



NCDA & CS

Plant Industry Division

Plant Protection Section

**PEST
ALERT**

Giant Hogweed

Heracleum mantegazzianum

Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is a biennial plant in the carrot family (Apiaceae). Giant Hogweed was introduced into the US as an ornamental plant. It is native to Eastern Europe, but escaped cultivation and has now naturalized in areas with rich moist soils (vacant lots, uncultivated or waste areas, riverbanks, along roadways, and in agricultural lands). The plant produces dried fruits which birds eat, thus dispersing the seeds. Giant Hogweed is a Federal Noxious Weed, as well as a Class A North Carolina Noxious Weed, and is found only in Watauga County. It was introduced by a homeowner for soil erosion, and shared with neighbors. The plant was discovered in 2010, and has been found in 6 unique sites around Blowing Rock. The sap of the plant is very dangerous when it gets on your skin or in your eyes, causing blisters and blindness.



Identification

Giant hogweed can grow up to 15 feet tall with a taproot or fibrous root. The stems are hollow and 2-4” in diameter with dark reddish-purple blotches. The stem has coarse white hairs, that circle the stem at the base of the leaf. The leaves are compound, deeply lobed, with three leaflets, up to 5’ wide. The inflorescence is an umbrella shape up to 2.5 feet in diameter. It blooms in mid to late summer. The fruits are elliptical in shape and produce up to 1500 seeds per flower head. The seeds are viable in the soil for 15 years.

In North Carolina, there are several plants easily confused with Giant Hogweed. The first is native Cow Parsnip (*Heracleum lanatum*) which grows in the NC mountains, and can also be poisonous – but is not a Noxious Weed. Elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*) also has a white flower and grows rampantly across the state on roadsides. This plant is not dangerous, nor is it a noxious weed. Giant Hogweed also resembles Angelica (*Angelica atropurpurea*), and Poison Hemlock (*Conium maculatum*).

Hazards

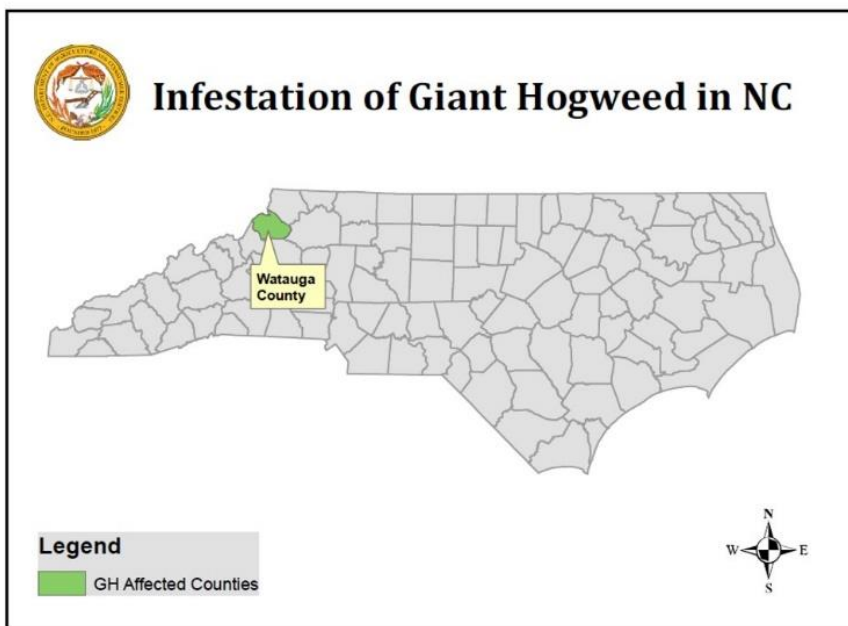
Giant hogweed is a threat to natural systems and human health. It is an aggressive plant that can dominate ravines and stream banks due to its size and rapid growth, reducing the amount of suitable habitat for natural plants and wildlife. When it dies off during winter months, increased soil erosion can happen.



Giant hogweed can cause skin reactions when humans come into contact with its sap. The reaction, called Photodermatitis results in large, painful blisters with eruptions (worse than poison ivy) within 24-48 hours of exposure. When exposed to sunlight, the blisters leave permanent purple scars. The sap can also result in blindness if exposed to the eyes.

Regulation

The Plant Industry Division, under the NC Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, prohibits the propagation, nursery cultivation, sale and/or distribution of Giant Hogweed



Current Situation

Giant Hogweed has been found in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Connecticut, Washington DC, Maine, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Michigan, NY, Indiana, Illinois, Oregon, Washington and most recently in Virginia. It is also found in Watauga County, NC. Giant Hogweed has been quarantined in this county and plant pest specialists continue efforts to eradicate the population using herbicides, as well as to survey surrounding areas for additional populations.

Conclusion

Your help is needed to help us find and control new infestations of this plant. If you think that you have seen this plant, please contact the NCDA&CS Weed Specialist Dr. Bridget Lassiter (bridget.lassiter@ncagr.gov or (919) 707-3749). You are always invited to report invasive species to the NCDA&CS by calling 1-800-206-9333 or report by email: newpest@ncagr.gov.