

Weeds Across Borders  
Banff AB, Canada  
27-30 may 2008

Weeds Across Borders (WAB) is an international (US, Canada, Mexico) conference born of the awareness of the ecological and economic damage caused by invasive species in North America and the need to share knowledge and expertise to improve weed management. The Banff conference was the fourth edition of Weeds Across Borders. Previous meetings were held twice in the US (2002, 2004) and once in Mexico (2006). The 2008 WAB was hosted by the Alberta Invasive Plants Council (AIPC) in partnership with U.S. Federal Highway Administration, the Okanogan County Noxious Weed Control Board and the North American Weed Management Association (NAWMA). The Conference was attended by approximately 150 people (my estimate), mainly from Canada and the US.

The conference included two days of meetings split by a one-day field trip. Topics covered by speakers included: status report from each of the three countries; examples of cross border partnerships; applied research on prevention, control, and management of invasive plants; ecological restoration success after weed control; best management practices; early detection and rapid response; public involvement and invasive species; economic and ecological impacts; and public policy and awareness. US speakers were associated with the following organizations: USDA-ARS, APHIS, the Nature Conservancy, NAWMA, the US Geological Survey, the US Army Engineers R&D, various universities (CT, CO, MT), the Adkins Arboretum (MD), the National Wildlife Refuge System (VA), NIWAW, and WSSA. Canadian speakers were affiliated with CFIA, the North American Plant Protection Organization (NAPPO), the First nations of BC, the Invasive Plant Council of BC, the Pacific Forestry Centre (BC), the BC Ministry of Forestry and Range, the University of Calgary, the Yukon Department of Environment. Both speakers from Mexico were from Universities.

I was struck by a few things. First and foremost, this is the youngest group of “weeds people” I have encountered in many years. Their enthusiasm and passion were palpable. I had the impression that they see themselves as “the” weed group, probably because many of them are dealing directly with weed management issues. They are the ones tackling the problems and seeking solutions. It was also my impression – but I could be wrong – that we, the WSSA, are not on their radar screen. There was a keen interest in the new journal but some concern that the information was not free. Clearly, the traditional model of journal subscription is outdated and is not the way to go for many of these people. I was also impressed by the number of state/provincial/municipal, public/private groups with a clear focus on the management of invasive weeds. However, throughout the conference, it was pretty much “everything but agriculture”. From an international perspective, attendance and contributions were lopsided, with Mexico being clearly underrepresented. It would appear that their participation was restricted by access to meagre resources.

Overall, in the current state of things, I do not see these people wanting to join our society or attend our meetings in a regular fashion. However, I can see a few stepping stones to could eventually bring the various groups closer together. First, we need to know who they are. We need a comprehensive list of these organizations and their activities. We need to communicate with their leaders, if only to make them aware of our existence and our desire to interact in whatever way possible. We need to explore ways to develop synergies and partnerships. One example of this could be to have the next WAB either in conjunction, prior or after a WSSA meeting or a regional meeting, to allow each group to capture some of the sessions/information/activities of the other group, much like will be done for our 2009 and 2010 meetings. This could apply to any other group holding meetings and wanting to partner with us if/when appropriate. There are likely many other ways to engage with these groups. We just need to initiate the dialogue. I am convinced that we will all grow by creating and capturing opportunities.

Respectfully submitted,

Anne Légère  
2008.07.03