

REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF OTTAWA-CARLETON
MUNICIPALITÉ RÉGIONALE D'OTTAWA-CARLETON

REPORT
RAPPORT

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DATE 12 June 1997

TO/DEST. Co-ordinator
 Transportation Committee

FROM/EXP. Environment & Transportation Commissioner

SUBJECT/OBJET **DECLARATION OF VELVETLEAF - NOXIOUS WEED LIST**

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION

That the Transportation Committee recommend Council pass a by-law designating Velvetleaf (Abutilon theophrasti Medic.) as a noxious weed.

BACKGROUND

In consultation with staff of the Legal Department, the Environment and Transportation Department has investigated the feasibility of a Regional By-law that would add Velvetleaf (Abutilon theophrasti Medic.) to Ottawa-Carleton's noxious weed list. At this time, the Region uses the provincial noxious weed list which includes 23 species of plants.

Requests have been received for the plant's addition to the list from the Townships of West Carleton & Osgoode and both the City of Gloucester and the Township of Goulbourn have expressed interest in such a designation. Furthermore, the Carleton Soil & Crop Improvement Association is advocating its addition due to the weed's effect on the farming community here in Ottawa-Carleton.

Velvetleaf has been identified in the United States as responsible for over \$340 million annually in crop losses and control costs. The plant's aggressive nature has the potential to cause serious yield reduction and harvesting problems here in Ottawa-Carleton. Velvetleaf reproduces by seed, each plant being able to produce over 7,000 seeds which can germinate over the entire season depending upon how often the host soil has been turned since the seed dispersal, because each subsequent turning randomly places the seeds at various levels in the tilled soil mass.

If seeds are allowed to germinate in previously tilled soil, i.e. abandoned fields, the plant will grow and eventually spread to adjacent properties. Since it is not currently on any control list there is no recourse for the farmer who is actively managing his property to prevent this spread of the plant. Velvetleaf is best controlled through the application of herbicides by professional applicators licensed by the Province to do this work.

DISCUSSION

Under Section 24 of the *Weed Control Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. W.5, the provincial government may make regulations designating plants as noxious weeds. Although not currently on the Province's list due to the fact that the weed is not harmful on a province-wide basis, velvetleaf has been designated by by-laws in several municipalities in southern Ontario.

Section 10 of the *Weed Control Act* permits the council of a Regional Municipality which has an area weed inspector to designate by by-law a local weed that is not otherwise designated a noxious weed. This by-law, which may apply to all or any part of the Regional Municipality, has the effect of deeming the named plant as a noxious weed within the area to which the by-law applies.

The enabling legislation also requires Ministerial approval of such a by-law before it takes effect but Mr. Craig Hunter, the Province of Ontario's Chief Weed Inspector, has indicated to Regional staff that the required approval would probably be forthcoming within a month of the by-law's enactment in light of the history of velvetleaf's designation as noxious in other communities.

CONSULTATION

Staff originally contacted a weed specialist and a number of field crop specialists from the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) as well as a turf extension specialist at the University of Guelph. These sources were able to describe the biology of the velvetleaf weed and its potential impact on cash cropping in Ontario.

These conversations, together with Internet searches, led staff to conclude that velvetleaf weed represents a hazard to cash cropping in Ottawa-Carleton. On that basis staff circulated an intent to all area municipalities to confirm their desire to have the Region prepare a draft by-law to add this plant to the noxious weed list.

Of the eleven municipalities in Ottawa-Carleton there are three which do not have land under their jurisdiction which is used for agriculture: Ottawa, Vanier and Rockcliffe Park. These three municipalities were included in the distribution and made aware of the Region's intent with respect to velvetleaf but no response was received. The Region has received responses from all the municipalities with an agricultural landbase expressing support for the plant's declaration as a noxious weed. This includes:

Township of West Carleton
City of Kanata
Township of Goulbourn
Township of Osgoode
City of Nepean
City of Gloucester
Township of Cumberland
Township of Rideau

The eight responding area municipalities have all indicated that they appreciate the research and support the recommendation and since the by-law can be geographically specific to any area the intent is to draft a by-law specifically to these municipalities.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Velvetleaf does not compete well with standard turfgrasses, such as those found within road allowances, due to the greater abundance of turfgrasses and their aggressive growth patterns. Velvetleaf remains primarily a problem for the cash cropping farm community on previously cultivated lands. Therefore, it is anticipated that the financial effect on the Region will be minor involving some staff time for administration only.

*Approved by
M.J.E. Sheflin, P. Eng.*