Montana Noxious Weed Education

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Meadow Hawkweed Complex

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Meadow Hawkweed Complex

Genus: Hieracium
Species: pretense, floribundum, and piloselloides
Priority Listing: 2A
Perennial

Each of the species included in the meadow hawkweed complex are in the Asteraceae or sunflower family and are closely related to dandelions. They are native to Europe and can be found in the foothills of the Alps.

The species is thought to have been introduced into the United States in 1828 as a medicinal remedy to cure digestive ailments.

Meadow hawkweed typically inhabits mountain meadows, forest clearings, pastures, hayfields, roadsides, abandoned farmland, and other disturbed sites.

This plant has shallow, fibrous roots, stolons, and rhizomes. The basal leaves are dark green on the upper side and a lighter green below, spatula shaped and about 6" in length. Both the stems and the leaves are covered with hair.

The rosettes of this plant produce 10 to 25 stems that can grow up to 3' in height. The stems usually do not have any leaves, and if they do, one single small leaf occurs at the mid-point of the stem. If severed, both the leaves and the stem secrete a white, milky juice.

One stem can produce 5 to 30 flower heads; flowers are bright yellow to white in color and are ½" in diameter. Ray shaped flower petals are squared at the tip, and they slightly resemble dandelion petals. They bloom from June to August. Flowers on the stem tops grow in a flat-topped cluster shapes, and after pollination tiny black seeds with a bristly tuft of hairs on the flattened end are produced. The bristly plume acts as a mode of transportation and aids in dispersal for seed spread

One characteristic that makes this plant so hard to control is that it can spread and reproduce by stolons and rhizomes, creating thick dense mats of vegetation.

Photo courtesy of Michael Shephard; USDA-Forest Service

Basal: leaves situated at the base of a plant, may look different than the plant's other leaves

Fibrous: containing strong fibers

Inhabits: to live in, reside in, or be present in

Medicinal: having the properties of medicine; used a medicine

Perennial: a plant whose life spans several years

Rhizomes: a perennial underground stem that usually grows horizontally

Rosettes: circular clusters of leaves that radiate from a center of a plant, close to the ground, like a dandelion

Stolon: a plant shoot that bends to the ground or that grows horizontally above the ground and produces roots and shoots at the nodes