

Horse Manure and Invasive Species

The topic of horses spreading noxious weeds is an extremely controversial one. I and many others, particularly a group called EnviroHorse, have searched published scientific literature and found absolutely no real research that can support the spread of noxious weeds in horse manure as an actual fact.

A common claim is that horses bring exotic seeds to the trail. The biggest source of such claims is The Nature Conservancy. To quote one of TNC's own references, Benniger-Truax, Vankat and Schaefer (Trail corridors as habitats and conduits for movement of plant species in Rocky Mountain National Park. *Landscape Ecology*, 1989, 6 (4), pp. 269-278.), regarding the assumption that manure is a major source of exotic species, "however, I have found no documentation of this in the literature." *Neither have we.*

A common research error is that TNC and other groups confuse the *herbivore* with the *ruminant*. A horse is an herbivore with a greatly different digestive system from that of a ruminant, such as a cow or a deer. **The ability of a seed to survive the steps necessary for horse manure to spread problem exotics—ingestion, viability, deposition, germination, survival, reproduction and invasion has not been proven.**

People assume it happens; it is more likely to occur with cows and deer, antelope and moose that are ruminants, than with horses. Perhaps we should ban the deer and moose?

As such, the spread of noxious weeds by horses on trails is at best a popularly held belief supported by misinformation, and the Federal government has chosen to regulate horse feed in the Western states based on this misinformation.

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