

# THE RUSSIAN THISTLE LAW.

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## UNIVERSITY EXPERIMENT STATION.

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ST. ANTHONY PARK, MINN., July 9, 1895.

Last winter the Minnesota legislature passed a law requiring those owning, occupying or controlling lands to kill all Russian thistles growing thereon and making it the clearly defined duties of certain officials to destroy the thistles on roads, streets and other public lands, and to see that they are destroyed on the lands of negligent owners. The provisions are clear and the penalties strong enough so that the law can be enforced. The legislature meant that the people should have a means of stopping the spread of this pest and not only enacted a good law but provided money with which officials can destroy the weed on the lands of negligent owners. The cost to be then collected in taxes and returned to a revolving fund in the state treasury. No one has any right to object to the faithful enforcement of this law and the farmers of any neighborhood, or the citizens of any town, will be grossly negligent of the interests of the people of the whole state if they do not support and thoroughly enforce the law. Effective work during the latter part of July and during August means the nearly entire eradication of this weed from the State and makes it possible in the future for us to control this invader.

*A Date Must be Set* by the board of county commissioners in each county before which all thistles must be destroyed. For the southern one-third of the state this should be about August 25. For the central one-third about Sept. 1st and for the northern one-third about Sept. 5th. These dates will in most cases give the weed agents a little time to kill thistles before they ripen on the lands of negligent owners. If not already attended to this date should be fixed at once.

*Landowners* and those occupying or controlling lands within or without villages or cities are subject to a fine if they do not comply with the law, besides having to pay for the work being done by officials. Presence of the weed is prima facie evidence of knowledge and the fine must be not over one hundred dollars nor less than ten dollars.

*The Officials* subject to a fine of \$25 to \$100 for neglect of duty are township supervisors, village or city councilmen, county commissioners and weed agents, and upon the complaint of any taxpayer the county attorney must prosecute negligent officials.

*The Board of County Commissioners* must (1) fix the date before which Russian thistles must be killed, (2) act instead of supervisors in case of unorganized towns, (3) and audit bills approved by township boards.

*County Auditors* must (1) publish the resolution naming the date before which Russian thistles must be killed, (2) mail the same to each town clerk, (3) notify division superintendents of all railways in the county, (4) thirty days after accounts of labor are filed they shall draw warrants on county treasurers, (5) shall certify to the state treasurer the full amount allowed by the county commissioners, (6) and they shall enter the amount expended on each parcel of land to be assessed against it as other taxes.

*The Board of Township Supervisors* (1) shall appoint for each township or smaller district, one or more weed agents (advantageous to have the road overseers or street commissioners appointed in most cases but no member of the board of township supervisors is eligible), (2) shall fix the rate of wages of weed agents and their helpers, (3) audit the accounts of weed agents, (4) shall pay for destroying Russian thistles in highways out of township funds, (5) and they shall certify to the county board of commissioners the amount expended on each parcel of land belonging to negligent owners.

*City and Village Councils* are required (1) to appoint one or more weed agents, (2) to fix the rate of pay for this work, (3) and to pay for the same in streets and on other public lands out of village or city funds.

*Weed Agents* (1) shall destroy all Russian thistles growing in highways or streets in their districts before the published date, (2) after said date they shall destroy all growing on the lands of negligent parties and to do so, if possible, before the seeds ripen. (They are given authority to enter lands and the rate of pay for themselves and helpers is fixed by the board or council by whom they were appointed), (3) shall report under oath to board or council which appointed them giving itemized statement of cost of destroying Russian thistles on each parcel of land and on highways and amounts due each helper.

*On State Lands* the board in charge can have weeds destroyed charging same to state without refunding into the revolving fund.

*Fines Collected* from negligent owners or officials shall be turned into the township, county, village or city treasury according to the jurisdiction of the board or council appointing the weed agents.

*Needy Landholders* as in cases of rare misfortune where paying for the destruction of Russian thistles would "work extreme hardship," the person may be granted equitable relief upon petitioning the judge of the district court. The petitioner must give eight days notice to the county attorney and the petition must be heard before the date for filing the delinquent tax list.

#### GENERAL DIRECTIONS FOR THIS SUMMER.

*In Fields of Small Grain* infested with Russian thistles the grain should be stacked and the ground plowed as soon as possible after harvest. In many cases it will be wise to mow the stubble and weeds and burn them, raking into windrows if necessary. Should patches be so thickly infested among the grain that it cannot be harvested it should be mowed and the entire crop of grain and weeds burned. Better mow and burn a crop of late flax than let the thistles ripen in it in a neighborhood otherwise properly cleaned.

*In Cultivated Fields of Corn, potatoes, etc.,* the cultivation should be done most thoroughly, the hoe being used to clean up every remaining thistle.

*In Grass Lands* the whole should be gone over and every weed killed before it ripens seeds. In some cases it will pay to plow up the tame or wild sod to kill the thistles.

*Along Roads* the greatest care must be taken. The reversible road machine will destroy many weeds. In many cases the breaking or the stirring plow will best do the work. In most cases the work must be completed with the hoe.

*Along Fences* and road borders the trouble will be great. The plow, the hoe and fire may all be used. In not a few cases the fences may be removed and the land cultivated to the track in the middle of the roadway.

*Among Trees* the greatest difficulty will be met. The hoe, heavy mulches of straw and in young artificial groves thorough cultivation are the best means of combatting the pest.

The members of county and town boards and of city councils and the agents they appoint should go to work at once and most vigorously. They should diffuse the notice of date as widely as possible. The agents should co-operate with land

owners in making plans for destroying the weeds; and every one should learn to recognize the weed at every stage of its growth and to tell by examining the flowers in the axils of the spines at about what time there is danger of the seeds becoming ripe enough to grow. Every infested field of small grain, and especially of flax, should be noted and no grain used from it for seed next season.

It is very important that the crusade be commenced at once and prosecuted in every county and town community where the Russian thistle has gotten hold. Certainly it is not too much to hope that no large tumblers will be allowed to ripen its seeds and tumble over neighboring farms. This alone would greatly retard the spread of this weed in Minnesota. But we are able practically to exterminate it and every neighborhood should have enough self interest and pride to enforce the law most rigidly. The cities are the worst infested and they owe it to the farmers as well as themselves to invest enough money and energy to clean their streets and unoccupied lots that they may not be a further source of infection to the rural district. The railways, have as a rule acted more energetically in killing out this weed than have cities or farmers. The exceptions can now be compelled to act in the matter.

The Russian thistle is an annual, the plant is easily killed by cutting it off below the branches at the surface of the ground or by plowing or by the use of ordinary cultivation implements. Its seeds are soft and will not retain their vitality more than a year or two. The weed is a terror mainly because of the large quantity of seeds it produces and its great ability to travel before the wind. Each person owes it to the community to not grow a weed which will blow upon the lands of his neighbors. The state has wisely organized a systematic effort to control the weed and has furnished a liberal amount of money to pay the expenses which morally belong to the state to assume. The newspapers should give the widest possible circulation to all notices regarding the weed.

Persons desiring to learn more of this plant should address the Experimental Station for bulletin No. 33, issued last year, and ask the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., for bulletins on this subject. Specimens will be identified and answers promptly returned by the Experiment Station.

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