

Pincher Creek Blueweed Blitz

Pincher Creek Watershed Group – Protecting the Creek one Blueweed at a Time

On a bright sunny morning on July 5th, friends and neighbours gathered together with a mission in mind: to remove blueweed, a noxious weed that grows along the banks of many southern Alberta waterways, including beautiful Pincher Creek. Blueweed may appear attractive with its showy blue flowers but don't let its appearance fool you. The members of the Pincher Creek Watershed Group know all too well how vigorous this weed is, and the hazards that this plant can bring to a landscape.



The Pincher Creek Watershed Group (PCWG) was formed in 2002 by landowners living along the creek who were concerned with the current condition of the creek, specifically with the appearance of blueweed. This concern for their watershed initiated the Blueweed Blitz, an annual organized event that gathered local landowners together for a Saturday in July to pick blueweed. Not only has the event resulted in a reduction of blueweed, but it has also brought together a volunteer community which has raised awareness of noxious weeds and riparian health and water quality.



Blueweed (*Echium vulgare*) appeared in the MD of Pincher Creek after a major flood in 1995 and has managed to spread along the entire length of Pincher Creek. It is a biennial plant that begins its life as a low growing rosette of hairy leaves in its first year, turning into a flowering bolt in its second year. A single plant produces seeds which can remain viable for many years. The blueweed is an introduced ornamental, which displaces native plants. It is unpalatable to livestock and tends to increase in overgrazed pastures. The plant is difficult to eradicate. It does not respond well to herbicides so the most effective way to get rid of it is to hand-pull the weeds. This can be challenging as the plant has a long tough taproot, which must be dug from the ground and usually from a rocky landscape.

2008 marked the sixth year for the Blueweed Blitz. Over the years 60 - 110 volunteers have participated in the event. Sixty-eight volunteers participated this year picking over 150 bags of noxious weeds (mostly blueweed). In this one day, more than 2 tonnes of plants were eliminated; potentially millions of seeds were prevented from creating a new crop of blueweed. But it isn't all work! There is plenty of fun to be had throughout the day. Volunteers were welcomed with refreshments and supplied with gloves, bags and shovels to make the task a bit easier. After a few hours of picking, they were rewarded with live music from a talented local group appropriately named the "Blueweed Pickers", ice-cold beverages and a hot meal. Prizes are also given out to a select few.

Thanks to the activities undertaken from groups like the Pincher Creek Watershed Group, we all get to enjoy the benefits of a healthier, cleaner watershed. Special thanks go to the organizers and Suzanne Curran for organizing such a great event!

Sources:

- Brad Bustard-Pincher Creek Watershed Group
- Alberta Stewardship Network "Awareness to Action-A Showcase of Environmental Stewardship in Alberta"
- Alberta Invasive Plants Council

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