Leafy Spurge Facts

- Leafy spurge is a deep-rooted perennial weed native to Europe and Asia.
- It may have been introduced to North America in the 19th Century as an ornamental or contaminant in imported grain or ballast water.
- It's an aggressive weed that chokes out native plant species.
- It spreads both by means of its creeping root system and by seed.
- It grows in a variety of dry and moist habitats ranging from flood plains and riverbanks to grasslands, ridges and mountain slopes. It frequently infests rough terrain, hindering access for management by conventional means.
- It is unpalatable to cattle and can form dense stands on uncultivated land.
- All parts of the plant contain a milky latex which is irritating to cattle, horses and some humans. The latex is reportedly toxic to cattle.
- Sheep, like goats, can graze leafy spurge without ill effects.
- In Alberta, leafy spurge occurs throughout most of the agricultural areas of the province, with the most extensive infestations occurring in the southern and east-central areas.
- Leafy spurge in Alberta appears to be strongly linked to river systems.
- The direct impact of leafy spurge is the reduction or entire local displacement of native plant communities. This dramatically alters ecosystems by affecting the properties of soils and the composition and function of plant and animal communities. These ecological changes directly affect local and regional economies through reduced recreational and agricultural revenue. The cost of management is very high.

Source: From report by Kim Goodwin, project specialist, MSU-Bozeman; Roger Sheley, associate professor and MSU Extension noxious weeds specialist, MSU-Bozeman; Robert Nowierski, former MSU-Bozeman entomologist; and Rodney Lym, professor, North Dakota State University.