



Memorandum

To: Vail Town Council

From: Department of Public Works

Date: February 20, 2018

Subject: Town of Vail / U.S. Forest Service Weed Management Partnership

I. INTRODUCTION

This agenda item will be presented in conjunction with a discussion with Aaron Mayville, the District Ranger for the Holy Cross Ranger District of the U.S. Forest Service. Mr. Mayville will address this request as well as provide an update on the Intermountain Fuel Reduction Project and other trail and wildlife topics.

Over the past two summers, the Town of Vail and the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) entered into a partnership to control the spread of noxious weeds along the town boundary on USFS land. That partnership resulted in the treatment of approximately 350 acres of native hillside, and a significant reduction in the noxious weed infestations along the northern Town of Vail/USFS property boundary. Staff is requesting the opportunity to continue this program in 2018. It is not currently funded.

II. BACKGROUND

By definition, a noxious weed is a non-native or “alien” plant that is listed on the State Noxious Weed List. These plants are highly invasive and spread at an alarming rate, usually to the detriment of native plants and wildlife. Infestations can, and have, quickly spread to adjacent properties. Per the Town of Vail Noxious Weed Ordinance and the Colorado Noxious Weed Act, all property owners, both public and private, must manage noxious weeds on their property.

The town has aggressively managed noxious weeds on town-owned property over the last 12 years. In addition, increased efforts to ensure that private property owners are managing noxious weeds are having a positive impact. Eliminating the spread of noxious weeds from the town’s developed areas into surrounding native areas is one goal of these management efforts.

The natural areas surrounding Vail are important for wildlife, native plants and for the quality of life of Vail’s residents and guests. The loss of these areas to noxious weed infestations would be detrimental to Vail. In recent years, USFS budgets have been drastically cut and the Holy Cross Ranger District works with one full time and four seasonal employees to manage over one million acres of forest property. Partnering with

the local office is the most effective way to ensure that the forest lands immediately adjacent to Vail are properly managed to reduce the spread of these plants into new areas and help return the currently infested areas into healthy ecosystems.

Last season, the USFS engaged the Western Colorado Conservation Corps (WCCC), a non-profit organization that works with land managers on projects such as trail construction and maintenance, fuel mitigation and invasive species control. WCCC holds a commercial applicator license with the Colorado Department of Agriculture and all staff on the specialized crew are trained as applicators.

In 2017, the WCCC and USFS provided over 1,300 manhours of noxious weed management at a cost of \$22,500. Through the partnership, the Town of Vail contributed \$15,000 and the USFS funded the remainder and provided all herbicides. In addition to the work through this partnership, the USFS also performed weed management work at all four Wilderness Area trailheads in East Vail, and partnered with Vail Resorts over the past two years to manage weeds on Vail Mountain. This combined effort is significant for the forests surrounding Vail.

III. GRANT APPLICATIONS

- For the upcoming management season, WCCC, in partnership with the USFS, was awarded a grant through the National Forest Foundation (NFF) in the amount of \$37,500. The USFS anticipates using between \$15,000-\$22,500 to fund labor for noxious weed work in the Vail area (2-3 weeks).
- The Town of Vail has applied for a “State and Local Forestry Grant” through the Colorado Department of Agriculture in the amount of \$15,000. Per the grant guidelines, this funding could be used on town-owned lands that border USFS land, furthering the efforts along the urban/native habitat interface. If granted, this could fund an additional 2 weeks of labor on town-owned lands. The award notice for this application is expected in mid-February.

If all grants are awarded and the Town Council funds the additional \$15,000, the total project budget would be \$45-\$50,000.

IV. 2018 PROJECT FOCUS

In 2018, the project will focus on weed management across approximately 2,400 acres between Davos and Pitkin Creek (see attached Map). Some portions of the management area have been treated previously, but much of it has not. One difficulty of management efforts for this project is a plant known as yellow toadflax, which is found in dense pockets throughout much of the management area. Yellow toadflax is best treated in late fall while most of the other weeds are best treated earlier in the season requiring two treatment periods.

In addition, if awarded, the Dept. of Agriculture grant will focus efforts on town-owned lands along the same boundary as well as some areas along south boundary including the Katsos Open Space, and parcels above Donovan Park.

V. USFS/TOV PARTNERSHIP

Continuing the partnership with the USFS will require two initial actions:

- 1) Staff would request an addition of \$15,000 to the current weed management budget of \$45,000. This will equal the budgets each of the past two years. This would be added to the Supplemental Budget Appropriation in March.
- 2) Adoption of a Participating Agreement, through a Resolution, prior to the start of the project.

VI. ADDITIONAL WEED MANAGEMENT ACTIONS FOR 2018

These efforts are part of the larger Town of Vail Noxious Weed Management Plan which also includes management of town-owned right-of-way, open space and park areas, contact with property owners and public education via email, newspaper and the town's website. In addition, for 2018, the town will again hire a Weed and Pest Management Intern for the summer to assist with identification, management of infested areas and enforcement of the Noxious Weed Ordinance on private property.

VII. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The efforts put into management of these native areas over the past two years have shown success. In many areas, thistles were so thick it was difficult to move through them, and while many areas are better, some have yet to be treated. Staff recommends that continuing the program for 2018 can be highly beneficial to the native habitat impacted by these plants.

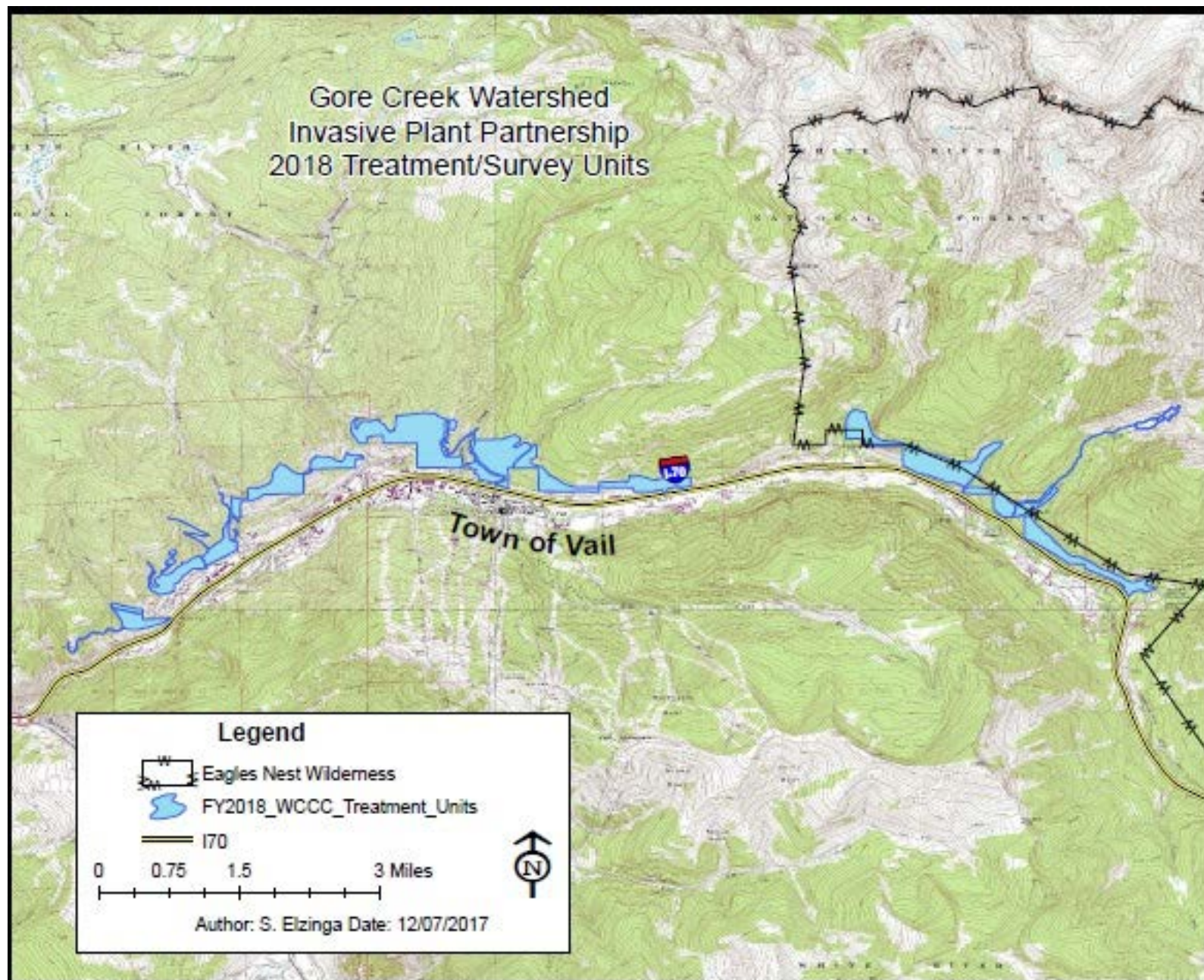
VIII. ACTION REQUESTED BY COUNCIL

Staff requests that the Council consider the proposal to continue this partnership in 2018 and potentially 2019 as a project "wrap-up".. If the Council agrees to fund the additional \$15,000 for 2018, it will be included in the upcoming Supplemental Budget Appropriation.

Attachments:

- 2018 Project Area Map
- Photos (3 pages)
- Before and After images of weed management efforts in the Town of Vail

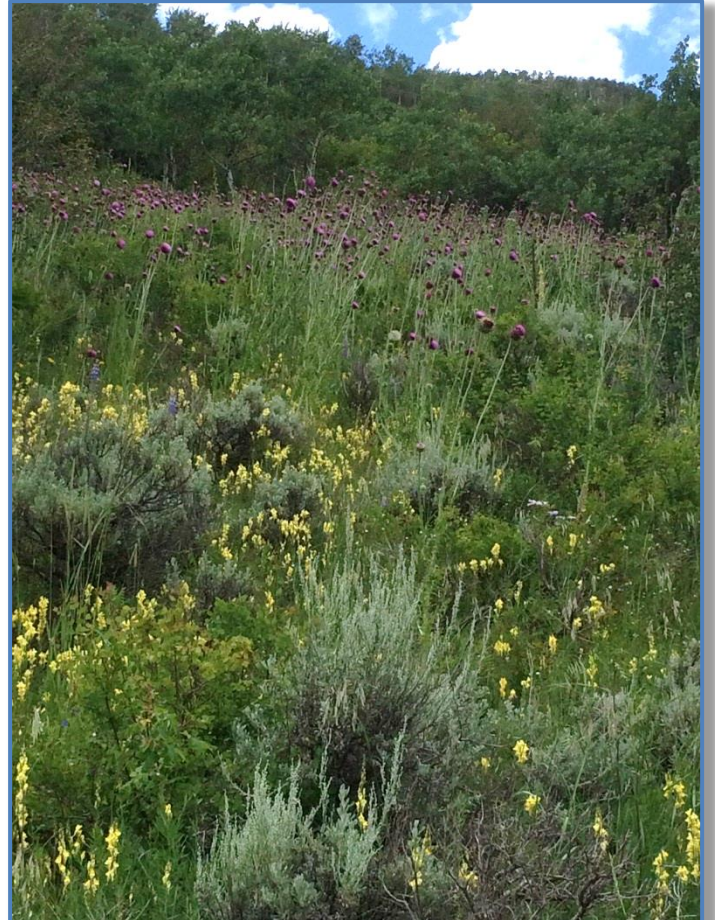
**2018 USFS/Town of Vail/WCCC
Weed Management Project Areas**



Areas shown on this map represent US Forest Service Land along the Town of Vail boundary being treated in 2018 for noxious weed infestations. This project is a partnership between the U.S. Forest Service and the Town of Vail. Labor is provided by the Western Colorado Conservation Corps.

Some of these areas have already benefitted from two seasons of weed management efforts through this partnership. A third season will ensure a significant suppression and, in some areas, eradication of noxious weed populations.

When coupled with the Town of Vail Boundary Weed Management Project, over 2,400 acres of public lands are included in 2018 weed management projects along the Vail/USFS interface.



Examples of noxious weed infestations between West Vail and Spraddle Creek along the north side of I-70. Weeds include musk thistle, plumeless thistle, yellow toadflax, and oxeye daisy.





Above: Steve Elzinga, USFS Weed Manager in the work area during 2016.
Below: Spray crew working on biennial thistles above West Vail in 2016



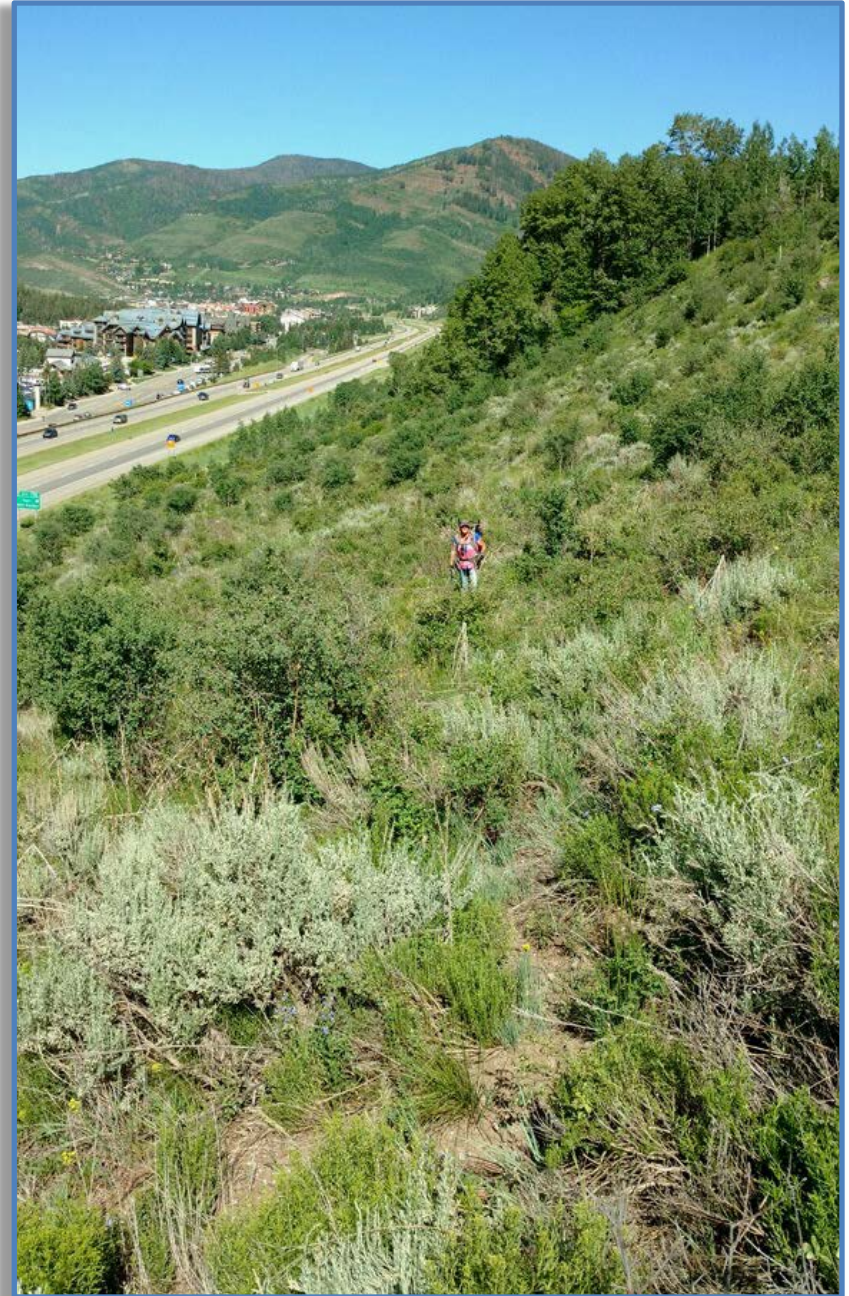
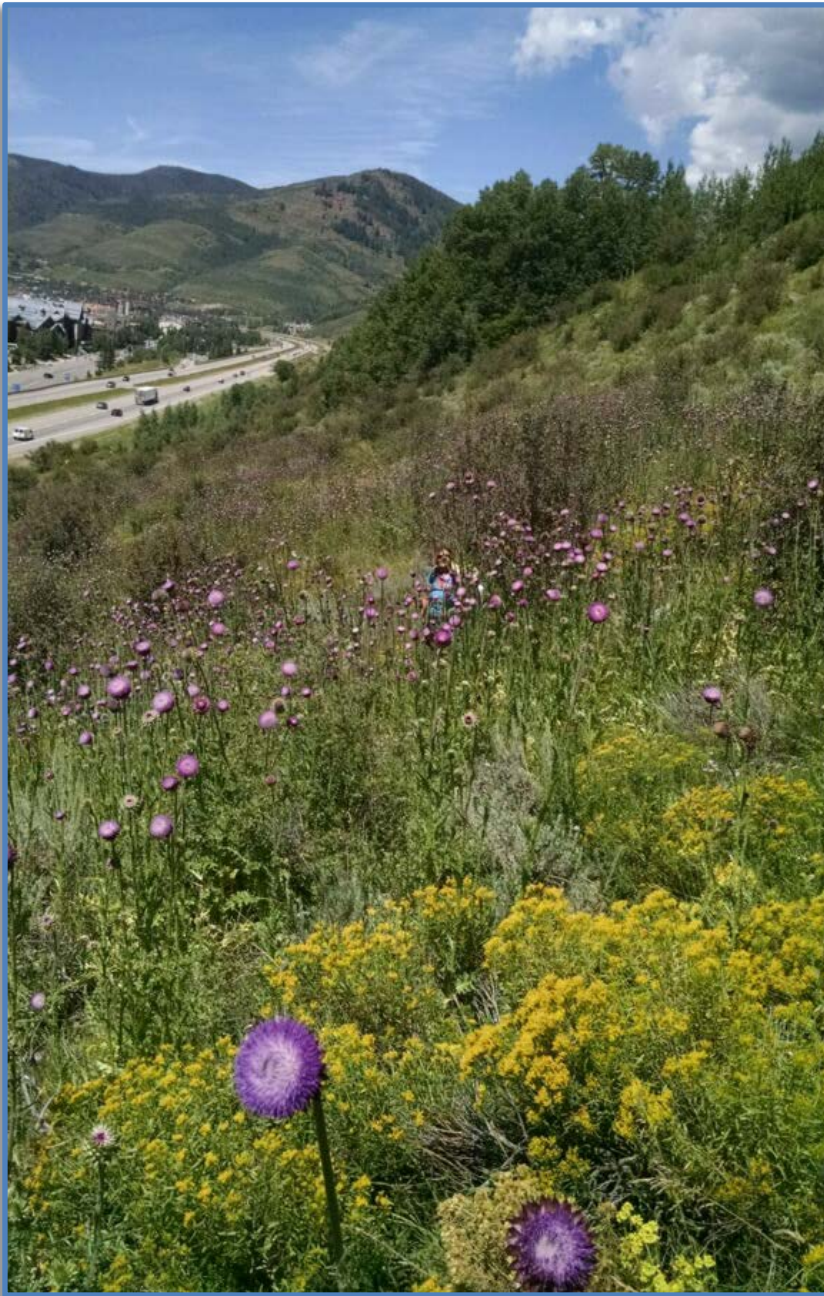


Above: WCCC crew taking a break from spraying above West Vail in 2017.

Below: Musk thistle post-treatment



Before and After
Weed Management Successes



Spraddle Creek hillside

Left: 2015 Musk Thistle

Right: 2016 after treatment



Vail Chapel

Above: 2015 Canada Thistle

Below: 2016 after treatment





Donovan Park Upper Bench

Above: 2007 Oxeye Daisy

Below: 2008 after treatment





West Vail north hillside
Left: 2015 Musk Thistle
Right: 2016 after treatment



Tract A – Bald Mountain

Above: 2014 Musk Thistle

Below: 2014 – same area, one day later - after hand removal

