PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE

Lythrum salicaria

THREAT: Purple loosestrife is a wetland plant that is gaining a foothold in Washington State. Purple loosestrife poses a serious threat to wetland ecosystems, displacing sensitive plant species vital to sustaining waterfowl and wildlife populations. The plant offers no food value to wildlife and its growth is generally too compact to offer cover, which may be just as crucial. It spreads rapidly with a dense, intertwining root system and it produces prolific amounts of tiny, wind-blown seed.

DESCRIPTION: Purple loosestrife is a perennial plant. Its purple-magenta colored flowers grow on long spikes. A well-established plant can grow up to 10 feet tall and 5 feet wide. Thirty to fifty stems arise from a common rootstock. One purple loosestrife plant can produce up to 3 million seeds which spread easily by wind, water or other means. Purple loosestrife is a favored perennial plant among many gardeners. However, even so-called sterile cultivars can produce viable seed. In 1990, quarantine was established which prohibits the buying, selling, and transport of purple loosestrife within Washington State.

MANAGEMENT OPTIONS: The intertwined woody root system of purple loosestrife makes it difficult to pull established plants. Plants under a year old are easier to remove by hand. Root sections will re-sprout if the entire root is not removed. Cut stem pieces from mowed plants will also send out roots unless the stems are allowed to dry out rapidly. Biological control (insects) was released in purple loosestrife infestations in Washington State in 1992. Please contact the Weed Control Board for site-specific recommendations or visit the Board's website at http://www.co.whatcom.wa.us/930/Noxious-Weed-Fact-Sheets for the publication: "Control Options for Purple Loosestrife"