

Rush skeletonweed (*Chondrilla juncea*)

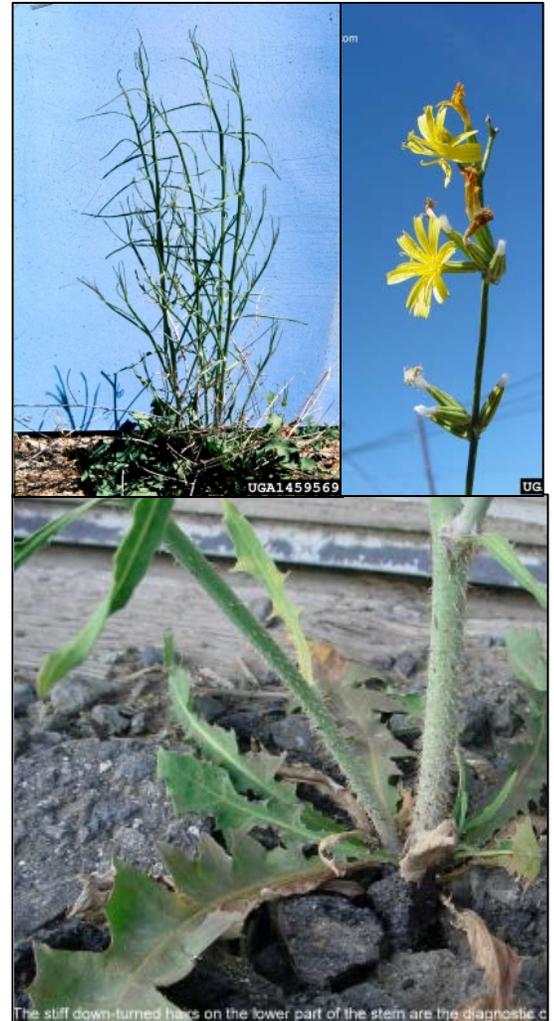
Identification Rush skeletonweed is a perennial forb of the Asteraceae family with multi-branching stems up to 4' tall. Stem leaves are inconspicuous, narrow, and entire, causing the plant to appear leafless. Plants have a dandelion-like basal rosette that withers and dies as the plant ages. The leaf, stem, and roots exude milky latex when cut or broken. Small yellow flowers begin to bloom in early summer and continue into fall. An important characteristic to identify rush skeletonweed are stiff, downwardly pointing hairs on the lower 4-6 inches of the stem. Skeletonweed (*Lygodesmia juncea*), a native plant, looks similar, but flowers are pale blue to pink, plants lack a basal rosette, and there are no hairs on the stem. Tumble mustard (*Sisymbrium altissimum*) may also resemble rush skeletonweed after the flowers mature. As the leaves dry up, the long narrow seed pods (siliques) of tumble mustard resemble the leafless branches of rush skeletonweed. You'll know it is tumble mustard if you can split the branch-like tips open to reveal numerous tiny seeds.

Impacts Rush skeletonweed has serious impacts in areas already impacted by agriculture, roads, and livestock grazing. In Australia it primarily infests cropland and is considered the most serious weed of the wheat growing region. In North America it is found primarily in California, the Pacific Northwest, and into southern Idaho on abused rangelands and roadsides, although some encroachment of cropland has occurred and may be increasing. It competes for water and nitrogen and may reduce native species cover. It's a palatable and nutritious forage in the rosette stage and during flowering until the stem becomes lignified.

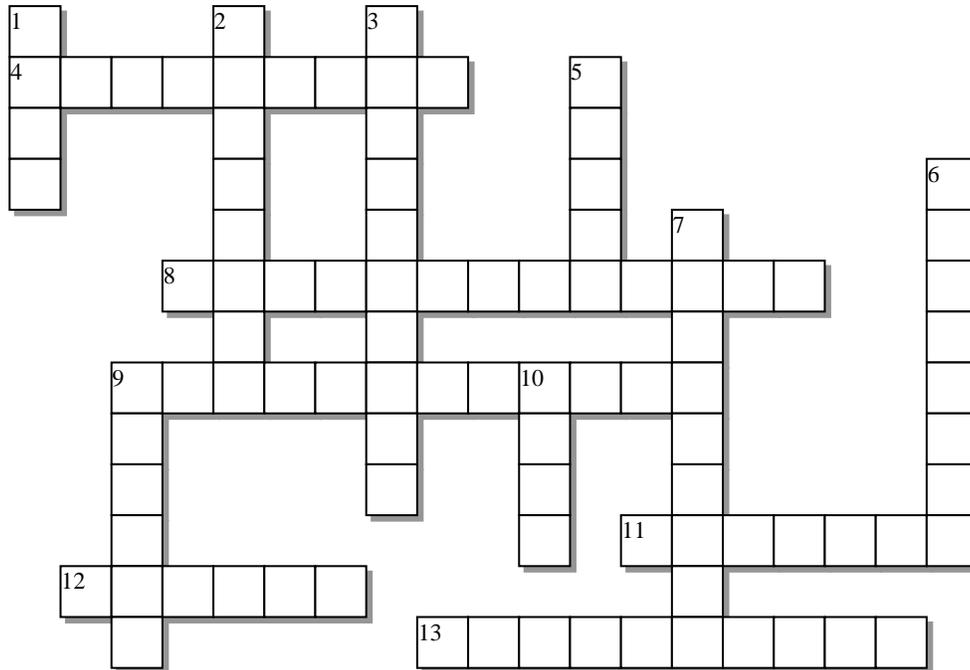
Habitat Rush skeletonweed favors coarse-textured, well-drained soils and is common on disturbed roadsides, river banks, dry river beds, rangeland, and wheat growing areas. In Montana reports have been limited to the northwestern counties of Sanders and Lincoln, except for one report in Treasure County in 2004. It has been spreading across southeastern Idaho, therefore counties in southwestern Montana have been especially alert for detecting any new infestations.

Spread Typical of many Asteraceae species, seeds have a parachute-like 'pappus' or fine hairs on the seed that enable long distance dispersal via wind. Seeds also disperse by water, vehicles, animals and machinery. Plants can also spread from adventitious buds at the top of the tap root and along major lateral roots.

Management Priorities No single treatment provides long-term control, so prevention is the number one objective for this Priority 1B weed that currently has a limited distribution across Montana. Monitoring, detecting new infestations, and implementing eradication programs are important parts of preventing spread of rush skeletonweed. Detect weed infestations early with systematic surveys along weed dispersal corridors. Dispersal of seeds and root fragments (i.e. from tilling) must be prevented, as well as vegetative spread from infested sites, such as from road shoulders, into non-infested areas. Avoid driving vehicles and machinery through rush skeletonweed-infested areas during the seeding period, and wash the undercarriage of vehicles and machinery before leaving infested areas. Livestock should not graze infested areas during seed formation, but if they do livestock should be transported to a holding area for 10 to 14 days before moving to non-infested range.



Weed Post Puzzle: Test your knowledge of rush skeletonweed



Across:

- 4 - Rush skeletonweed is considered the most serious weed in the wheat growing region of this country
- 8 - After flowers mature and seed pods elongate into long, narrow, branch-like structures, this plant may resemble rush skeletonweed (common name)
- 9 - Common name for a rush skeletonweed look-a-like that appears leafless, has no hairs on the stem, nor a basal rosette
- 11 - One of two counties in the northwestern part of the state where rush skeletonweed has been commonly reported
- 12 - If flowering, rush skeletonweed is easy to distinguish from the native skeletonweed because rush skeletonweed flowers are _____
- 13 - This is the number one management priority for rush skeletonweed

Down:

- 1 - If you must drive through a weed infested area, always _____ the undercarriage of your vehicle before driving to a non-infested area
- 2 - Name for the county in central eastern Montana that had one report of rush skeletonweed
- 3 - Break the stem or a leaf of rush skeletonweed and this will ooze out (two words)
- 5 - Rush skeletonweed has downwardly pointing _____ on the lower 4-6 inches of the stem
- 6 - Livestock grazing infested areas should be contained in a holding area for ten to _____ days before moving to uninfested range
- 7 - The basal rosette of rush skeletonweed resembles this common lawn weed
- 9 - Rush skeletonweed plants will begin to bloom in early _____ and continue into fall
- 10 - Fine hairs on the seed allow long distance dispersal via _____

Solutions are posted to the MSU Extension Invasive Rangeland Weed website:

<http://www.msueextension.org/invasiveplantsMangold/extensionsub.html>

