



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

P.O. Box 42560 • Olympia, Washington 98504-2560 • (360) 902-1800

October 14, 2025

WSNWCB
P.O. Box 42560
Olympia, WA 98504-2560

Dear WSNWCB,

The Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) requests the emergency listing of sunflower broomrape (*Orobanche cumana*) as a Class A noxious weed.

Orobanche cumana is a parasitic plant, and it is entirely dependent on its host's nutrients and water, emerging only after extensive underground damage has already occurred. A single plant can produce over 100,000 miniscule, windborne seeds, which can remain viable in the soil for decades.

This parasitic plant was recently detected in Yakima in September 2025. The small infestation was discovered by a homeowner, and its identity was confirmed through molecular testing by WSDA's Plant Pathology and Molecular Diagnostics Lab (PPMDL) and morphological identification by USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

This is the first known detection of this species in North America. WSDA's Pest Program is already working closely with the homeowner, USDA, the Yakima County Noxious Weed Control Board, and local stakeholders to investigate the source, assess the extent of the infestation, and implement the appropriate response measures to protect Washington producers, as well as North American agricultural crops, especially sunflowers.

Orobanche cumana is a devastating root parasite of sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*) and other members of Asteraceae (the sunflower family), leading to significant crop losses. Not only does *O. cumana* pose a risk to sunflower producers in the state, but it could also have wide reaching impacts to the availability of export markets for agricultural commodities grown in the area. This could include seed and hay producers. One reason for the potential impact on export markets is due to the small and sticky seeds produced by the plant, which spread easily.

This detection is especially concerning due to the aggressive nature of this parasitic weed and its potential to spread rapidly if left unmanaged. *Orobanche cumana* poses a serious threat to commercial sunflower production and could cause significant impacts to growers, processors, exporters and the agricultural economy if not swiftly contained.

Because *O. cumana* is extremely limited in distribution in Washington, is difficult to control once established, and is highly destructive to commercial sunflower crops and other agricultural commodities, a

Class A noxious weed listing is appropriate. This listing will also complement the WSDA emergency quarantine, rulemaking efforts for which are already in progress. Moreover, a Class A noxious weed listing will provide crucial education and outreach to the public as well as a regulatory tool to county noxious weed control boards to help ensure its mandatory eradication by public and private landowners if it is detected elsewhere in Washington state.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Greg Haubrich", is written over a horizontal dashed line.

Richard "Greg" Haubrich
Assistant Director, Plant Protection Division, Washington State Department of Agriculture