



2025 Budget Request

Request: Noxious Weeds Management

From: Niall Lobley, CAO

Department: Community & Environmental Services

Total Financial Ask: \$20,000

Type of Budget Request: *Operating & Capital*

This document and its attachments are public and available in an accessible format upon request.

Background and Strategic Priority

At Council, in July, Council raised a concern in respect to the impacts of Noxious Weeds in Georgian Bluffs and the role of the municipality in managing these. In addition to concerns raised around Noxious Weeds, discussion also took place in respect to the role of the municipality in managing and dealing with Invasive species. Staff were directed to bring back a report through budget in respect to Noxious Weeds and Invasive Species Management.

Analysis

Noxious Weeds are legislated under the Weed Control Act¹ and consist of a list of twenty five species of plants that are considered harmful to humans. These species include both invasive, non-native species, as well as several native, naturally occurring species on Ontario plants. Noxious Weeds are noted as harmful either because they can cause human injury, or, they can cause injury to agricultural operations through harm to livestock or crops.

It should be noted that several species of Noxious Weeds are native to Ontario and can serve important ecosystem services. For example, milkweed, a plant vital to the lifecycle of Monarch butterflies, was, until recently included on the Noxious Weeds list for

¹ <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/90w05>



Ontario. Ragweed, a Noxious Weed, is a native species that provides soil enrichment and habitat for many native species of insects and animals; yet can be very problematic around livestock. As such, while these species are problematic, seeking to eradicate all noxious weeds in all areas would cause ecological harm.

Landowners are legally obligated to remove Noxious Weeds from their property when they are identified to them under the Noxious Weed Act. In order to enforce this, municipalities may identify an Area Weed Inspector who has bylaw powers to enforce the Weed Control Act.

Invasive Species are legislated under the Invasive Species Act² and consist of a list of 43 species that are considered invasive; species that are known to spread rapidly and outcompete native species and cause harm to natural ecosystems. These species include terrestrial and aquatic plants and animals. The Invasive Species Act restricts the movement of these species, the sale and purchase of these species, but does not require the management or removal of them. Having said that, the management and control of Invasive Species is encouraged under the Ontario Strategic Plan for Invasive Species³ and many municipalities and government agencies have developed plans and strategies for the management of invasive species on their lands over past decades.

In addition to Ontario legislation, several Federal ministries⁴ have regulations, guidelines, strategies and best management practices that are in place to restrict, control and remove harmful invasive species.

The Township has a Noxious Weeds program and has had this in effect for many years. Each year between \$7,000 and \$10,000 (plus staff time) is spent on the management of Noxious Weeds. Three species in particular have been a focus of the program.

- Roadside spraying for Wild Chervil, a species that was brought to North America by Europeans that while short lived, seeds prolifically and rapidly colonise an area out competing native plants. It is a host to a virus that impacts carrots and parsnip crops, and it is unpalatable to livestock. Without natural checks and balances, Wild Chervil will rapidly dominate an area. It should be noted several species of native plant look very similar to Wild Chervil.
- Local treatment for Poison Ivy, a native species to Ontario which is known to cause skin irritation, which can be severe, on humans that come into contact, even through secondary transmission such as from dogs' coats. This native plant thrives in shady or semi shady spots. It holds several ecological values as a species that berries late and berries that persist through winter serving as a

² <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/s15022>

³ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/invasive-species-strategic-plan-2012>

⁴ <https://www.canada.ca/en/services/environment/wildlife-plants-species/invasive-species.html>



valuable support for many native species of bird. Treatment in the Township is restricted to areas where there is a high likelihood of contact such as key trail points and in parks, though this species commonly occurs on Township properties.

- Giant Hogweed is an invasive non-native species that grows rapidly and seeds prolifically. Generally found along creeks and watercourses where its vast seed numbers rapidly establish on disturbed banks, the resistance, long dormancy periods and sheer numbers of seeds as well as a lack of awareness of how to dispose of Hogweed has led to human relocation to areas away from creeks. Hogweed sap is harmful to humans causing severe blistering when exposed to UV light (such as sunlight) and can persist on the skin for several days. There are a number of cases where exposure has led to severe burns and even deaths related to Hogweed exposure. While not prolific in the Township, it is present locally on private property and is found on some road edges and along parts of the Rail Trail. Prompt addressing of individual plants before seed dispersal can dramatically reduce the growth; however, once established, Giant Hogweed is highly resistant to control efforts.

In addition to these species, the Township is aware that small patches of Japanese Knotweed are present in some locations. This is not a Noxious Weed but is an Invasive Species. It is known to spread quickly, particularly through poorly conducted control operations and poor destruction practices, and, when established, the root system can cause structural damage to nearby buildings. Japanese Knotweed has been treated on Township property in the past.

The Township's treatment of these species is by herbicide application direct to plants (no area spraying takes place) and is a contracted service given the legislative and specialist nature of chemical storage and application as well as the Health and Safety risks posed by some species and the chemical treatment of them.

Removal of Noxious Weeds (and Invasive Species) is not easily achieved. The persistence of these species is often what makes them Noxious or Invasive. The University of Guelph has been treating multiple times annually, stands of Hogweed that were well established in the upper Sixteen Mile Creek north of Oakville for more than 15 years using a variety of techniques and whilst much reduced, the plant is still present and reoccurring annually. Wild Chervil seeds prolifically and has a long dormancy ability meaning it can rapidly establish for years after treatment of the growing plant has been successful. Noxious weed and Invasive species treatment requires long term, sustained efforts and even brief pauses in treatment can allow for any progress to be lost as plants rapidly re-establish.

Anecdotally, 2024 saw the success of the sustained program of Wild Chervil treatment. Staff have observed that well established stands along road edges are significantly diminished in 2024, and areas of smaller infestation have been eliminated. Hogweed



continues to be a persistent challenge in areas. While more limited in its presence, it is persistent despite repeated annual treatments.

Staff are continuing with these programs and budget resources are in place to continue this work.

Over recent years, staff have identified two significant, well-established areas of Hogweed growth on private properties. In both cases, staff have engaged the landowners, and the landowners are working to manage and remove Hogweed. The Township will continue to seek to work with these landowners over successive years.

Noxious Weeds are the landowner's responsibility, and the Township responds to a small number of complaints each year on private property (3 in 2024). In each instance, staff are able to visit properties and have found cooperative landowners willing to respond. The Township also works with the Province and County in identifying and treating Noxious species on their properties when these concerns are raised with Township staff.

Staff note that there has not been an Invasive Species Management Program implemented by the Township in the past, treatment of invasive species has been limited to small scale eradication of small stands of Knotweed. Township staff are aware that Invasive Species commonly occur on municipal property and that most, if not all municipal properties have invasive species occurring on them. These include species such as Norway Maple, European Buckthorn, Honeysuckles, Garlic Mustard and Phragmites.

The Township does not have a designated Area Weed Inspector. This requires training and regular skills updates through attendance on mandatory courses each year. Several lower tier municipalities in Grey County contract out this service. Collaboration with the County Area Weed Inspector is routinely undertaken. Township staff have found voluntary compliance to be high when approaching and working with landowners and that the Property Standards Bylaw has provided support to date in approaching private landowners in respect to Noxious Weeds.

The Township has a number of programs embedded within the Community Improvement Plan (CIP) which is anticipated to be approved in late 2024 that provide support through grants, to landowners that wish to manage or control invasive species and/or Noxious Weeds on their properties. These grants are expected to be available in 2025 and are designed to be stackable with other grants and stewardship programs that are available to private landowners to control Invasive Species and Noxious Weeds.

The Township is seeking to meet with area agencies such as neighbouring municipalities, Grey County and Grey Sauble Conservation Authority in respect to collective efforts to manage and control invasive species and Noxious weeds but has



not been able to coordinate this discussion prior to this paper. Collective action is needed to ensure efficient use of resources.

By late 2024, the Environmental Initiatives Officer will be engaged by the Township and a key focus of work will be seeking to identify and prioritise Invasive Species and Noxious Weeds Management, in partnership with other agencies and communities.

The Township has an active, sustained program seeking to address, manage and, where reasonable and possible, eradicate Noxious weeds. Work is ongoing in respect to expanding and enhancing understanding of Invasive Species in the Township and how best these might be addressed the Township has re-written its Noxious Weeds and Invasive Species web pages in 2024⁵. The Township has responded to public concerns and will continue to do so, and has seen voluntary support by private landowners in addressing Noxious Weeds. The Township is anticipated to have grant programs available in 2025 to support landowners in managing Invasive Species and Noxious Weeds. Prior to a more fulsome understanding of the current status of Noxious and Invasive species, staff are unable to identify the full scope of resources that are required.

Staff recommend that in 2025, Council support \$20,000 of additional resources in this area.

It is proposed that \$10,000 be added to the Operating Budget and that this be used to:

- Fund an external contract role to act as a designated Area Weed Inspector to be able to enforce action by private landowners where Noxious Weeds are identified.
- Enhance the existing treatment program to support a broader scope of activities as may be identified by the Environmental Initiatives Coordinator or other staff. This would primarily be used to address Noxious Weeds on municipal property but could also be used to support Invasive Species Management.

It is proposed that up to \$10,000 be allocated as a Capital project, funded from the Climate Change & Environmental Initiatives Reserve to support an assessment of municipal road allowances and the Rail Trail corridor to identify and map the presence and extent of invasive species and noxious weeds.

In completing these works, alongside the work of the staff team and Environmental Initiatives Coordinator, it is anticipated that the existing work will be sustained and enhanced, and staff will be able to provide a more detailed and completed assessment of Noxious Weeds and Invasive Species in 2025 toward developing a more comprehensive plan of actions in subsequent years.

⁵ <https://www.georgianbluffs.ca/en/invasive-species.aspx>



Financial Impact

- \$10,000 Operating
- \$10,000 Capital