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Teaming up against leafy spurge

BEN HARDIN

Agricultural Research Service

Leafy spurge thrives in varied habitats along the Little Missouri River, so it's difficult to control by any single method. The drainage area encompasses parts of Wyoming, Montana, and North and South Dakota. In this area, strategies developed during the past 17 years to control the weed are now being expanded on and demonstrated at various sites in an integrated pest management project called TEAM Leafy Spurge—The Ecological Areawide Management of Leafy Spurge. It emphasizes use of biological controls.

“TEAM Leafy Spurge is the first large-scale, systematic study to determine the most effective and economically feasible control methods to control leafy spurge,” says ARS ecologist Gerald L. Anderson of Sidney, Montana.

Four primary study sites are located at Devil's Tower in Wyoming; the South Fork of the Moreau River in South Dakota; Mill Iron, Montana; and Medora, North Dakota.

Anderson leads the project, along with entomologist Lloyd Wendel, who is with USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service in Mission, Texas. Several ARS and APHIS laboratories, state departments of agriculture, universities, cooperative extension services, other federal agencies, and private landowners participate as partners. This cooperative effort may serve as a model for other noxious weed programs across North America.

Progress on the 5-year project, which began last fall, is communicated through tours of field sites, newsletters, videotapes, a decision-making support computer program, and a site on the World Wide Web at <http://www.team.ars.usda.gov>. A field day planned for June 1999 will feature a demonstration of geographic information system and global positioning satellite technologies. These are used to inventory leafy spurge infestations and monitor effectiveness of the TEAM Leafy Spurge program.

Noxious weed control has historically relied on chemical herbicides. TEAM Leafy Spurge differs in that insect and pathogen biological control are the foundation on which other methods—such as grazing by sheep and goats, chemical herbicides, and periodic burning and reseeding of rangeland—are integrated and applied over large geographic regions.

Gerald L. Anderson is at the USDA-ARS Northern Plains Agricultural Research Laboratory, 1500 North Central Ave., Sidney, MT 59270; phone (406) 433-9416; fax (406) 433-5038, e-mail: gerry@mail.sidney.ars.usda.gov