



# Noxious Weed Control Assessment Rate Increase

October 7, 2019

Proposed to

**Lincoln County Board of County Commissioners**

By

**Lincoln County Noxious Weed Control Board**

Represented by

Kevin L. Hupp

# **Lincoln County Noxious Weed Control Board**

## **Assessment Increase Proposal Summary**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Lincoln County Noxious Weed Control Board has been active for 49 years in Lincoln County. Like most programs a lot of changes have been made to this program over the years, some were good and others were not so good. There have been different coordinators who have run the program the way they best see fit. Each subsequent coordinator has evaluated the previous policies and procedures and made adaptations to them. The Board members themselves have also been very diverse and have taken different measures to see that this is a successful program. There are very few aspects of this program that haven't been changed a great deal; the weed control assessment rates are one of them.

The Lincoln County Noxious Weed Control Board hopes to present to the Board of County Commissioners a fact-filled analysis of what this program has done, what is hasn't done and why it is important to have an assessment increase to continue to have a successful program in Lincoln County.

### **BACKGROUND**

The Board of County Commissioners activated the Lincoln County Noxious Weed Control Board on March 3, 1970. In 1985, the Board of County Commissioners passed a motion to have a weed assessment to fund the program. The rates were assessed as follows:

\$0.06/acre for Rangeland, Timber, Dryland Pasture and R-O-W

\$0.12/acre for irrigated and dryland cropland and irrigated pasture

\$2.50 per minimum parcel

These rates were kept until 1990 when they were lowered to:

\$0.05/acre for Rangeland, Timber, Dryland Pasture and R-O-W

\$0.10/acre for irrigated and dryland cropland and irrigated pasture

\$2.00 per minimum parcel

The rates were decreased because of too much surplus funds being carried, which was near \$100,000. The Weed Board was told to spend down the surplus.

The Weed Board offered cost-share to landowners approximately between 1989-1995. The average budget for the cost-share program was \$10,000. The Leafy spurge grant program was also in effect from at least 1989-1995. This was a state grant that provided reimbursement for Leafy spurge control in the county. This averaged \$10,000 per year for the Weed Board.

### **CHANGES TO THE BUDGET**

Since the Weed Board was formed in 1970, it has had some changes to the revenue aspect of the program. In 1985, a weed control assessment was issued to fund the program. The rates brought in approximately \$138,000. In 1991, those rates were changed which subsequently lowered the income to approximately \$118,000. This rate stayed the same until 2002, when the Weed Board asked for an Assessment Increase and were subsequently approved to the current rates:

\$0.11/acre Irrigated & Dryland Cropland, Irrigated Pasture (Minimum parcel is 90 Acres).

\$0.06/acre Rangeland, Timber, Dryland, Pasture & R-O-W (Minimum parcel is 165 Acres).

\$9.90 Minimum Parcel

In 1993, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) owned 27,072 acres in Lincoln County. In 2001, they owned 47,288 acres, an addition of 20, 216 acres. Currently, BLM owns 74,662 acres, an addition of 27,374 acres. BLM is a federal governmental entity and can't be assessed. BLM PILT payments do not pass down to the Weed Board budget.

In 2001, irrigated/dryland cropland and irrigated pasture encompassed 823, 840 acres, Rangeland/timber, dryland pasture/R-O-W encompassed 541,082 acres. There were 5,275 minimum parcels.

Currently (2019), irrigated/dryland cropland and irrigated pasture encompass 786,915.96 acres, Rangeland/timber, dryland pasture/R-O-W encompass 546,825.25 acres. There are 4,145 incorporated parcels.

### **CURRENT STAFF SITUATION**

The Weed Board has been Fiscally Responsible for 17 years on the same budget. However, we have found the bottom and cannot continue with same budget any longer. In 2002 (1<sup>st</sup> year of the current assessment), the Weed Board hired 7 Field Technicians. In 2004, the Weed Board could only fund 4 Field Technicians. In 2008, the Field Technicians were reduced to the current level of 2. This has left vast amounts of the county unsurveyed. The past 12 years of having

field staff level so low, has not allowed for proper service to property owners in Lincoln County. It has also left the program stagnant, as we cannot progress forward with new technology, serve our landowners properly and develop new projects within the program. Having the ability to hire 4 additional field staff will greatly improve our coverage and service to Lincoln County landowners.

### **FIELD TECHNICIAN POSITION**

In 1999, the Weed Board changed the name of the field staff positions from weed inspector to field technician. The reason for this change is that the Weed Board saw the job changing from an inspector who just enforced the weed law and told landowners what to do, who didn't know as much as they needed to know about noxious weed control, who may have been more harsh than needed; to an individual who has their WSDA public operator's license which allows that person to give technical advice about herbicides, legally recommend herbicides, knows all of the latest control methods available, works with landowners rather than against, carry pamphlets and handouts with them for landowners, answers all of the landowners questions on site.

The field technician is a mobile land manager providing a one-stop-shop resource tool for landowners. Not only do they have the job of upholding the Washington state noxious weed law, they are kept up-to-date on new herbicide products, techniques and tools that are effective at controlling noxious weeds. New field technicians are not sent out to the field by themselves until they can identify all noxious weeds and can answer common landowner questions with confidence and diplomacy. This is an individual that a landowner feels comfortable talking to and calling later to ask questions of. The Weed Board has experienced far more noxious weed control compliance since improving the field position and far less complaints on the employees.

### **CURRENT SITUATION**

The Weed Board has had the current assessment for 17 years. Since 2002 (when the current assessment started), we have adjusted our program to fit the budget from year-to-year. From reducing staff, services and programs, we have constantly adapted the program to fit the revenue and other outside resources. We have found that over the years the additional State requirements that have been put on employers who have employees continues to grow. Although inflation and cost of living have definitely increased over the 17 years, the additional employment requirements have been the biggest factor in reducing our assessment longevity. Now, after 17 years, we have exhausted the current assessment and are in need of an assessment increase.

# Assessment Increase Proposal

The Lincoln County Noxious Weed Control Board proposes the following Noxious Weed Control Assessment Rates:

	Acres/Parcels	Assessment/A	Total
Irrigated & Dryland Cropland, Irrigated Pasture	786,938.93	\$0.30	\$236,081.67
Rangeland, Timber, Dryland, Pasture & R-OW	546,825.25	\$0.30	\$164,047.57
Incorporated Parcels	4,145.00	\$12.00	\$49,740.00
<b>Total</b>			<b>\$449,869.24</b>

We realize that assessments are not meant to last forever. However, it is the mindset of the current Weed Board members and staff that they should last as long as fiscally possible. The budget for this proposal will include: 4 additional field technicians, 4 additional vehicles, making the program specialist position full time. An additional spray set up (truck w/tank, trailer w/tank and ATV and possibly taking over or creating a Biocontrol Collection and Distribution program.

**REASONING FOR ASSESSMENT RATES**

The above Assessment Rate Proposal is a reflection of the current state of invasive noxious weeds throughout Lincoln County. There are no boundaries. The rangelands in the south are inundated with Rush skeletonweed. The incorporated parcels are out of control with noxious weeds due to their lack of control for decades. We are seeing Houndstongue, Musk thistle, Scotch thistle, Common and Annual bugloss and Russian knapweed spreading rapidly across the county.

The proposed increase would allow more field staff and reverse the current trend of spreading noxious weeds back to shrinking noxious weed infestations. We have the tools necessary to help every landowner that wants help to reduce and eventually eradicate noxious weeds. The last 11 years have seen us sliding backwards due to the lack of on-the-ground help. Current staff have had to be pulled from their regular duties to help with other additional revenue generating projects. While these projects generate revenue, they are counterproductive for the program to succeed.

Washington State minimum wage will be increased to \$15/hr. next year. Staff spends a majority of an hour when dealing with a noxious weed infestation. The proposed per parcel rate of \$12 does not cover the \$15/hr. staff is paid. This is just one of many examples where the Weed Board gives more than they take.

## **INCORPORATED ASSESSMENT RATES**

In the interest of equal benefits and responsibilities relating to the control of noxious weeds, the Weed Board has determined that all lands within Lincoln County should be assessed.

At present, the only lands within the jurisdictional boundaries of the Weed Board that are not being assessed are the incorporated areas, yet the incorporated areas are not exempt from noxious weed problems. The Weed Board constantly receives complaints of noxious weed infestations by landowners of the incorporated towns.

Uniform assessment within land classifications means that all incorporated areas within the jurisdictional boundaries of the Weed Board must be assessed. Currently, the Weed Board treats incorporated parcel complaints sparingly. Field Technicians inspect very little in the incorporated parcels that lie within their respected area. If they see an infestation that they interpret to be at a level that needs controlled. They will take appropriate steps to see it controlled. No thorough canvassing takes place of incorporated parcels.

In 1999, the Weed Board stopped having the field technician's control noxious weeds in the incorporated towns and spend their time in the surrounding areas. Small areas of each town have been targeted for weed control since 1999. Not all of the complaints received are taken care of due to the lack of funding from these entities.

# Assessment Rate Comparison



**Assessment Rates from 1985-1990**

\$0.06 Acre    Rangeland, Timber, Dryland pasture and R-O-W  
\$0.12 Acre    Irrigated and Dryland cropland and Irrigated pasture  
\$2.50         Minimum per parcel

**Total Revenue= Approximately \$138,235.00**

**Lowered Assessment Rates in effect for 1991**

\$0.05 Acre    Rangeland, Timber, Dryland pasture and R-O-W  
\$0.10 Acre    Irrigated and Dryland Cropland and Irrigated Pasture  
\$2.00 Acre    Minimum per parcel

**Total Revenue=Approximately \$119,991.00**

**Current Assessment Rates from 2002 – 2019**

\$0.06 Acre    Rangeland, Timber, Dryland pasture and R-O-W  
\$0.11 Acre    Irrigated and Dryland Cropland and Irrigated Pasture  
\$9.90         Minimum per parcel

**Total Revenue =Approximately \$192,000**

AG Opinion  
City & Town Assessment

Program Involvement  
and  
Performance

## **Program Highlights from 2002-2019**

- Established Dalmatian Toadflax bug and massively reduced its population
- Intensified the Biocontrol program for Diffuse and Spotted knapweed and Rush Skeletonweed.
- Changed weed inspectors to field technicians that are trained to be more like land managers than just weed inspectors.
- Produced and maintain over 70 brochures, pamphlets and handouts
- Improved website with more features and information
- Main player in the Washington Wilderness Hay and Mulch program for certifying hay and Straw.
- Started GPS mapping to make field staff more efficient and mapped noxious weed infestation more precisely located.
- USDA APHIS PPQ involvement increased with additional free biocontrol agents and traveling yearly to Montana to collect Leafy spurge beetles. Insectary was also established for Knapweed bug.
- Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA)- Channeled Scablands CWMA has given thousands of dollars to landowners for on-the-ground work.
- Lake Spokane/Long Lake invasive plant group that works with Avista in developing and maintaining noxious weed control in Lake Spokane/Long Lake.
- Hold Noxious Weed Management Seminars to educate landowners.
- Good working relationship with WSDOT and Public Works staff involving noxious weed control on R-O-W and other properties.
- Designed a spray outfit that allows staff to treat 40 acres at a time. This allows for efficient enforcements and other projects that come available.
- For a short time, was a participant in the Adopt-a-Highway program.
- Maintained eradication of Syrian Bean-Caper (Class A noxious weed since 2001).
- Continue rapid response on any Yellow Starthistle infestations.
- Performed herbicide research projects on Leafy Spurge in separate locations for 3 years, as well as, efficacy trials on Ventenata.
- Work closely with herbicide companies needing plots for their R&D protocols.
- After 21 years, and tenacious, never give up attitude, we are starting to see a decline in Leafy Spurge in some areas due to the flea beetle. Lincoln County has the most Leafy Spurge in the state.
- Worked to help develop a complete noxious weed software program for landowner management
- Participate in the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Conservation Day
- Taught various classes in Elementary schools about noxious weeds and biocontrol agents.
- Various speaking engagements across the state
- 4-Gallon Backpack Sprayer Rental-\$100 refundable deposit.

## **Program Involvement**

### **Involvement by staff that represent Lincoln County outside county lines**

- Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board Noxious Weed Committee Member
- Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board Legislative Committee Member
- Washington State Noxious Weed Coordinator Association President (2003)
- Washington State Noxious Weed Coordinator Assoc. Vice-President (2018 & 2019)
- Assist other county Coordinators and Boards with questions/situations.
- Educate other county landowners on biocontrol agents
- Presented at the DuPont Regional meeting on findings from the Leafy Spurge Herbicide Research Trial.
- Many of our educational brochures and handouts are being used in other counties and at the state level. Some are even used in other states
- DuPont Range and Pasture Western Advisory Panel member
- Twice interviewed by Washington Ag Network Radio about Fall Weed Management
- Meet with District Senator and Representative about various weed related topics
- Featured in Techline Invasive Plant News periodical on our new spray boom design.

Photos of Noxious Weed  
Infestations on town parcels