So you now own a few acres and aren't quite sure what those often stickery plants are coming up all over the fields. Chances are they are noxious weeds - or more commonly referred to as obnoxious weeds. In this first newsletter we will be addressing one of the most common of these weeds - Diffuse knapweed.

The Wasco County Weed Department receives numerous calls throughout the year about Diffuse knapweed. This weed has moved into many areas mostly unnoticed by landowners. Disturbed sites, i.e., building, construction sites, or tilled lands show the greatest impacts, but commonly this becomes a roadside invader as well.

Diffuse knapweed is one of the most damaging rangelands weeds in the Northwest area. Knapweed competes with rangeland grasses and forbs, reducing forage production to near zero in areas where the weed is well established. The plant has little grazing value and is avoided by livestock and wildlife when other forage is available.

Diffuse knapweed is normally a biennial (takes two years to produce seed) but may live for several years as a rosette before flowering or it may continue to grow after producing seeds to flower again the next year. In the rosette stage the plant looks very much like a dandelion. As the main stem of the plant starts to shoot up, or bolt it can grow to be 1 to 3 feet tall. The plant has a deep taproot. Flowers are generally white, but sometimes pink or lavender. Diffuse knapweed can produce up to 1,200 seeds per flower stock. This assists the plant in taking over lands very quickly.

Upright stems have numerous spreading branches, and a tumbleweed mobility when broken off. Mature plants are easily caught and transported on all types of farm, ranch, and recreation vehicles. This is commonly the plant you will see being carried along roads on the undercarriage of cars and trucks.

The key to managing knapweeds is early detection and treatment of invading plants. A combination of control measures works best for long-term control. Reseeding with productive forages, hand-pulling, mowing to reduce seed production, and herbicides can be used to assist in management of knapweed. Remember though that management of this and all weeds is not a one season issue. Monitoring your weed infestations and continual control methods are a necessity to maintain the productivity of your land. At 1,200 seeds per plant for say a ten year period makes for a lot of weed seed load in the soil profile!
For further information concerning Diffuse Knapp Weed or any other weed control issues, please contact your local weed department. The following are the phone numbers for the various county weed departments:

- Klickitat County 509-773-5817
- Hood River County 541-387-6889
- Sherman County 541-565-3655
- Wasco County 541-298-4110