Deschutes County Noxious Weed Board

Medusahead Rye

Identification and Treatment

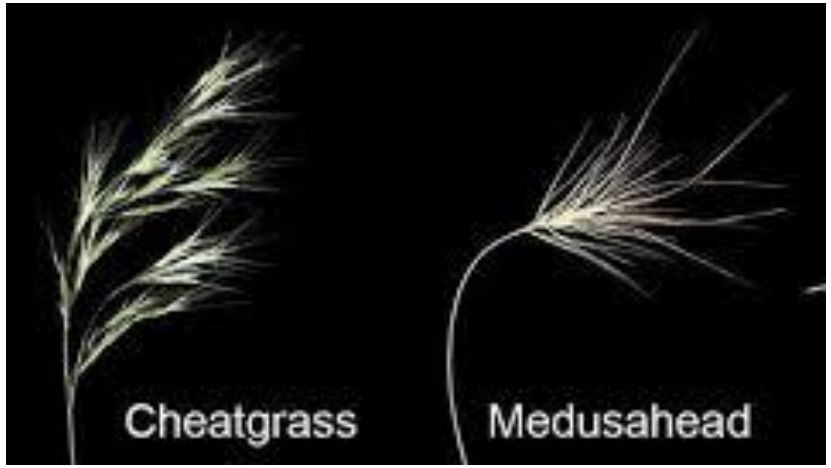
Why is it a Noxious Weed?

Medusahead rye is considered a noxious weed in Oregon, meaning that it represents “the greatest public menace, and is a top priority for action by weed control programs.” The plant will invade thousands of acres of grasslands and pastures, much like cheatgrass.

Identification

Medusahead rye

Taeniatherum caput-medusae (L.) Nevski



General Description

Medusahead rye is an annual grass, with shallow fibrous roots, native to Eurasia. It can be 6-24 inches tall, with bright green color in early spring, curing to light purple and then tan as it matures. It has a high silica content, so livestock avoid eating it.

Its name derives from the distinctive flowerhead, which resembles Medusa in Greek mythology, a Gorgon who had a head of snakes.

Where it Grows

Medusahead rye is often found where cheatgrass also occurs, such as grasslands and pastures.[1] It thrives on clay soils, which hold moisture. Often these areas have been disturbed by grazing or fire, for example, which have allowed the species to establish.

How do I control it?

General Control Strategy

- Prevention is crucial. Maintaining a healthy native plant community will impede medusahead invasion. For example, established pastures should be seeded to species that compete well with medusahead for available resources (such as water) and be properly managed.[3]

- Medusahead seeds drop within 2m of the plant, which affords an opportunity to use vegetative buffers to contain medusahead.[2] Tall grasses and shrubs are excellent barriers and could greatly reduce movement from roadside environments to adjoining land.

- There currently are no biological control agents developed for this species.

(continued)

Manual & Mechanical Control

- Small amounts of medusahead rye can be hand-pulled or dug, as the roots are shallow and release easily. Large infestations will take a lot of time and energy to pull.
- Medusahead rye is susceptible to tillage, but can have multiple flushes, so multiple tillage operations may be necessary. Disking and plowing before seed set can reduce medusahead by 90% or more.
- Fire by itself is not effective control. A slow, hot fire before seed set can also reduce medusahead rye by 90%, however, native vegetation has also been removed.

Chemical Treatment

Herbicide Control

- There are herbicides appropriate for use on medusahead, both before (pre-emergent) and after (post-emergent) plants have emerged from the soil.
- The smaller or younger the plants, the better the post emergent herbicides work.

Citations:

[1]Archer, Amy J. 2001. Taeniatherum caput-medusae. In: Fire Effects Information System, [Online]. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, Fire Sciences Laboratory. Available: https://www.fs.fed.us /database/feis/plants/graminoid/taecap/all.html

[2]Davies, K.W. 2008. Medusahead dispersal and establishment in sagebrush-steppe plant communities. Rangeland Ecol Manage 61:110-115.

[3]USDA NRCS Plant Guide, “Medusahead.” August 2010. https://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/pg_taca8.pdf

Thank you!

Let’s keep our community free of noxious weeds.

For more information on noxious weed identification and treatment, please contact **Ed Keith, County Forester, at** Ed.Keith@deschutes.org or Cell: (541) 322-7117