Fall Site Preparation

Keys to Success for Weedy Sites

Best Management Practices

Fall is an extremely busy and important time of year. As plants start to go dormant it is a great opportunity to treat perennial invasive and noxious weeds before the deep freeze of winter. If site preparation is overlooked and a seeding is rushed, it usually leads to a low quality and ultimately expensive situation. A field with a history of an infestation of annual and perennial weeds is particularly vulnerable as it only takes a few live root fragments or exposed seed sources to recolonize an area and outperform your seeding project. Poor site preparation is the leading component of failed habitat projects. It may be wise to strictly prepare your field and wait until spring or next fall for your perennial seed mix application.

Herbicide and Smother Grain Seeding Treatments

Usually the most efficient method for reducing weeds are herbicide treatments which can be highly effective during fall site preparation. First, identify your weed species. Many weeds are readily killed by one or more applications of glyphosate ("Roundup") although some weeds maybe resistant to glyphosate or need a selective broadleaf herbicide to ultimately kill. Most broadleaf herbicides, such as the active ingredient 2,4-D and Dicamba, have extended plant back intervals (can be 1 month or more) before you attempt a seeding action. If you were going to plant later in the fall be sure to read the label before any herbicide application and schedule your seeding attempt at the appropriate interval. If using only glyphosate the suggested plant back interval is short and ideal for quicker turn around seeding actions.

A great method for areas that have invasive broadleaf weeds that need multiple herbicide sprays is to start an herbicide/smother seeding regimen. Using small grains such as winter barley, wheat, oats, or triticale after an herbicide application is a great two pronged approach to reducing the broadleaf weed presence in your field. The incorporation of small grains to your field preparation matrix allows the use of a broadleaf herbicide once the grain has reached the 3-5 leaf stage, targeting only the broadleaf weeds. Depending on mother nature we have seen fields planted to a small grain in late November after an earlier herbicide spray. The grain was able to germinate and overwinter providing great competition to the broadleaf weeds next spring and summer while allowing the use of a broadleaf herbicide. Grain is typically planted at "production rates" from 90LBS - 125LBS per acre. This fall smother method also serves as nesting cover in the spring and a food plot if left to mature while allowing a good seed bed for a no-till drill seeding event when weeds are satisfactory reduced.

Soil Tillage

Soil Tillage is another option for killing weeds. Your field can be tilled by a disc, chisel plow, cultivator, or rototiller depending on size. These implements are geared to till inches into the soil and break up the root mass of invasive weeds. Soil tillage requires repeated steps to deplete root reserves and kill the plant, so it usually is more effort and time consuming than herbicide treatments although still effective.

A great strategy is to till the ground early this fall and see if anything re-grows. Most likely so, let the weeds grow 3-6 inches and conduct another tillage event. This method requires the roots of weeds to expend energy to produce new leaves, weakening the plant to ultimate death. Continuing this method next spring on a warm sunny day where you are exposing the roots, destroying new growth, and drying the invasive weed out is a great technique. As mentioned before, it is key to identify your weeds. Some can be rhizomatous (root spreading), and light disturbance (such as a one disc pass) can stimulate growth and multiply plant colonies. Only repeated efforts of tillage will reduce the energy reserves of the plant to eventually have it expire and allow your seeded species have a chance to persist once seeded.

Other disadvantages to soil tillage are that it consumes heavy amounts of fuel to operate the equipment, large amounts of time with repeated passes over the field, and even more threatening is exposing dormant weed seeds in your field to the soil surface. Tap rooted weeds are also challenging with tillage methods as their roots extend deep into the soil where tillage equipment cannot reach allowing the plant to persist.

As with any project you must establish goals, create a project action schedule, and execute as mother nature allows. Identifying your weed species is crucial for effective management and reading the herbicide label for rates and plant back intervals essential. Sometimes it is better to over prepare a field than pulling the trigger on planting an expensive native seed mix before you have your weeds under control. Fall is a great time to continue or start the process so make the best out of your time!

For more information on site preparation and other How-To Resources check out our web link below or give us a ring. As always, Think Habitat!



For more online How-To Resources
Visit: www.PFHabitatStore.com/resources/
or call – 866-914-7373
to speak with our wildlife professionals