

Keeping Yukon Natural

Recommendations for Off-road Vehicle Operators



Narrowleaf hawksbeard is one of Yukon's most prevalent invasive species and has a negative effect on Yukon's agriculture. Photo: Andrea Altherr

What's the problem?

Invasive species are non-native species that have the potential to cause undesirable or detrimental impacts on people, animals, or the ecosystem. These species 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 nutrient poor soils. However, invasive species that do become established often excel in these conditions due to their ability to outcompete boreal 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.

As an off-road vehicle (ORV) operator you are able to access remote and pristine areas of Yukon with relative ease and potentially bring non-native plants on your trip. Seeds and plant parts can easily be transported in the chassis and tires of your ORV. While vegetation and soil damage from ORVs

can often be reversed over several years, invasive plants are difficult to eradicate once they become established. Invasive species frequently spread beyond trails and roadways once they become established in one location. Plant species most likely to be transported by ORVs are those with small seeds that are gravity or wind-dispersed, have high seed production, and form persistent seed banks.

Understanding the sensitivity of different ecosystems is an important step in preventing the introduction and spread of invasive plant species in these areas. Soils in alpine areas are typically shallow and vegetation growth is slow because of low moisture, cold temperatures, and short growing seasons. Wetlands are very sensitive to disturbance and ruts form quickly when wheels contact water-saturated ground. These ruts and exposed soil create the perfect habitat for invasive plant species to get established. Effects of ORVs can be drastic and long-lasting in these environments.

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

Best practices for ORV operators

- Follow Play Clean Go principles found on www.yukoninvasives.com.
- Before heading back to the shop, inspect your vehicle and gear. When available, use a power washer or air compressor to remove any dirt, plants, seeds, or bugs. If these are not available, use a brush or other hand tool to knock off dirt clods and plant debris.
- Stay on designated and existing trails to avoid disturbing soil and damaging sensitive habitats, especially in wetlands and in alpine areas.
- If possible, do not drive through wetlands; go around if there is another existing trail option. If the only option is through the wetland, avoid widening the trail to minimize ground cover damage.
- If you do get stuck, use a winch to extricate your vehicle instead of accelerating out of mud holes. This reduces rutting and reduces potential places for invasive plants to establish.
- Cross only at established points in creeks and streams. Cross slowly to prevent streambank erosion and creation of new places for invasive plants to establish.
- Reduce travel when soil is wet or muddy to reduce damage to the ground – ruts can lead to permafrost degradation and also provide microsites for colonization of invasive plant species.
- Stay on hard-surfaced trails where possible.
- Follow local regulations regarding authorized ORV use of trails.

Come clean – before leaving home, take some time to inspect and remove dirt, plants, and bugs from clothing, boots, gear, and vehicles.



Sweetclover is widely spread throughout the Yukon. Avoid driving through weedy areas and check your gear for plant parts. Photo: Andrea Altherr

Two examples of species easily transported by ORVs

Crested wheat grass

Agropyron pectiniforme

Crested wheat grass is an attractive bunchgrass with flattened seed heads that resemble a comb or fish scales. It has an extensive root system and is commonly seen in gravelly, dry areas such as gravel pits or exposed ditches and roadsides. ORV users can prevent spread of crested wheat grass in staging areas by ensuring they do not drive through patches when seed heads are present and cleaning mud and other debris from machines prior to moving to new sites.

Crested wheat grass is fast growing and can aggressively outcompete native grasses for moisture and nutrient resources. It can form monocultures and prevent shrub establishment. Photo: Stefan Gottermann, YG



Narrowleaf hawksbeard

Crepis tectorum

Narrowleaf hawksbeard is a tall annual plant with small, dandelion-like flower heads. It will readily colonize gravelly disturbed areas such as staging areas, roads, right of ways, and river banks. Each plant is capable of producing over 40,000 seeds which spread easily through wind dispersal. Once established, narrowleaf hawksbeard can form highly dense patches, which displaces native plants. The seeds can adhere to clothing, shoes, and tires. ORV users should avoid travelling through narrowleaf hawksbeard patches and take care to clean clothing and vehicles before entering and leaving the backcountry.

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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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