

NATIONAL AWARD

Northeastern N.D. partners earn award for weed control

■ Cavalier-Walsh-Pembina County Weed Control Joint Venture focuses on finding environmentally friendly ways to keep noxious weeds in check

Herald Staff and Wire Report

Partners in a northeastern North Dakota weed control project have received national recognition for their efforts.

The "Cavalier-Walsh-Pembina County Weed Control Joint Venture" was honored with an award last week in Washington as part of National Invasive Weed Awareness Week.

The Invasive Weeds Awareness Coalition sponsored last week's celebration in the U.S. Botanical Garden. The coalition is a consortium of public and private companies dedicated to eradicating invasive species.

According to Mark Fisher, private lands biologist for the Devils Lake Wetland Management District of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the federal agency partnered with weed boards in Walsh, Cavalier and Pembina counties to receive a \$31,800 grant in 2006.

The partnership also received \$78,875 in matching nonfederal dollars from the county weed boards, the North Dakota Department of Agriculture, the North Dakota State University Extension Service and BASF Corp., Fisher said. Those funds came in the form of various in-kind services, Fisher said.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, a conservation group Congress founded in 1984, sponsored the partnership.

Showcase project

"National recognition is really quite an honor," said Fisher, who serves as grants administrator for the project and attended the awards cer-

emony. "An honor to all participants involved and a chance to showcase our local project on a national scale."

The grant, which is the second phase of a three-year project, has increased weed control budgets for both the service and county weed boards by about \$60,000 over the past two years. Fisher said the partnership also expects to receive its final award of \$30,000 for fiscal year 2007.

According to Fisher, the local project has focused on finding effective, environmentally friendly ways to keep noxious weeds in check. That effort, he says, includes "integrated pest management" and educating public and private land managers about selecting the right controls in the right situations.

In coarse or sandy soils, for example, continued use of herbicides may increase the potential for groundwater contamination, Fisher said, negating any weed control benefits.

"In situations such as these, herbicides — or different herbicides with less environmental persistence — may be a better choice," Fisher said. "The use of mechanical or biological control agents would be safer yet."

Fisher said the group plans to hold a public weed tour in both Walsh and Cavalier counties this summer.

"The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's grant has made it possible for ourselves and county weed boards to treat thousands of acres of noxious weeds with new and innovative methods," Fisher said.

That equates to more on-the-ground acres treated within the project area.

Brent Nelson, a member of the Walsh County Weed Board, agreed.

"It is good to see that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has stepped up its own weed control activities and is very active with weed control on their lands, while simultaneously helping Walsh County supplement its weed control budget," Nelson said. "We look forward to analyzing our test plot data this summer, which hopefully will provide some new information with respect to weed control in Walsh County."

Challenge grant

In addition to the Foundation's grant, Fisher said, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service provided a "challenge cost share" grant working with Benson and Towner counties. Each county received \$2,500, he said.

"Through partnerships such as these, it is hoped that we can better manage weeds within the five counties," Fisher said. "Decreasing the number of weeds in cropland and rangeland environments while improving habitat conditions for wildlife and fish will ultimately benefit the American people."

Noxious weeds threaten millions of acres of land in the U.S. and have been targeted as one of the nation's most urgent issues in grassland management.

Just in North Dakota, leafy spurge and Canada thistle infest more than 1.2 million acres and 1.4 million acres, respectively.

Absinth wormwood, salt cedar, purple loosestrife and musk thistle also are on the hit list of noxious weeds infesting lands in North Dakota.