



National Invasive Species Working Group And Yukon Invasive Species Council

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GIANT HOGWEED: BIG, SCARY ALIEN ON THE MOVE

Spreading Invasive Ornamental Plant Causes Long-Lasting Skin Damage

Given that 2010 is the *International Year of Biodiversity*, the time is right to start focusing on the early detection of invasive species – the second biggest threat to biodiversity worldwide. The National Invasive Species Working Group is aiming to increase the number of trained volunteer “spotters” across the country to help detect new invaders.

The initial focus for this nation-wide initiative is giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*), a very aggressive invasive plant with concern to human health and safety. Due to its intentional introduction through the horticulture industry, limited current distribution, potential for spread, and toxicity, members of the working group have agreed that this plant is a key national concern.



Native to Europe and Asia, giant hogweed was introduced to North America as an ornamental plant in the early 1900s. It is now known to be present in British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland, as well as a number of US States. It is not known to grow in Yukon.

Its larger-than-life size is not the only reason to fear this plant. Spreading by seed, giant hogweed may crowd native plants and take over natural areas, especially in moist soils such as

Growing up to five meters in height, giant hogweed has numerous small white flowers clusters in an umbrella-shaped head, with stout, hollow green stems covered in purple spots. Stem hairs and leaves contain a clear, highly toxic sap that, when in contact with the skin, can cause burns, blisters and scarring.

riverbanks. A rare type of invasive plant that threatens human health, giant hogweed produces a sap that causes sensitivity to UV radiation leading to skin blistering and severe burns. As a result, legal workplace regulations in BC and Ontario have unique implications for working in infested areas. There are numerous cases of people being hospitalized due to injuries caused by this “exotic” looking plant!

Borrowing a page from the Australian “Weed Spotters” Program, the working group is promoting the message “the more eyes we've got, the more invasive species we can spot, and potentially stop!” Provinces that currently have spotters networks in place include BC and Newfoundland, with other provinces and the territories at various stages of program development.

Individuals can report an invasive species in all provinces and territories. Giant hogweed may be confused with other plants including cow parsnip (*Heracleum maximum*), angelica (*Angelica* spp.), and poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*). Learn how to properly identify giant hogweed by contacting your local invasive species council info@yukoninvasives.com.

The National Invasive Species Working Group is comprised of provincial and territorial council groups from across the country who are working together to raise awareness about invasive alien species and their impacts. Current national initiatives include the development of “spotters” networks and horticulture outreach projects.

For more information about giant hogweed, or any invasive species, contact the Yukon Invasive Species Council: info@yukoninvasives.com or visit www.yukoninvasives.com

To report any sightings contact:

info@yukoninvasives.com

or

Department of Environment

Wildlife Viewing Biologist

Phone: 867-667-8291

Email: wildlife.viewing@gov.yk.ca

How to identify Giant Hogweed

The leaves of giant hogweed are lobed, deeply incised and up to 5 ft. across. Compare to mature leaves of cow parsnip which measure up to 2 to 2 ½' in diameter and are not as dissected as giant hogweed leaves.

For more information visit:

http://www.invasiveplantcouncilbc.ca/images/stories/documents/tips/Giant_Hogweed_TIPS.pdf



Cow parsnip



Giant Hogweed

Pictures from: http://www.mipn.org/MDA_Hogweed_Brochure.pdf

http://akweeds.uaa.alaska.edu/pdfs/potential_species/bios/Species_bios_HERM_AN.pdf