

Controlling Burdock No Easy Task

The working conditions were harsh for tackling common burdock in the Duncan-Lardeau area in June and July: intense heat, wasp nests, stinging nettles and more mosquitoes than you could shake a planting shovel at. Despite all of this, a six-member team made greater progress than expected in pushing back this problematic plant.



With FWCP support, the work was coordinated through the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations and hired through the BC Conservation Foundation. Team members, all from the local communities of Cooper Creek, Kaslo, and Argenta, spent six weeks removing burdock on the Duncan-Lardeau Conservation Properties.

Burdock can be a serious problem for wildlife and native plant species. It is an invasive species which means that it grows aggressively and displaces other species; its broad leaves shade-out other plants, and birds and bats can become entangled in the burrs and perish. The burrs also attach to ungulates and bears which can cause irritation.

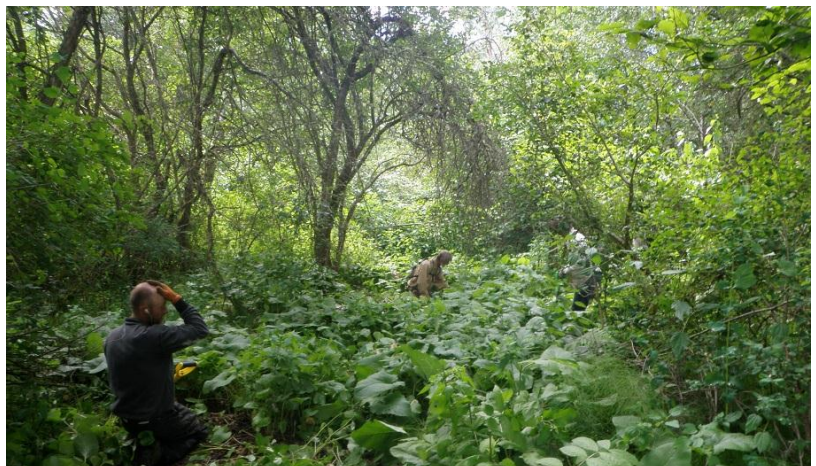
Using planting shovels to cut the burdock below the root crown just prior to flowering proved to be the most effective control method, as this is when most of the plant's reserves are directed to flowering. It reduces the vigour of the burdock and will likely still have to be retreated next year.

The areas where burdock was removed will be re-seeded with native species in the fall, when rains start. The treatment units will be surveyed next year to gauge the measure of success, but there is still plenty of burdock to deal with so similar work is anticipated for 2016.

Burdock Quick Facts¹:

- Considered regionally noxious under the *BC Weed Control Act*.
- Introduced in the 1700s for its medicinal characteristics; also used to make paper and coffee.
- Plants can live up-to four years, producing 6,000-16,000 seeds per plant.
- Plants can grow up-to two-metres tall, with leaves that grow up-to half a metre long.
- Mowing or cutting is best done before flowering to eliminate seed production, but removing as much of the root system as possible is the most effective control.
- Is the inspiration for the Velcro hook and loop fastening system, after a Swiss engineer examined how the burrs stuck to his pant legs and dog's hair after a hunting trip.

Hard graft: lots of work on their hands and knees as they attempted to get as much of the roots up as possible. Photo: Ross Clarke



¹ Source: Invasive Species Council of B.C.