Yachats Weed of the Month – July 2019

Tansy ragwort (Senecio jacobaea)

Impact: Tansy ragwort is an invasive weed from Europe that is spreading rapidly in the Pacific Northwest. Due to the presence of toxic alkaloids, it is one of the most common causes of poisoning in cattle and horses. The poison has a cumulative effect. Milk produced by affected cows and goats also contains the toxins. Around Yachats, tansy is common in pastures, disturbed areas such as roadsides, and along the banks of the Yachats River. In recent years Yachats Trails crew members have destroyed thousands of tansy plants in and near town, but tansy remains a serious threat to livestock.

Identification: Tansy is a biennial that comes into bloom in July, and by August the clusters of yellow flowers are easy to recognize. The plants are normally unbranched up to the spreading inflorescence, and can grow up to 6 ft. tall. A single large plant can produce over 100,000 seeds that are easily spread by wind. Plants usually bloom in their second year; one-year-old plants are short with lacy, carrot-like leaves.

Management: Tansy flower heads should be cut and bagged for disposal. It is also important to pull out the plant itself, or at least cut it at ground level, otherwise the cut stem can produce new flowers within a few weeks. The best time to deal with tansy is soon after the flowers have started opening; the plants will be easily recognizable but will not yet be releasing seed. Look for immature plants and destroy them as well, otherwise they will produce next year's crop of flowers and seeds. The cinnabar moth larva (see photo) feeds on tansy and is useful in controlling this weed. If you see any of these caterpillars, leave them and the host plant alone.

Contact information: Call Wally at 541 547 5474 if you have any questions. For more information about invasive weeds in Yachats, see www.yachatstrails.org.

Yachats "Weed of the Month" is an informational service of the Yachats Trails Committee and YIPS! - the Yachats Invasive Plants Subcommittee.