



For Immediate Release

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The Nanaimo Region Unites in the Battle Against Aggressive Knotweed and Toxic Giant Hogweed

The provincial government has officially proclaimed May 2016 as Invasive Species Action Month to demonstrate that targeting invasive species is a priority. In concert, the tri-central Vancouver Island municipalities which include the City of Nanaimo, City of Parksville, Town of Qualicum Beach and the Regional District of Nanaimo have joined forces for a second year to tackle aggressive knotweed and new to 2016, toxic giant hogweed.

“We are pleased to welcome the Nanaimo Regional District, a new partner in the 2016 program (final ratification expected at the May 24 board meeting),” explains Rachelle McElroy, Executive Director of the Coastal ISC. “Land owners in the RDN can now benefit from subsidized treatment, increasing the goal of verifying all knotweed and giant hogweed infestations in the region and treating priority sites.”

Following a successful first year of the “knot on my property” program run in partnership with the Coastal Invasive Species Committee (Coastal ISC) which aimed to verify all knotweed reports within these municipalities and treat knotweed on select priority sites at no cost to the landowner. The results are in: the program targeted a total of 41 knotweed sites with 28 on private property. These sites are now recorded in the provincial invasive alien plant program database for tracking and follow-up monitoring and treatment. Effective control usually takes three to five years.

Local residents can benefit from free treatment by qualified invasive plant technicians and are asked to report knotweed and giant hogweed on their property until the end of May. Treatments will take place twice - in June and August. If you think you have knotweed on your property, please contact info@coastalisc.com or toll free 1-844-298-2532.

Considered one of the world's worst invaders, knotweed is a hollow stem shrub resembling bamboo. It can grow up to 4 cm a day and cause serious damage to foundations, driveways and septic systems, as well as natural habitats. In the UK, Japanese knotweed has spread rampantly and now homeowners cannot secure mortgages or insurance on properties with knotweed.

Building on the success of the 2015 “knot on my property” program is the addition of another priority invasive species, giant hogweed, due to the extreme health and safety risks. Giant hogweed stem hairs and leaves contain a clear, highly toxic sap which when in contact with the skin, can cause burns, blisters and scarring. WorkSafe BC issued a [Toxic Plant Warning](#) for giant hogweed requiring workers to wear eye protection and heavy water-resistant clothing and gloves.

Giant hogweed is a herbaceous perennial. Stems are hollow, ridged, green with purple spots to purple-red and may have stiff hairs present. When in flower, plants can grow to 6 metres tall. Flowers are small, white and clustered in large umbrella-shaped heads and leaves are green and deeply incised (almost to leaf vein) and have three segments. Leaves can exceed 2.5 metres in length.

Both giant hogweed and knotweed when left alone can spread into riparian areas and out-compete native vegetation. Since both knotweed and hogweed dies back annually, bare soil is exposed contributing to bank instability and increased bank erosion. The program aims to target infestations prior to them spreading into sensitive riparian areas.

“The issue of invasive species crosses jurisdictional boundaries and it will take a combined effort and collaboration to rid our region of destructive plants like knotweed,” said Mayor Teunis Westbrook, Town of Qualicum Beach.

“We are pleased to be working with local municipalities to eradicate knotweed and hogweed. We recognize both are invasive and aggressive plants which spread easily and can impact property values and the environment,” added Marc Lefebvre, Mayor of the City of Parksville.

“Invasive plants like knotweed and giant hogweed can have a devastating impact on the health and economy of our communities. By working together we can help reduce the spread of these dangerous plants in the mid-Island region,” said Bill McKay, Mayor, City of Nanaimo.

Coastal ISC is asking the public to help eliminate the threat of this species before it becomes more widespread.

“We have a responsibility to change our behaviour and prevent invasive species like knotweed and giant hogweed from causing harm to people, ecosystems and our economy. This subsidized regional program will save significant taxpayer dollars. Visit www.coastalisc.com or pickup a booklet from your municipality to learn how to defend your property from knotweed invasion and identify giant hogweed to protect yourself from being burned by phototoxic sap,” explains Rachelle McElroy, Executive Director of the Coastal ISC.

For more information on how to identify these plants and their damaging impacts; as well as other invasive species that are being managed in your area please visit www.coastalisc.com.

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Attached Photos:

Asphalt damage caused by knotweed



Giant Hogweed – leaves and flowers. Photo Credit: Becky Brown





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