

"Weed Control 1"

Hi, Fred Nelson for Community Comment,

When we hear the word "Weed", our thoughts go to marijuana almost immediately. In the early Nineteen Forties, one of the challenges of the Humboldt County Agricultural Department was "Weed control". No, not marijuana, but a plant called Klamath Weed, better known as St. John's Wort. Humboldt's agricultural lands had been invaded by this noxious weed, especially the southern part of the county. First discovered in the Klamath River area in Nineteen Hundred, the weed spread and became a pest in nineteen California counties with Humboldt being the worst. Klamath Weed is a plant that grows between one and four feet tall with bright yellow, five pedaled flowers, blooming from June through August. As it takes over from native grasses, livestock will eat it and will be poisoned. The seeds are tough and pass through the animal thus spreading through pastures. Even the heat from a wild fire is not enough to kill the seed. The county treated the weed with granulated borax for a number of years. I worked for the county during parts of the summer for two consecutive years, the second season as a foreman of an eight man crew. The weed killer of choice at that time was granulated borax which came in fifty pound sacks. Each crew member was furnished with a metal bucket which would be filled from the fifty pound sacks. We would line up, double arm's length apart, buckets in hand, walking slowly looking for the weed, from seedlings to full grown. You would broadcast the borax by hand, not only on the plants but in a large diameter around the plant to make sure that the root ends would be destroyed as well as the tap root. We were never in a position to see the results of our work as the borax was not activated until the first rain. As some of you know, borax once wetted down, will kill any vegetation that it comes in contact with so you are left with barren ground for at least a year. This treatment was manpower oriented and was not fool proof. Australia had Klamath Weed infestations and through biological research found the most effective method of control was a beetle that would destroy the Klamath Weed, but not other types of vegetation. They were imported to the U.S. in Nineteen Forty Four. In Nineteen Forty Six the beetles were introduced to a test location in Humboldt resulting in the beetles destroying twenty acres of Klamath weed just in that one location. The beetles were then introduced to other Humboldt locations plus nineteen other counties in Nineteen Forty Seven. Most of the infestation was erased over the years but there are areas in Southern Humboldt where Klamath Weed still exists. The weed can also be seen along some of the county roadsides. If you see these pretty plants in bloom, don't pick a bouquet. Fred Nelson for Community Comment