

Rush Skeletonweed

Chondrilla juncea



Basal rosettes. © John M. Randall/The Nature Conservancy

OTHER COMMON NAMES: Hogbite, gum succory, naked weed

DESCRIPTION

Rush skeletonweed is a perennial plant that grows from one to four feet tall. Juvenile plants overwinter as a rosette of hairless, basal leaves that are two to five inches long and widen towards the tip. **Lateral lobes** on the leaves of the basal rosette point backwards toward the base. When mature, the basal rosette disappears and the plant becomes dark green, nearly leafless, and bears many branches. A distinguishing characteristic are its coarse downwardly-bent hairs that cover the lower four to six inches of the stem. When cut, the stems and roots exude a white latex sap. Yellow flower heads that are $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in diameter grow along the stem in the **leaf axil** or at the branch tips. Flower heads may grow individually or in clusters of two to five. The summer development of flower heads on a virtually leafless stem with thin **aerial branches** gives the appearance of a "skeletonweed." Seeds have a **pappus** of numerous white **capillary** bristles that are carried by the wind.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR:

- Thin aerial branches with few-to-no leaves
- Lateral lobes on basal rosette leaves, pointing back toward the base
- Downward bent spines on the stem between the rosette and the first whorl of leaves.

WHEN TO FIND RUSH SKELETONWEED

It's important to catch and control this plant before it flowers and sets seed (July – September) so as to prevent its dandelion-like seeds from being widely dispersed. Therefore, look for this plant during late fall and winter when it appears as a basal rosette.

WHERE TO FIND RUSH SKELETONWEED

It is found in light, dry soil typically on rangelands and roadsides.

WHAT TO DO

Report, but please do not pull this plant.

Rush Skeletonweed is native to Eurasia and now infests several million acres in the Pacific Northwest, California, and Idaho. In Oregon, it was first discovered in Douglas County in 1974, and is currently found in the southwest and along the northern and eastern border. Oregon has traced the majority of its rush skeletonweed infestations to an 80-acre gravel pit.

Reproduction of rush skeletonweed is by seed and vegetative growth. The seeds self fertilize, producing clones of the parent plant, which enables the plant to create dominating infestations of well-adapted biotypes. Seeds are dispersed by wind, with the seed's pappus acting as a parachute that can carry it far distances. If it becomes established in croplands, cultivation becomes its primary means of dispersal. Vegetative spread is possible from shoot buds and from root fragments that are left in the ground after mechanical injury.

Rush skeletonweed is an aggressive plant in both rangeland and cropland, threatening primarily cereal grain and potato production. There are currently four approved biocontrol agents in Oregon. Herbicides and mechanical methods are not very effective control measures.

REFERENCES

Rush Skeletonweed. (n.d.) Retrieved March 19, 2007, from Oregon Dept. of Agriculture's Web site: http://oregon.gov/ODA/PLANT/WEEDS/profile_rushskeletonweed.shtml

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