

Colorado State Conservation Board 2009 Matching Grants Project:
Gunnison Conservation District: Absinth Wormwood Control
in the Ohio Creek Watershed

What natural resource problem(s) did the project address?

Absinth wormwood - a Colorado noxious weed - has been growing in Gunnison County since at least the 1960s, with the biggest problem occurring in the Ohio Creek watershed. In 2005 it was determined that eradication was possible for the county by 2007 - but, as is often the case with noxious weeds, the extent of the infestation was revealed over time to greater than initially realized. **The Gunnison Conservation District is working with Gunnison County to continue working aggressively towards the goal of absinth wormwood eradication in Gunnison County.**

The Gunnison County Weed Coordinator worked with landowners in the Ohio Creek watershed to identify the best plan of attack. Milestone has proven the most effective chemical for absinth wormwood treatment. Promising results were obtained in 2008 by cost-sharing Milestone for use on absinth wormwood, and increased **encouragement to landowners to ramp up the eradication effort was thought worthwhile.** Eradication of noxious weeds depends heavily on focused, persistent and aggressive action if efforts are not to be wasted because weed populations begin to recover. A single plant has the capacity to re-infest an area over time and all noxious weed are voracious reproducers! **Once a certain level of infestation is reached, eradication - or sometimes even suppression - becomes economically unrealistic and the weeds degrade the land for agriculture and wildlife.** The cost of trying to contain the weeds and prevent them from infesting new areas becomes a perpetual and significant liability to private and public landowners. **The possibility of eradication while weed populations are still low and contained is thus an environmental and economic golden opportunity.**

What was achieved?

- Landowners and Homeowner Associations the Ohio Creek watershed **mailed a picture of absinth wormwood and invitation to participate in cost-share program for treatment.**
- Public forum held but attendance was poor and so **21 individual landowners with estimated 586 acres of absinth wormwood visited by district technician and given information and handouts.**
- **District and Gunnison County cooperated to provide mapping of landowner infestations and Milestone for treatment**
- **\$25 per acre paid to landowners towards treatment application costs through CSCB Matching Grant and Milestone provided free of charge by the county to stimulate effectiveness of efforts towards complete eradication.**
- **227 acres absinth wormwood treated by 10 landowners and 1 homeowners association - some areas reseeded to further discourage re- infestation**
- **66% of project costs contributed as match to Matching Grant funds through Milestone supply, cost-share of landowner and commercial sprayer Milestone application expenses, and technical assistance provided by district and partners to landowners.**



The gray-green coloring of absinth wormwood is similar to sage and it also has a strong sage odor and bitter taste - but it is actually in the sunflower family. **Noxious weeds may be easily overlooked** even when prevalent - looking similar to native plants , being thought "too pretty" to be a noxious weed, or happily growing so well they appear to be a 'natural" part of the landscape. **Like many noxious weeds, absinth wormwood is opportunistic in colonizing disturbed ground - such as alongside roadways.**