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Weed expert urges caution

By JOHN STROUD
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Plans for Garfield County to renew weed spraying have county weed supervisor Roger Davis concerned over procedures and prompted him to call in a weed expert Monday to urge the commissioners to proceed cautiously.

"There is a potential for an explosion of noxious weeds (in Garfield County)," said Gary Lore, who formerly worked for the Colorado Department of Highways and now works for the Nebraska-based Cornbelt Chemical Co. "The problem still exists because a county-wide management plan has not been implemented.

"And I caution you to use a slow, methodical process," Lore said in addressing the commissioners at their regular meeting. "Weed con-

trol is probably a line item ... even chemical companies would like to see a reduction in the use of chemicals (for spraying)."

Davis said he wanted Lore to provide input, because of concerns that the county will rely too heavily on spraying without initiating a weed management plan.

Some of the spraying, which Davis will ultimately be responsible for, could be hazardous with current county-owned equipment, and a liability risk to him and the county he would rather not take, he said.

"It's not just spraying. It's management, and I'm talking re-seeding, fertilizing and mowing ditches," Davis said. "(With spraying), we're going to have the EPA down here watching closely."

The commissioners, who earlier this month met with local ranchers

who serve as the county weed board, and agreed to pursue bidding for commercial spraying in addition to county participation, said they would like to talk more in-depth with Davis.

"You are supposed to be a weed professional," Commissioner Buckley Arbaney told Davis.

Commissioner Arnold Mackley added, "We need to get together, because we're obviously on different wavelengths."

Commission Chairwoman Marian Smith agreed the county needs "integrated management" to attack its weed problem, but she added some of the responsibility lies with the state in terms of conservation.

Lore advised the commissioners to be up-front with public participation in weed control, particularly

with environmental groups, because spraying does carry an environmental concern, he said. "You need to do it right in terms of public comment and participation."

For summer weed spraying, the county is about six months too late in its planning, Lore said. But the first step toward weed management is spraying, he said, adding the fall season is a good time to start.

"Very few weeds can simply be sprayed and gotten rid of," Lore warned. "There is a return in long-term dollars spent on weed spraying. You have to have patience, because it takes three to five years to get that return."

Lore also urged the county to seek local contractors for weed spraying, because the process can be overseen and followed up better if the contractor is local.