

## WATER HEMLOCK WARNING

**General.** As many of you probably know, last spring one of our neighborhood ranchers lost several steers, most likely due to eating water hemlock. Known in botanical nomenclature as *Cicuta Douglassii*.

This plant has the distinction of being the most toxic plant in North America. All parts of Water Hemlock are poisonous. However, the most toxic parts are the tuberous roots and seed heads. The toxin Cicutoxin attacks the central nervous system, causing convulsions, grand mal seizure, and often death.

After hearing about the loss of the steers, portions of Lateral 4 were checked and Water Hemlock is definitely in our midst. The plants were cut and bagged them, as they were in full flower and close to spreading their seeds.

**Invasive Nature.** Water hemlock spreads along stream banks and ditch lines. It likes wet marshy soil. It spreads by seeds, which is highly problematic as each flower head, umbel, can produce up to 70,000 seeds, that remain viable for years. If left untreated and hemlock gets a good foothold, it can start spreading to dry ground areas as well.

**Treatment.** Water Hemlock can be eradicated a couple of ways. Spraying with 2,4-D is effective, though it may take several years to fully kill plants. Digging, or grubbing out each plant is also effective. Just be sure to get the whole root. It is suggested after digging them out, you burn the slash. Lastly, it is also effective to cut the whole plant down before flowers go to seed. Water Hemlock is a perennial, but fairly short lived. By cutting them down, one can stop the spreading, and after several years, those plants being cut down will most likely die out.

**Identification.** Water hemlock is an easily identifiable plant. It can grow up to 6' but also may be 2-3' tall. It has pinnately compound leaves with deep tooth like serrations along each leaflet. Purplish veins can be seen on the stems/stalks, especially below leaflet nodes. Also, it smells awful!





**Stewardship.** Please check the laterals and wet areas on your property, May-July, and help eradicate this toxic invasive plant. Water can carry seeds miles downstream, as well as seed-by-wind distribution. Let's keep our ditches clean of this hazard, for the sake of all ranchers, livestock, and the environment.

Sources of information:

USDA

USFS

