

## **THE INVASION**

### **A Sorrowful Tale About Invasive Species**

*Once Upon A Time* a young Martian couple moved into small bungalow on a quiet cul-de-sac in Everytown, Oregon. At first their neighbors didn't even notice that the Martians had moved in. After all, the Martian family lived quietly, they kept their yard neatly mowed, and they minded their own business. However, there were a couple of things about the Martians that would soon make their neighbors in Everytown regret the day the Martians showed up. For one thing, it takes only five years for Martian children to reach maturity and begin reproducing, and a typical Martian couple has about 20 babies a year. For another thing, Martians have enormous appetites and consume prodigious amounts of food and water.

*Before long, the Martian family had outgrown its little bungalow and had begun moving into other homes in the neighborhood. Not long afterward, the grocery stores in town began running out of food on a regular basis. And the creeks in the area began running dry. Most of the people who had lived in Everytown, Oregon moved away in search of a less-crowded place to live and a more plentiful supply of food and water. In no time the Martians had overrun Everytown, and few of the original inhabitants remained. The native families who stayed on were always hungry and thirsty, and were unable to prosper.*

The foregoing may be a fanciful tale, but Everytown, Oregon really IS being invaded. Not by Martians, of course, but by noxious weeds like tansy ragwort, knapweed, toadflax, and scotch broom. Like the Martians in our story, once these invasive plants take hold they spread rapidly and take over land formerly occupied by native species, choking them out. You can see large communities of these weeds in vacant lots, along roadsides, and maybe even in your neighbor's pasture.

In an effort to stop the spread of invasive plant species, the Forest Service has adopted new rules for all users of our wildernesses and national forests. Whether or not you agree with the Forest Service's new regulations, you have to applaud the idea of preventing noxious weeds from taking over our national forests. After all, it's far better to have native species of grass and wild flowers waving in the wind than for our forests to be overrun with scotch broom and purple loosestrife.

The new rules state that beginning in 2007, only certified weed-free feed may be used in wilderness areas and at trailheads leading to wilderness areas in Oregon and Washington. Beginning in 2009, this rule will be expanded to cover all national forests in Oregon and Washington.

Certified weed-free feed includes commercially-processed pellets; steamed, rolled grains; and hay that has been certified by state inspectors to be free of weed seeds.

While this rule is new to most Oregonians, in fact similar requirements have been in effect for years in Idaho, Montana, Nevada, California, in Washington's Cascade Mountain wildernesses, and in the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest in eastern Oregon. It's also important to note that the rules don't apply just to equestrians – there are comparable rules for ATV users, mountain bikers, and even the crews fighting forest fires.

There are four things you can do to comply with both the letter and the spirit of the new regulations.

1. Use only certified weed-free feed in all wilderness areas and at trailheads and horse camps that provide access to wilderness areas.
2. Use certified feed one or more days before you go into a wilderness area to ensure your animals can eat these products, and to help prevent the spread of weed seeds through manure.
3. Encourage your hay grower to certify his crop under the weed-free program.
4. Since most people will need only a few bales of certified hay each year, encourage your fellow OET chapter members to pool their purchases and make one bulk purchase each year on behalf of all interested buyers. This will save everyone money and ensure that you have a supply of certified feed for your trail riding and camping needs.

The certification process involves extra work and expense for the farmer, so at this point there are only a few growers of certified hay. The certified hay growers in Oregon are:

- Jon Bright, 25360 Walker Rd, Bend, OR 97701, 541-382-5493
- H&R Baling, 15 Carthage St, Eugene, OR 97404, 541-409-4263
- Brett Hemenway, 6521 Danube Drive, Madras, OR 97741
- Kent Madison, 29299 Madison Rd, Echo, OR 97741, 541-376-8107
- David McDowell, 4846 Orchard Heights Rd NW, Salem, OR 97304, 503-588-8031
- Jerry Nagaki, 5026 Pioneer Rd, Ontario, OR 97014, 541-262-3637
- Richard Tyler, 10242 W. Langell Valley Rd, Bonanza, OR 97623, 541-545-6099
- John Volle, 305 Haskins Rd, Bonanza, OR 97673, 541-545-6298
- Wallowa County Extension Services, 668 NW 1<sup>st</sup> St, Enterprise, OR 97828, 541-426-3143

Using certified hay or commercially-produced pellets while you're camping or trail riding is a bit more expensive than feeding standard hay, but using these feeds today will be a lot less expensive than paying down the road for someone to remove the invasive species that have found their way into the forest.

Compliance is pretty much voluntary at this time, since the Forest Service can't police every trail head every day. But in a couple of years the rules will apply to all national forest lands. And non-compliance by the horse community gives just added ammunition to those groups who want to limit stock usage on public land. So please do the right thing. Do your part to ensure that invasive species stay well away from our national forests.