



March 2014

# Ada County Pest of the Month

A quick guide to identifying and controlling  
invasive plants and animals found in the county

## WHITETOP (Hoary Cress)



Whitetop is a perennial broad leaf weed that stands up to 2 feet tall and has a creeping rhizome root system that can reach up to 6 feet deep. It has a distinctive bloom of small white four petal flowers that bloom in early spring. The leaves are alternate, gray-green, and the upper leaves clasp the stem. The seeds can remain viable for up to 4 years and can be transported great distances by animals or flowing water.

Whitetop invades rangelands throughout North America and is a highly competitive weed once it becomes established. Whitetop spreads primarily by extremely persistent roots and will eventually eliminate desirable vegetation and become a large colony or monoculture.

### Quick Facts:

- Name: Whitetop (*Cardaria draba*) is part of the mustard family, also known as Hoary Cress.
- Found in open, unshaded, disturbed ground. It grows well on alkaline soils that are wet in late spring and does better in areas with moderate amounts of rainfall. It is widespread in fields, waste places, meadows, pastures, croplands, and along roadsides
- One plant can produce 1,200 - 4,800 seeds
- Stems grow from the center of each rosette in late April. Plants flower from May to June. Plants set seed by mid-summer. If conditions are favorable, a second crop of seeds can be produced in the fall.
- Flowers are numerous with four white petals that give the plant a white, flat-topped appearance. Flowers bloom May to June.
- Generally considered unpalatable to livestock.



## How to Control:

If whitetop becomes established, it should be contained as soon as possible. Containment can be achieved by managing the outside perimeter to prevent the spread of whitetop. Continue using prevention techniques for the uninfested area and apply integrated management options to the infested area using a combination of the following.

### Mechanical Control

Mechanical control can be effective applied to small rosettes in fall or early spring. When pulling, hoeing or tilling the seedlings, make sure to get the lateral and vertical roots. If fragments of the root remain, new plants will develop.

Pulling and cultivation must be done on a regular basis, sometimes several times a season. Do not till or mow an established stand; this stimulates the rhizomes to grow new plants.



*Whitetop in spring rosette stage.*

### Chemical Control

Chemical control is difficult because whitetop establishes itself in crops and on rangeland where desirable broad-leaved plants, many of which are legumes, are present. Legumes are sensitive to herbicides and will be lost if sprayed. Crops such as alfalfa, peas, onions, and sugar beets are damaged or killed by pre-emergent and post-emergent herbicides that control whitetop. There are no registered herbicides for controlling Whitetop in these crops.

Landowners should treat whitetop in the fall after the crop has been harvested to ensure that future crops are not lost to the herbicide or to whitetop infestations.

Land owners have few chemicals to use against whitetop. If used correctly, 2, 4-D can provide fair to good control. Chlorsulfuron (Telar XP®) and metsulfuron (Escort®) can be used on non-cropland. Caution: chlorsulfuron and metsulfuron persist in alkaline soils (high pH) for several years. The soil residual may kill or damage crops, forage, and plants used in rangeland revegetation if planted too soon following a treatment.

Small infestations in cropland may be controlled by application of foliar active products such as glyphosate. Dicamba can extend the window of control without adding long term residuals to the soil.

Once the weed is eradicated, it is very important to revegetate the land. Planting desirable forage or crops that emerge all season long will increase competition with whitetop.



**Note: Chemical control of any weed can be difficult and confusing. If you are not experienced in chemical control or do not understand the product label, you should consult a licensed applicator to assist you. Inappropriate application can kill desirable vegetation, and may violate federal law.**

**For questions or concerns, please contact:**

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