

# NOXIOUS WEEDS IN CLALLAM COUNTY

## TANSY RAGWORT

*(Senecio jacobaea)*

Tansy ragwort grows one to four feet tall at maturity. The stems are stout, erect and can be branched. The leaves are deeply lobed with a ruffled appearance.



The conspicuous yellow flowers, which bloom from July to October, are in clusters. The flowers usually have 10-15 petals, most often 13.

The seeds have a white pappus, like a dandelion head.

The first-year plants (rosettes) and bright green and ruffled-looking.



### Threats:

- ? Tansy ragwort is invasive and will establish itself readily in disturbed areas.
- ? It is toxic and can be lethal to cattle and horses, and to a lesser extent, goats.
- ? The toxic properties remain when the plant is cut and dried in hay; this makes it more of a threat because although grazing animals will usually avoid eating the live plant it is difficult for them to avoid it in hay.
- ? The toxins accumulate in an animal's body, causing irreversible liver damage and eventual death. Three to seven percent of an animal's body weight in tansy ragwort, consumed over its lifetime, can be lethal. Poisoning symptoms in cattle include nervousness, agitation and diarrhea. Symptoms in horses include peeling skin, weight loss, and difficulty in walking.
- ? The toxic properties are also a threat to humans, because honey or milk can be contaminated if bees or goats utilize tansy ragwort plants.
- ? All parts of the plant are toxic, the flowers having the highest concentration of toxins.

**Tansy ragwort is a Class B weed which has been selected for control in Clallam County, east of the Elwha River.**  
**West of the Elwha, containment may be required, with 100 buffers.**

## Look-a-likes (all non-native):



**Common tansy, (*Tanacetum vulgare*)** has button-like yellow flowers, not the ray flowers of tansy ragwort. Also, its leaves are fern-like, quite unlike the leaves of tansy ragwort. The leaves of common tansy have a pungent smell, like fever-few; tansy ragwort leaves do not have this smell.

Common tansy is a Class C noxious weed; control of it is recommended because it is slightly poisonous and invasive.

**Common groundsel, (*Senecio vulgaris*)** grows only four to eight inches tall, considerably smaller than tansy ragwort. The flower heads do not open fully; they are usually elongated and drooping.



**Woodland groundsel, (*Senecio sylvaticus*)** grows one to three feet tall, smaller than tansy ragwort. The leaves are greenish gray and woolly; tansy ragwort leaves are brighter green and not woolly. The flower heads are small and inconspicuous, unlike the ray flowers of tansy ragwort.

## History:

Tansy ragwort is native to Europe and western Asia and now has world-wide distribution, following European settlement in new areas. It was first recorded in Oregon in 1922 and is now found throughout the western United States. Although it occurs in pastures and along roadsides throughout much of Clallam County, the worst concentrations are in the west end.

## Ecology:

- ? Tansy ragwort can survive under most conditions.
- ? It is a biennial, producing a dense rosette of dark green leaves the first year. During the summer of its second year the plant “bolts,” meaning that long stems grow and the plant reaches its mature height and produces flowers and seed. Plants usually die after seed production. If flowers are removed before seed is produced, the plant can reflower later in the same season and produce seed. Although tansy ragwort is technically a biennial, it will act as a perennial if the flowering stalk is cut, mowed, trampled or injured while flowering. The plant will sprout from the root crown or roots and continue to live.
- ? One plant can produce 5,000 to 200,000 seeds; the seeds require light to germinate, but they can remain viable in the soil for 10 to 16 years, awaiting favorable conditions.

## CONTROL

### Prevention and early detection are the best means of control.

- ✂ **Practice** good pasture management; avoid overgrazing, irrigate and fertilize as needed, and reseed bare ground. A healthy pasture will resist weed invasion.
- ✂ **Use** weed free hay and seed; avoid introducing weed contaminated soil.
- ✂ **Clean** equipment that has been used in infested areas.
- ✂ **Remove** seedlings when young; newly established plants can usually be pulled without leaving root fragments in the ground.
- ✂ **Replant** newly weeded areas with desirable (preferably native) plant species that will discourage reinfestation.
- ✂ **Dispose** of weeds properly, bag or burn seed heads or fragments that may resprout.
- ✂ **Monitor** the site for several years; promptly remove new seedlings.

**CUTTING** is not an effective control method unless followed up with herbicide treatment. Cutting before flowering does not destroy the plant, but will *encourage* development by stimulating the growth of side shoots.. Cut plants may not die as biennials usually do, but may survive, produce more seed, and grow even more vigorously than uncut plants.

**PULLING** can be very effective, especially when the ground is soft and moist. Remove as much of the root as possible or the plant will resprout. All flower heads should be removed and burned. If flowers have begun to produce seeds, the plants should be gathered gently into plastic bags to minimize escape of seeds. Learn to recognize seedlings; plants are easiest to remove in the first year before developing an extensive root system.



**Note:** Tansy ragwort is reported to be **phototoxic**. Skin contact with the sap followed by exposure to sunlight **could cause skin irritation or burning**. Wearing gloves when handling plants is recommended.

## BIOLOGICAL CONTROL:

Three insects have been introduced for biological control of tansy ragwort:

? The larvae of the **cinnabar moth**, (*Tyria jacobaeae*), feed on the leaves, buds and flowers.



? During the fall through the early spring, the larvae of the **ragwort flea beetle**, (*Longitarsus jacobaeae*), burrow into and feed on roots, injuring or killing them.

? The larvae of the **ragwort seed fly**, (*Pegohylemyia seneciella*), (not shown) feed on the developing seed heads.

**HERBICIDES** can be effective, but should always be applied with care. Do not apply herbicides over or near water bodies. Read the label to check that you are applying an herbicide in the right place, to the right plant, at the right time, and in the right amount. For perennial weeds, long term control requires stopping seed production **and** attacking the weed's root system. Translocated herbicides, (ones that move throughout a plant's system), such as Weedmaster<sup>TM</sup> (2,4-D and dicamba) or Curtail<sup>TM</sup> (2,4-D and clopyralid) are recommended.

? Herbicides are more effective on first year than second year plants

? Observe grazing restrictions because 2,4-D may make plants more attractive to livestock, but not less poisonous.