



2026 WEED AWARENESS

The Weed Control Authority is responsible for implementation of the Nebraska Noxious Weed Control Act throughout Lancaster County. The Authority has also provided the inspection and administration of the City of Lincoln's Weed Abatement Program since entering into an interlocal agreement with the city in 1996.

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Invasive Yellow and Caucasian Bluestem in Nebraska

Why Landowners Should Pay Attention

First and foremost, it is the Weed Authority's goal to work with landowners to assist with the management of noxious weeds and compliance with the City of Lincoln weed abatement code. Only when the landowner fails to comply with State Law and City code does the Weed Authority step in to act.

By Brent Meyer, Lancaster County Weed Authority Superintendent

Invasive bluestems — particularly **yellow bluestem** and **Caucasian bluestem** — are becoming a growing problem in Nebraska rangelands, roadsides and conservation areas. These grasses were originally introduced from Eurasia for forage and erosion control, but they are now spreading beyond planted areas and replacing native prairie species.

What to Look For

Yellow and Caucasian bluestem are warm-season perennial grasses that typically grow **1–4 feet tall** and form **dense, sod-like stands**. They often

start growing earlier in the spring than native prairie grasses.

Common identification features include:

- Yellow – 2-6 finger-like, stubby looking branches often clustered close together.
- Caucasian – 4-8+ branches and longer, more slender and open in appearance.
- Yellow-green leaves.
- Narrow blades and flattened leaf sheaths.
- Reddish or purplish tint at maturity.

Because they resemble native bluestems at first glance, infestations are often overlooked until large patches develop.

Why They Are a Concern

These invasive grasses can quickly dominate pastures and prairie areas.

Loss of Native Plants

Dense stands crowd out native grasses and wildflowers, reducing prairie diversity.

Wildlife Habitat Impacts

Invasive bluestems support fewer insects and create poor nesting habitat for grassland birds like pheasants, quail and meadowlarks.

Forage Decline

While once planted for forage, these grasses often

become coarse and less palatable over time and can reduce overall pasture productivity.

Aggressive Spread

They spread by seed, short rhizomes, equipment movement and roadside corridors. Disturbed areas, overgrazed pastures and field edges are especially vulnerable.

Early Detection Is Key

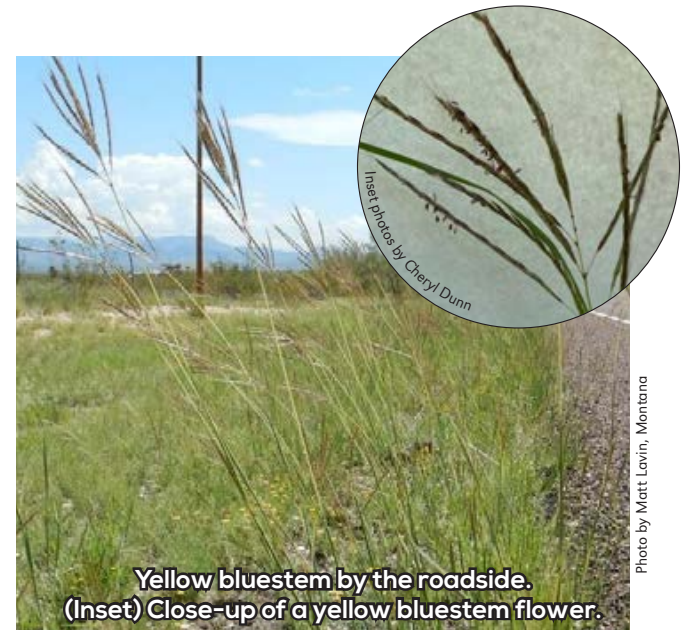
Small patches are much easier to control than large infestations. Landowners should watch for new patches along:

- Fence lines
- Roadsides
- Disturbed soils
- Old plantings or previously seeded areas

Management

Controlling invasive bluestems usually requires **multiple years of management**. Effective strategies may include:

- Targeted herbicide treatments.
- Follow-up monitoring and re-treatment.
- Prescribed fire in some systems.
- Maintaining strong native grass competition.



Yellow bluestem by the roadside. (Inset) Close-up of a yellow bluestem flower.

Photo by Matt Lovin, Montana



A Caucasian bluestem cluster in a field. (Inset) Close-up of a Caucasian bluestem flower.

Photo by Bob Romero, some rights reserved (CC-BY-NC)

Protecting Nebraska's Prairies

Nebraska's grasslands provide forage, wildlife habitat, soil protection and long-term ecological value. Monitoring and addressing invasive species early helps protect these important landscapes.

Key takeaways for landowners:

- Learn to identify invasive bluestems.
- Monitor pastures and grasslands regularly.
- Treat small patches early.
- Plan for long-term management if infestations occur.

TAKE 2

Two minutes to **read about two** invasive plants which are working to establish themselves in Lancaster County



Poison hemlock flowers

Photo by Oregon Department of Agriculture, CC BY 2.0

Poison Hemlock: A Dangerous Plant to Watch For

Poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*) can pose serious risks to both livestock and people if consumed. It is often confused with non-toxic plants such as wild carrot (Queen Anne's lace), making proper identification important.

Identification

Poison hemlock has fern-like leaves and clusters of small white flowers. A key identifying feature is its smooth, hollow stem with purple blotches, while wild carrot has a hairy stem. Plants typically grow in moist areas such as streambanks, roadside ditches and low spots in pastures.

Hemlock is a biennial plant, growing as a low rosette the first year and producing tall, flowering stalks the second year. Mature plants can reach up to 10 feet tall and flower from May through July.

Toxicity

All parts of the plant contain potent alkaloid toxins. Even small amounts can be lethal — as little as five pounds of foliage may kill a cow. Although livestock usually avoid the plant, they may graze it when forage is limited or early in the season when it is one of the few green plants available.



Young poison hemlock stem

Photo by Robert Vidéki, Doronicum Kft., Bugwood.org

Management

Early detection is the most effective way to control poison hemlock. Preventing seed production and spread is key.

Control Options Include:

- Regular mowing early in the season to prevent flowering and seed production.
- Herbicide treatments in the rosette stage during late fall or early spring.
- Biocontrol — A poison hemlock moth that feeds on and defoliates poison hemlock has been released in several locations within the Lincoln city limits to help reduce plant populations.
- Monitoring moist areas, ditches and field edges where plants commonly establish.

Do not mow or spray during the grazing season after July, as treated plants can become more palatable to livestock even when dying.

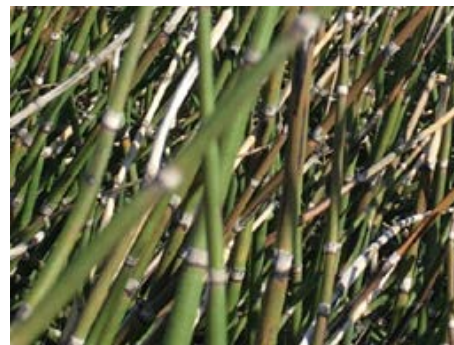
Preventing Spread:

- Avoid moving hay from infested areas.
- Clean equipment after mowing or working in infested fields.
- Use weed-free hay and forage.

Monitoring pastures and roadsides each year can help catch poison hemlock early and prevent larger infestations.

Scouring Rush (Rough Horsetail): What Landowners Should Know

Scouring rush (*Equisetum hyemale*), also called rough horsetail, is a perennial plant commonly found in ditches, wetlands, streambanks and poorly drained soils. While it can be part of natural plant communities, it often spreads aggressively and forms dense patches that compete with desirable vegetation.



Scouring Rush stems Identification

Scouring rush is easy to recognize once you know what to look for:

- Tall, upright hollow stems that grow 1–4 feet tall.
- Jointed stems with black-and-white bands at the nodes.
- No typical leaves — only small tooth-like scales at the joints.
- Rough texture due to high silica content.
- Grows in dense colonies spreading through underground rhizomes.

The plant prefers moist or poorly drained soils and can tolerate seasonal flooding.

Why It Can Be a Problem

Scouring rush can become difficult to manage. It produces cone-like spore structures (strobili) at the tips of stems, but it primarily spreads through an

extensive underground rhizome system. Once established, it can:

- Form dense colonies that outcompete desirable vegetation.
- Spread rapidly through underground rhizomes, making mechanical removal difficult.
- Regrow from small rhizome fragments left in the soil.
- Persist for many years in moist or poorly drained soils.

Large quantities may also be toxic to livestock, though animals typically avoid it.

Management Options

Controlling scouring rush usually requires multiple management methods and persistence.

Cultural Control

- Improve drainage where possible.
- Establish competitive vegetation.
- Avoid moving contaminated soil or equipment.

Mechanical Control

- Repeated mowing or cutting throughout the growing season.
- Digging small patches and removing rhizomes where practical.

Chemical Control

- Herbicides such as Escort XP, Arsenal, Garlon 3A and others may provide some control, but often require multiple applications. Refer to UNL Guide for Weed, Disease and Insect Management in Nebraska (EC-130).
- Use labeled surfactants to improve herbicide absorption.

Key Takeaway

Scouring rush is a persistent perennial that rarely disappears after a single treatment. Long-term management typically involves repeated control efforts and improving site conditions to encourage desirable vegetation.

Regular monitoring of wet areas, ditches and low spots can help landowners catch new patches early and prevent larger infestations.

The County Commissioners serve as the Lancaster County Weed Authority. Currently, Brent Meyer serves as the Superintendent and supervises a seasonal staff of six weed inspectors with the assistance of Chief Inspector Pat Dugan and Account Clerk Danni McGown.

Nebraska's Noxious Weeds

It is the duty of each person who owns or controls land to effectively control noxious weeds on such land. Noxious weed is a legal term used to denote a destructive or harmful weed for the purpose of regulation.

The Director of the Nebraska Department of Agriculture establishes which plants are noxious. These non-native plants compete aggressively with desirable plants and vegetation. Failure to control noxious weeds in this state is a serious problem which is detrimental to the production of crops and livestock, and to the welfare of residents of this state. Noxious weeds may also devalue land and reduce tax revenue.



STOP INVASIVE SPECIES
IN YOUR TRACKS.

PlayCleanGo.org

Musk Thistle

Pink to purple flowers

Mature seedhead

Height 1.6–9.8 ft

Canada Thistle

Pink to purple flowers

Height 1–3.9 ft

Plumeless Thistle

Purple flowers

Height 1–4.9 ft

Phragmites

Young seedhead

Mature seedhead

Height 3.2–20 ft

Leafy Spurge

Large yellow leaves (bracts)

Stems/leaves have milky sap

Height .3–2.6 ft

Sericea Lespedeza

White or cream to yellowish-white flowers

Height 1.5–6.5 ft

Japanese & Giant Knotweed

Creamy-white to greenish-white flowers

Height 3–10 ft

Height 8–13 ft

Purple Loosestrife

Purple to magenta flowers

Height 1.3–8 ft

Saltcedar

Pink to white flowers

Height 3.3–20 ft

Spotted & Diffuse Knapweed

Lavender to purple flowers

White/purplish flowers

Height 1–3.9 ft

Lancaster County's Noxious Weeds

White flowers

Lavender to white flowers

Height 4–8 ft

Height 3–6 ft

Good neighbors control noxious weeds — If you have questions or concerns about noxious weeds, please contact your local county noxious weed control authority, Nebraska Weed Control Association (<https://neweed.org>) or Nebraska Department of Agriculture.

Lancaster County Weed Authority

What We Do / Why It Matters

What We Do

- Administer the State of Nebraska Noxious Weed Control Act and the City of Lincoln Weed Abatement Program.
- Identify, monitor, and manage state- and county-designated noxious weeds.
- Provide education and guidance to landowners, students and the public.
- Manage noxious weeds along county roadsides and City of Lincoln landfills.
- Work with landowners and others to promote responsible weed control.

Why It Matters

- Noxious weeds reduce water conveyance, crop yields and pasture productivity.
- Invasive species crowd out native plants and wildlife habitat.
- Early detection and control help reduce long-term management costs.
- Coordinated weed control protects property values.
- Healthy land supports agriculture, recreation, and quality of life for all residents.

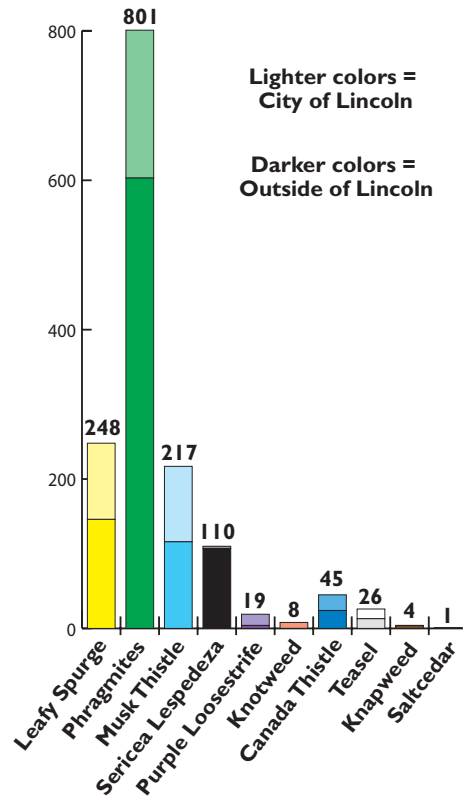
Lancaster County's weed control efforts help ensure that today's management actions

protect the land for future generations. By focusing on prevention, education and active weed management, the Authority assist to reduce the impacts of noxious and invasive weeds while supporting landowners in meeting their responsibilities under the Nebraska Noxious Weed Control Act.

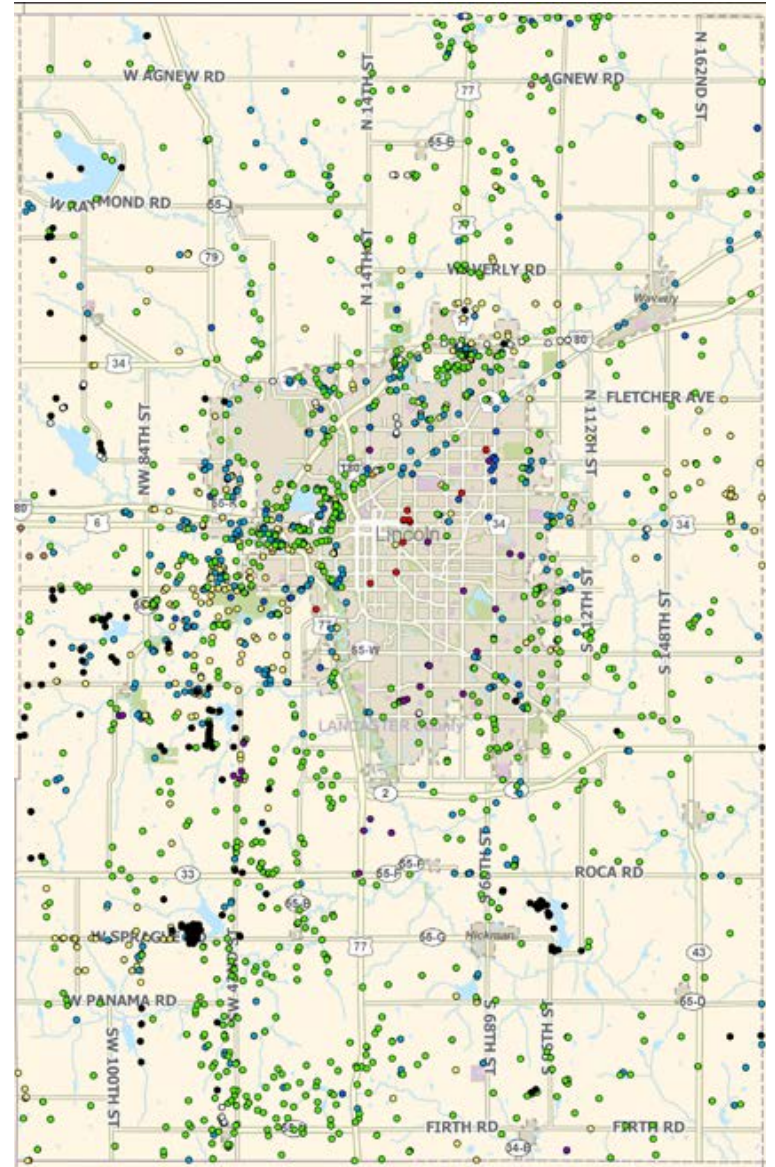
Throughout the year, staff managed noxious weeds along county roadsides and at City of Lincoln landfill sites; administered the State of Nebraska Noxious Weed Control Act and the City of Lincoln Weed Abatement Program; monitored and mapped priority weed infestations and oversaw maintenance at abandoned cemeteries across the county. A total of 1,479 noxious weed sites were documented in violation countywide, including 462 sites within the City of Lincoln and 1,017 sites in rural Lancaster County, underscoring the continued need for

NOXIOUS WEEDS

Number of Lancaster County Sites in Violation



coordinated weed control efforts. In addition, staff conducted 8,202 inspections within the City of Lincoln on 3,702 unkept properties, resulting in abatement actions on 292 properties.



- Leafy Spurge
- Phragmites
- Musk Thistle
- Sericea Lespedeza
- Purple Loosestrife
- Knotweed
- Canada Thistle
- Teasel
- Knapweed
- Saltcedar

The Authority relies on strong partnerships with landowners, volunteers and local agencies to promote practical, environmentally responsible and cost-effective weed management. These cooperative efforts play an important role in protecting agricultural land, preserving natural habitats and maintaining

the overall quality of life in Lancaster County. Through prevention, education and active management, the Authority addressed noxious weed infestations on both public and private lands while supporting landowners in meeting their obligations under the Nebraska Noxious Weed Control Act.

Volunteer Recognition

Did you know Lancaster County Maintains Seven Abandoned Cemeteries?

The Weed Control Authority oversees mowing and maintenance at these cemeteries:

- Asplund
- County Poor Farm
- Dietz
- Evangelical
- Highland Precinct
- Jordan
- Uphoff

Special recognition and appreciation are extended to the following volunteers and organizations for their continued assistance:

- **Lincoln Tree Service** – Tree trimming and removal
- **Dave Miller** – Jordan Cemetery mowing
- **Terry Briley** – Evangelical Cemetery mowing

- **Clark Liesveld and Boy Scouts of America Troop 64** – Dietz Cemetery mowing
- **Troy Henning** – Highland Precinct and Uphoff Cemetery mowing
- **Larry England** – County Poor Farm Cemetery mowing
- **David & Linda Almery** – Asplund Cemetery mowing