

## WASHINGTON REPORT

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### **Seeking Your Expertise for the 2021 Weed Survey**

The 2021 survey of the most common and troublesome weeds in aquatic and non-crop areas in the U.S. and Canada is here! <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2021WeedSurvey>

We invite you to participate in this year's weed survey to list the five most common and troublesome weeds in at least one of the following areas:

- 1) Aquatic: irrigation, flood control
- 2) Aquatic: lakes, reservoirs, rivers
- 3) Aquatic: ponds
- 4) Forestry
- 5) Natural Areas: parks, wildlife refuges
- 6) Ornamentals: field nursery crops, outdoor containers, Christmas trees
- 7) Right-Of-Ways: railways, roads, public utilities

Common weeds refer to those weeds you most frequently see, while troublesome weeds are those that are most difficult to control, but may not be widespread. Your expertise is important and will be invaluable in highlighting weed species trends over time.

Survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2021WeedSurvey>

### **Support for \$11.5 Billion in Ag Research Infrastructure**

The Weed Science Societies joined over 350 other national, regional, and state organizations and companies in a letter to House and Senate Agriculture Committee leadership to request their support for \$11.5 billion in ag research infrastructure investments over five years. This investment in our 1862, 1890, and 1994 land grant and non-land grant schools of agriculture is necessary in order to ensure the U.S. remains a global leader in food and agricultural innovation. A recent Gordian/APLU study assessed the state of facilities at U.S. colleges and schools of agriculture this year and reported that 69% of these buildings are at the end of their useful life. [Click here](#) to read the letter and see the signatories.

### **Legislation to Boost USDA Research Funding Reintroduced**

Senators Dick Durbin (D-IL) and Jerry Moran (R-KS) reintroduced the **America Grows Act**, S. 1371, that would require a five percent annual funding increase each year for the next 10 years for research activities at USDA's ARS, NIFA, NASS, and ERS. The U.S. share of total agriculture research investments among high-income countries as a group has declined from 35 percent in 1960 to less than 25 percent by 2013. By comparison, in the past 30 years, Chinese investments in agriculture research have risen eight-fold.

The six National and Regional Weed Science Societies [joined over 120 other organizations](#) in a letter to Senate Agriculture and Appropriations Committee members supporting the America Grows Act of 2021.

### **Eagle Killing Neurotoxin Linked to Hydrilla Identified**

Bald eagles, as well as other wildlife, have been succumbing to vacuolar myelinopathy (VM) in the southern U.S. since the 1990s. In a March 2021 issue of *Science*, researchers finally identified the neurotoxin, aetokthonotoxin (AETX), which is produced by the cyanobacterium *Aetokthonos hydrillicola* that is the cause of VM deaths. The cyanobacterium, *A. hydrillicola*, grows very well on hydrilla covering 20-90% of its leaf surfaces. *A. hydrillicola* has also colonized hydrilla in more than half the watersheds in the southeastern US.

Reference: “Hunting the eagle killer: A cyanobacterial neurotoxin causes vacuolar myelinopathy” by Breinlinger et al., 26 March 2021, *Science* 371. [DOI: 10.1126/science.aax9050](#)

There was some controversy created by inaccurate media reports that linked the herbicide diquat dibromide as a possible cause. AETX biosynthesis relies on the availability of bromide. The authors recognize that a number of conditions may increase or even decrease bromide availability such as environmental conditions (e.g., lake turnover, agitation), natural sources (e.g., geologic), as well as anthropogenic sources (e.g., power plants, water treatment plants, gasoline additives, chemicals, plant management). Breinlinger et al. (2021) state that “the consequences of elevated bromide from geologic and anthropogenic sources (e.g., water treatment and power plants) on VM should be further investigated”.

It should be noted that there are VM-positive water bodies with AETX where diquat has never been used. Likewise, diquat controlling hydrilla is desired because hydrilla is the source of the problem. Furthermore, the water concentration of bromide after a diquat application is 25 to 125 times below the optimum water concentration of bromide required for AETX production.

The bigger travesty in all of this is that **hydrilla is a federally listed noxious weed**, and without question, the most widespread aquatic noxious weed on the federal list. APHIS Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) has limited funding for managing and preventing the interstate spread of federal noxious weeds under the Plant Protection Act. While APHIS has active permits for two hydrilla biocontrol agents, *Hydrellia balciunasi* and *Hydrellia pakistanae*, unfortunately, APHIS confirmed that they **do not have a current program** for the control and management of hydrilla. WSSA has ongoing conversations with APHIS on this important issue.

### **EPA Announces Plan to Revise WOTUS Definition**

The EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers have announced plans to revise the definition of “waters of the U.S.” or WOTUS to determine which waterways and wetlands federal agencies can regulate under the Clean Water Act.

The agencies also intend to initiate a new rulemaking process to restore the pre-2015 definition of what constitutes WOTUS and have requested a federal judge to remand the Trump

Administration's 2020 Navigable Waters Protection Rule. The 2020 rule, which replaced the Obama Administration's 2015 Clean Water Rule, moved WOTUS back towards Congress's original intent of "navigable waters" and removed ephemeral streams that flow only after heavy rainfall or snowmelt as well as wetlands without surface water connections to intermittent or perennial streams from the agencies definition of WOTUS.

Many agricultural groups are opposed to changing the current Navigable Waters Protection Rule because they feel it provided long-overdue certainty and clarity for landowners affected by the scope of WOTUS' jurisdiction. There is concern about government overreach and regulatory confusion in how federal agencies decide which waters of the United States they can regulate.

The Biden Administration eventually plans to draft its own definition of which waterways, wetlands and groundwater they can regulate by "*drawing from the lessons learned from the current and previous regulations, as well as input from a wide array of stakeholders, so we can better protect our nation's waters, foster economic growth, and support thriving communities.*" More information about the new rulemaking is forthcoming.

### **National Invasive Species Awareness Week (NISAW)- Part II**

NISAW Part II was May 15-22, 2021 and focused on local invasive species prevention and removal events, plus included five educational webinars. The [North American Invasive Species Forum](#) was also held virtually during NISAW Part II and led by the Canadian Council on Invasive Species.

The webinars from NISAW part II are now available. Click a link to begin watching.

- May 17: [The Climate Crisis and Invasive Species](#)
- May 18: [Biological Threat Surveillance Tools \(US Geological Survey Special Event\) and The Model Legislative Framework for State Aquatic Nuisance Species \(ANS\) Programs and Resource Toolkit for Local Governments](#)
- May 19: [The Regulatory Process for Classical Weed Biological Control](#)
- May 20: [Aquatic Plant Management Priorities](#)
- May 21: [A Comparison of State Noxious Weed Lists and The Western Weed Action Plan](#)

The May 20<sup>th</sup> webinar was led by **Ryan Wersal**, an assistant professor at Minnesota State University and president of the Aquatic Plant Management Society (APMS). Wersal provided an overview of APMS and current aquatic plant management issues. He also discussed the need for increased research funding.

The May 21<sup>st</sup> webinar was presented by **Jacob Barney**, an associate professor at Virginia Tech and chair of WSSA's Noxious and Invasive Weed and Biocontrol Committee. He discussed his recent work that focused on variations in how states regulate noxious weeds, the challenges those variations pose and ways to bridge the gap.

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