

# **Noxious Weed and Pest Management Plan For Morgan County, CO**

## **I. Introduction**

Noxious weeds present a variety of concerns including decreased crop and forage production, soil erosion and toxicity to wildlife, livestock, and people. Noxious weeds are not native to the United States and, therefore, have no natural predators to control them. As a result, noxious weeds can displace native vegetation, reduce habitat for native and endangered species, degrade riparian areas, and decrease property value. These detrimental effects to the natural ecosystem justify the need for creating and implementing a county-wide noxious weed management plan.

## **II. Background and History**

Morgan County has had some form of formal weed control program since 1962. In 1962, a group of farmers in the Wiggins community petitioned the board of County Commissioners and formed the Wiggins Pest Control District, which encompasses 111,442 acres, located in the western part of Morgan County. In 1968, the Northern Pest Control District was formed, encompassing 107,842 acres. The Northern Pest Control District voted to disband approximately 5 years later. In 1969, the Fort Morgan Pest Control district was formed which encompasses 94,193 acres in the central part of Morgan County. In 1991, The Board of County Commissioners adopted Ordinance 91 ORD 1, an ordinance that “Regulated Management and Control of Undesirable plants in accordance with the Colorado Weed Management Act”. Since that time the activities of the districts have varied, and most recently, Noxious Weed management has primarily been complaint driven.

In 2016, because of recent historical flooding events, and a renewed effort by the state of Colorado in carrying out the Colorado Weed Act, there is an increased interest by the Morgan Conservation District, the City of Brush!, and the Board of County Commissioners to become compliant with the Colorado Weed Act and re-form the Morgan County Weed Advisory Board. Discussions also ensued regarding attempting to market a county-wide Pest Control District that would make noxious weed control within the county and county right of ways more effective and affordable to Morgan County citizens. It would also provide a platform for enforcement of the Colorado Noxious Weed Act, and possibly provide a platform to aid in management of range damaging rodents.

## **III. Requirements of the Colorado Noxious Weed Act**

The Colorado Noxious Weed Act (Colorado Revised Statutes 35-5.5) was originally signed into law in 1991 and amended in 1996 and 2003. Also referred to in the document as “ACT”, it directs the Board of County Commissioners from each county in the State to adopt a Noxious Weed Management Plan for all unincorporated land within each county (CRS 35-5.5-105). The ACT further directs each Board of County Commissioners to appoint a local Weed Advisory Board whose power and duties are as follows:

Local advisory boards shall have the power and duty to:

1. Develop a recommended management plan for the integrated management of designated noxious weeds and recommended management criteria for noxious weeds within the area governed by the local government and governments appointing the local advisory board. The management plan shall be reviewed at regular intervals but not less often than once every three years by the local advisory board. The management plan and any amendments made thereto shall be transmitted to the local governing body for approval, modification, or rejection.
2. Declare noxious weeds and any state noxious weeds designated by rule to be subject to integrated management.
3. Recommend to the local governing body that identified landowners be required to submit an individual integrated management plan to manage noxious weeds on their property.

A list of the current State A, B, and C-listed noxious weed species can be found at <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/agconservation/noxiousweeds> or by contacting the Morgan Conservation District. This list is updated annually based on the status of a particular species.

- a. List A includes rare noxious weed species that are subject to eradication wherever detected statewide in order to protect neighboring lands and the state as a whole. All populations of List A species are designated by the commissioner for eradication.
- b. List B includes noxious weed species for which the commissioner, in consultation with the state weed advisory committee, local governments, and other interested parties, develops and implements state noxious weed management plan designed to stop the continued spread of these species.
- c. List C includes noxious weed species for which the Commissioner, in consultation with the State Weed Advisory Committee, local governments, and other interested parties will develop and implement weed management plans. These plans will be designed to support the efforts of local governing bodies to facilitate more effective, integrated weed management on public and private lands. The goal of such plans will not be to stop the continued spread of these species but to provide additional education, research and biological control resources to jurisdictions that choose to require management of List C species.

The 1996 ACT allows for cooperative planning and plan administration among counties and municipalities. Additionally, the ACT establishes the position of State Weed Coordinator in the Colorado Department of Agriculture, and creates a State Noxious Weed Management Fund. The Department of Agriculture may make special grants from this fund to local entities for the management of State noxious weeds.

#### **IV. Status of Noxious Weeds in Morgan County (Wiggins, Fort Morgan, Brush!, and Hillrose)**

The recent flood events of 2013 and 2014, along with a lack of a weed management plan and strategic weed control in the county right of ways, have contributed to a larger noxious weed population. These noxious weeds are found in both the County right of ways, as well as on private and State lands.

## **V. Objectives of this Plan**

The main objective of this plan is to meet requirements of the 1996 ACT, and its yearly revisions. This plan provides policy and guidance for noxious weed management in Morgan County. For the purpose of this plan, “pests” are defined as prairie damaging rodents. This plan is for the use of all landowners and managers, both public and private.

## **VI. Noxious Weed Management Approaches**

The Morgan County Weed Manager and licensed staff will advise landowners of the need for, and feasibility of, weed control. Only licensed applicators will make chemical recommendations. Private landowners who choose to apply herbicides on their property will be advised to strictly follow the manufacturer’s label.

The Morgan County Weed Advisory Board prefers an integrated approach to weed management. An integrated approach implements cultural, mechanical, biological, and chemical control methods. Utilizing a variety of methods helps prevent chemical-resistant weeds, decreases “bare ground” situations, and allows for weed control efforts tailored to each individual site or scenario.

1. **Cultural and Mechanical Control:** First and foremost, good land management is always encouraged to prevent an invasion. The key is to create conditions favorable for desirable plants, thus increasing competition for undesirable noxious weeds. Methods include proper irrigation, mowing, burning, properly timed livestock grazing, plowing, and seeding. When properly applied, these methods are effective as control measures as well as preventive measures.
2. **Biological Control:** Many noxious weeds become prolific due to the fact that they have no natural predators. The Colorado State Insectary tests insects and pathogens to control invasive species. Care is taken to be sure they will not move to native species or crops. Biological management of noxious weeds will continue to grow as more biological controls are developed. Biological controls are not a valid eradication method when used alone, but can be integrated with other methods of weed control.
3. **Chemical Control:** The use of herbicides is expected to remain our most effective tool for managing noxious weeds. Due to a variety of factors, herbicides are often most effective, but should still be used in conjunction with other management methods. Morgan County Weed Advisory Board prefers applying selective herbicides using a spot-spraying technique. Spot spraying (when compared to broadcast spraying) is more cost-effective, reduces the amount of herbicide in the environment, and prevents unnecessary damage to surrounding vegetation. Integrated noxious weed management calls for the sensible application of chemical herbicides. According to the policies stated previously, Morgan County will use chemical control methods when appropriate.

## **VII. Management Tools**

1. **Education and Outreach:** The Morgan County Weed Manager, the Morgan County Planning and Zoning Department, and also the CSU Extension Service in Morgan County will

distribute educational materials concerning the identification, propagation, and control of noxious weeds. Various outreach and educational tools will be utilized. These tools may include news releases, presentations, publications and handouts, site evaluation, and weed tours.

2. **Monitoring and Mapping:** Tracking the invasion and control of noxious weeds in Morgan County requires an effective system of monitoring. Morgan County GIS Mapping system includes a mapping layer with GIS locations of noxious weed infestations. This map will provide clarity and specificity to the mapping resource provided by the Colorado Department of Agriculture.
3. **Resources:** The noxious weed control program in Morgan County is funded by various entities (please refer to the list of partners below). Now, the ACT provides for appropriations by the state legislature “for the purpose of funding noxious weed management projects”. The Colorado Department of Agriculture is authorized to award grants from these funds to local weed control agencies. The Morgan County Weed Manager, with the consent of the County Commissioners, will apply for such grants (and others) as needed. Other options for funding include cost sharing with land owners or fees for service.
4. **Enforcement on public lands, private lands, and on utility ROW and state ROW easements** will be primarily complaint or identification driven. Morgan County public works department will use County owned and maintained technology to identify noxious weeds and report locations to the Morgan County Weed Manager and the Board of County Commissioners. The Morgan County Planning and Zoning Office will coordinate and collaborate with other agencies in providing an effective reporting system that allows for the effective functionality of this noxious weed plan.

### **VIII. Noxious Weed Management Plan and time line**

Weeds covered under this plan are all included in the state noxious weed list designated by rule. The state provides an updated species list each year based on the spread of and concern for specific varieties. The current year’s lists can be found through the following link:

<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/agconservation/county-weed-programs> and copies can be provided by Morgan Conservation District.

<https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/agconservation/noxiousweeds> is another resource for which weeds are covered.

### **IX. Coordination and Cooperation**

Morgan County Weed Control collaborates with a variety of agencies and landowners. Local, State, and Federal agencies along with researchers, private organizations, interest groups, and agricultural land managers often contribute. Their contributions include funding, time, labor, and expertise to create large scale weed management efforts.

In Morgan County, partners include:

Town of Wiggins  
City of Fort Morgan

Town of Log Lane  
Town of Hillrose  
City of Brush!  
Morgan County  
Colorado Parks and Wildlife  
Colorado Department of Transportation  
Colorado State University Extension  
Colorado Department of Agriculture  
Irrigation Companies:  
    Upper Platte & Beaver Canal Co  
    Lower Platte & Beaver Canal Co  
    Snyder-Smith  
    Tremont Ditch Co.  
    Daul Snyder  
    Riverside Irrigation District  
    Weldon Valley  
    Bijou Irrigation  
    Morgan Ditch  
    Central Colorado Water Conservation District  
Natural Resources Conservation Service  
Morgan Conservation District  
Landowners and Land Managers  
Colorado State Land Board  
Wiggins Pest Control District  
Fort Morgan Pest Control District

#### **X. Review and Amendments**

The 1996 Colorado Noxious Weed Act requires that local noxious weed management plans be reviewed at least once every three years. Implicit in this language, is that the Weed Advisory Board can conduct review and updating at any time. The County Commissioners must approve any changes to the Noxious Weed Management Plan.