

DIG THIS By Peg Tillery (for 05-18-05) Meet Dana Coggon - Noxious Weed Coordinator

We have a new addition to the Extension Office in the form of our County Noxious Weed Coordinator Dana Coggon. Dana comes to us following several years as the Education Specialist for the State Noxious Weed Control Program. She has a Masters Degree in Weed Science from Colorado State University.

What are noxious weeds anyway and why do they need to be coordinated? Dana says, "Noxious weeds are non-native plants that have been introduced accidentally or as ornamentals in peoples' gardens. Some are poisonous to humans and livestock and most grow rapidly and are extremely difficult to control. They can reduce crop yields, displace desirable plant species, destroy beneficial native habitat, damage recreational opportunities, clog waterways and diminish land values." Each state generates its noxious weed list. And, each county, by law, is responsible for controlling those weeds plus can decide what noxious weeds from the list need the most attention.

So, what does a noxious weed coordinator do?? Dana's job is to help protect the economic and ecological resources of Kitsap County from the detrimental impacts of invasive weeds. This summer she will be spending countless hours of quality time on the roads of Kitsap County looking for infestations and chatting with local landowners and stewards about weed control strategies. Dana's primary job is to provide education to the citizens of Kitsap County on what noxious weeds are and how citizens can do their part in controlling invasive species. Dana is working on creating educational materials on our county's "Dirty Dozen" weed list that includes plants like knotweeds and spartina.

Dana is also relying on the expertise of a group of volunteers called the WSU Weed Advisors. The current crew of Weed Advisors are Master Gardeners and volunteers with a botany background, but anyone who has an interest in controlling noxious weeds through education and assistance to the Kitsap community can become a Weed Advisor. These volunteers have completed an extensive course on invasive plant management control along with coursework in integrated pest management. Dana says, "If you have a passion for our county and would like to be active in the preservation of our lands please contact me at dcoggon@co.kitsap.wa.us or 360-307-4242 to get involved in the fall Weed Advisor class session."

Dana explains that non-native invasive species (plants and animals) cost the US an estimated \$137 billion per year due to environmental damage, public health hazards and economic losses to livestock and agriculture. Exotic weeds are spreading at about 4,600 acres per day on Federal lands in the West. In ten years from 1985 through 1995 the spread of exotic plant species increased on public rangelands in the West from 4 million to 17 million acres. Noxious weeds are a leading contributing cause of species endangerment. Purple loosestrife, which chokes out wildlife habitat and clogs waterways, now invades wetlands in 48 states at an estimated cost of \$45 million a year for control and lost land use. In Washington State, the Department of Fish & Wildlife spent close to \$1.3 million dollars in one year to control spartina, purple loosestrife and saltcedar.

Dana says, "Noxious weeds are found everywhere in Kitsap County in urban, suburban and rural areas; on developed and undeveloped land, farmland, forest and other natural open spaces as well as in lakes, rivers, streams, and in Puget Sound." Our County Noxious Weed Control Board was established to direct the state mandated program as required by the court order. The county board, appointed by the County Commissioners, consists of five unpaid citizen volunteers representing these regions: South, Bremerton, Central, North and Bainbridge Island. The board meets monthly and provides vision and direction to the weed control program. The county noxious weed control program staff are hired, directed and supervised by the citizen board.

Dana says the Noxious Weed Control Program in Kitsap County provides the following services: surveys and maps of noxious weed infestations county-wide to identify the full extent of the weed problem and to detect infestations at an earlier and more preventive stage; educational services to the public through informational workshops and publications; technical assistance to the public on weed identification, control and eradication; and facilitation of weed management efforts by working with volunteer and landowner groups." Contact Dana at the Extension Office with questions and comments.

Contact Peg in care of this newspaper or email ptillery@co.kitsap.wa.us