



Whatcom Weeds

Whatcom County Noxious Weed Control Board 322 N. Commercial St. Bellingham WA 98225
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PERENNIAL PEPPERWEED

Lepidium latifolium

THREAT: Perennial pepperweed, a native of Eurasia, was probably introduced to North America around 1900 in contaminated seed. It has become a problem plant in many parts of the United States, especially in the west. Perennial pepperweed spreads both by seed, which is produced in abundance, and by creeping roots. Seeds can be moved by water, contaminated machinery and soil, livestock, waterfowl and when used in dried flower arrangements. Water and contaminated soil can also move root and rhizome fragments, which can sprout into new plants. Perennial pepperweed invades pastures, roadsides, croplands, riparian areas, irrigation ditch sides and other disturbed areas. This plant can occur in a wide range of habitats, including areas with high concentrations of salt in the soil. It forms dense monocultures, crowding out other plants. The accumulation of semi-woody stems can interfere with livestock grazing and reduce wildlife habitat.

DESCRIPTION: Perennial pepperweed is a member of the mustard family. It normally grows 1 to 3 feet tall, but may grow up to 8 feet high. The erect plant has many stems growing out of a semi-woody root crown. The bright green to gray-green leaves are alternate and waxy, with a prominent whitish mid-vein. Leaf margins can be either smooth or toothed. The lance-shaped basal leaves can be up to 12 inches long, while the stem leaves are smaller. Perennial pepperweed flowers from June to September, producing dense clusters of small white flowers at the ends of the branches. The flowers have 4 sepals and 4 petals, and produce tiny reddish brown seeds in small rounded seedpods. Perennial pepperweed has an extensive, creeping root system, from which shoots emerge in late winter or early spring.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: Once established, perennial pepperweed can be very difficult to control, so it is important to prevent establishment. Maintaining healthy and vigorous vegetation on a site will make it more difficult for this plant to get established. Mechanical control should be undertaken with care, as root fragments left in the ground will resprout. Hand digging can be used on small infestations if care is taken to remove as much of the root as possible and the area is monitored for regrowth. Perennial pepperweed can be controlled using chemical herbicides. Contact the weed control board for site-specific chemical recommendations.

