

Keeping Yukon Natural

Recommendations for Hikers, Bikers, and Horse Riders



Spotted knapweed is not widely distributed in Yukon, but early control is necessary to limit the spread of this invasive species. Photo: Andrea Altherr

What's the problem?

Invasive species are non-native plants that have the potential to cause undesirable or detrimental impacts on people, animals, or the ecosystem. These plants often reproduce quickly and are very persistent. Most non-native species introduced into the Yukon will not become invasive due to their inability to adapt to the cold climate and soil poor nutrient conditions. However, invasive species that do become established often excel in these conditions due to their ability to outcompete boreal species. A high presence of invasive species can lead to loss of habitat for rare and endangered species. Changing climatic conditions in the North such as warmer winters and wetter summers may further increase the extent and rate of spread of invasive species.

Backcountry recreation is a key pathway for introduction and spread of invasive species. Boots, equipment, and domestic animals may

carry noxious weeds. Introduction of these plants may be harmful to humans, damage native habitat, and create poor feeding conditions for wildlife. Not only do invasive species damage natural habitats, their spread can cause negative social impacts such as destruction of native scenery. Backcountry users should strive to maintain the natural environmental conditions they encounter. Disturbances create an ideal environment for invasive species to become established in the backcountry.

Best practices for hikers, bikers, and horse riders

Protecting Yukon wilderness from invasive species can start with a few simple considerations that have lasting effects. This includes:

- learn to identify invasive plants so you can help protect our beautiful backcountry;

Yukon contains many areas of natural wilderness, and by caring and doing our part, the ecological integrity of the territory can be maintained.

- inspect and clean off boots, gear, clothing, and pets before you go on your trip. Clean off any dirt or plant parts after your backcountry trip;
- check your camp or recreation site for weed species. Take a few minutes to hand pull weeds that have not gone to seed;
- report new sighting of weeds on trails, especially in remote areas;
- use existing trails and avoid travelling through wet, sensitive areas where possible. Minimize compaction and creation of bare spots where weeds can establish; and
- for horsepackers, pack in weed-free feed and avoid grazing animals in infested areas.

Play Clean Go – Give invasive species the brush off!



Use the boot brush and bike brush stands at trailheads to clean your equipment!
Photo: Andrea Altherr

Two examples of invasive species to look for in the backcountry

Spotted knapweed

Centaurea stoebe

Spotted knapweed is a hardy, perennial plant with purple flowers and a stout taproot. It is a highly competitive plant that can form dense patches in overgrazed areas. Spotted

knapweed is unpalatable to livestock, and will only be grazed when more desirable species are not available. It suppresses growth of native species through allelopathy where chemicals are released through the root system that inhibits germination and slows growth of native seedlings. A single plant will produce thousands of seeds per year. Once a seedbank is established it can take many years to eradicate. Small infestations can be pulled or mowed once per year after they have bolted, but before they flower. Larger infestations can be plowed under in the spring. Repeated control applications will be necessary to control populations.



A single sweetclover plant can produce 300,000 seeds which remain viable in the soil or under water for many years. Photo: Andrea Altherr

Sweetclover

Melilotus alba, Melilotus officinalis

Sweetclover is a tall, branched plant with showy white or yellow flowers. It is often seen forming dense and continuous clusters in the ditches along Yukon roadsides. Recently sweetclover has been spreading to river gravel bars. Recreational canoeists may now encounter this species on paddling trips. Infestations of sweetclover can reduce the amount of suitable camping locations along the river, and make camping spots less scenic for users. Paddlers and boaters can help slow the spread of sweetclover along river systems by spending a few minutes pulling the plant before it reaches flowering stage. If there are no flowers or seeds present the pulled stalks can be left on the gravel bars, or burned in a contained fire pit. Sweetclover should not be pulled when the plant has gone to seed as this will aid in dispersal of the seeds.

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Report invasive species to info@yukoninvasives.com OR
use the reporting form at www.yukoninvasive.com OR
submit your observation to www.iNaturalist.org

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