

Absinthe Wormwood Municipal Designation**Report Purpose**

To provide Council with the recommendation from the Agricultural Service Board to elevate the designation of Absinthe Wormwood (*Artemisia absinthium*) to a noxious weed in Strathcona County.

Recommendation

1. THAT Bylaw 18-2018, a bylaw that elevates Absinthe Wormwood (*Artemisia Absinthium*) to a noxious weed as defined by the *Alberta Weed Control Act SA 2008 c.W-5.1.*, be given first reading.
2. THAT Bylaw 18-2018 be given second reading.
3. THAT Bylaw 18-2018 be considered for third reading.
4. THAT Bylaw 18-2018 be given third reading.
5. THAT Bylaw 18-2018 be forwarded to the Minister for approval.

Strategic Plan Priority Areas

Economy: Proactive approach to this invasive plant will protect agricultural economy.

Governance: n/a

Social: n/a

Culture: n/a

Environment: Protection of natural habitats.

Other Impacts

Policy: SER-001-004 Weed Control Enforcement Program

Legislative/Legal: The *Alberta Weed Control Act SA 2008 c.W-5.1* provides that a municipality may designate a plant as a noxious weed within the municipality by bylaw.

Interdepartmental: Legislative and Legal Services, Recreation, Parks and Culture

Summary

Absinthe Wormwood is a perennial herb that forms a bushy plant similar in appearance to pasture sage, but with a stronger odor. The plant reproduces mainly through seed and can produce up to 50,000 seeds per stem. Seeds remain viable for 3-4 years and have a high rate of germination. Seeds are easily transported through hay, wind, water, and animals. Absinthe Wormwood prefers disturbed sites mainly found in damaged pastures, fence lines, abandoned cultivated land, and gravelly soils. Recently it has been found in gravel pits and oil/gas leases.

Once established, Absinthe Wormwood is difficult to control. It can be toxic to other plants in the area, and it can crowd out other vegetation in damaged and overgrazed areas.

If Absinthe Wormwood is inadvertently mixed with agricultural feed and consumed, it can cause economic loss. Dairy cattle will produce tainted milk products and breeding stock can have reproductive problems. Absinthe Wormwood seeds and leaves can contaminate flour and other grain products and can prove to be a social concern, causing hay fever due to the wind-borne pollen.

The current situation in Alberta is that Absinthe Wormwood is considered a regional problematic weed. The Alberta Weed Regulatory Advisory Committee has agreed to review

Absinthe Wormwood for Provincial listing. A risk assessment is required for consultation and will take time.

Manitoba and Saskatchewan currently list Absinthe Wormwood as a noxious weed. The Counties of Flagstaff, Red Deer, and Stettler, have proactively enacted bylaws to elevate Absinthe Wormwood to a noxious weed.

Plants regulated under the *Noxious* category of the *Alberta Weed Control Act* are required to meet the following criteria:

1. Can easily spread and if allowed to do so can have a substantial negative environmental, economic, or social impact
2. Can be controlled at a reasonable cost
3. Regulation is in the common interest of Albertans

Currently, Absinthe Wormwood is not a significant threat in Strathcona County; however, designating it as a noxious weed will allow for early detection and appropriate enforcement strategy to be initiated, reducing the likeliness of its spread throughout the County. Weed Inspectors will be able to increase awareness and enforce as required. Absinthe Wormwood would also be included in the Strathcona County Rural Roadside Vegetation Control Program.

At the December 11, 2017 Agricultural Service Board meeting, the Board put forward a motion to recommend that Council designate Absinthe Wormwood as a Noxious Weed in Strathcona County.

Communication Plan

Upon final reading of the bylaw, and Minister approval, the public will be educated on the invasive nature of this plant, its designation, and control measures.

Enclosure

- 1 Weed Control Bylaw 18-2018