

Common Name: Bull Thistle

Scientific Name: *Cirsium vulgare* (Savi) Ten.

Family: Sunflower family (Asteraceae)

Similar Species: *Cirsium arvense*, and the native *Cirsium edule*.

Description: Stem 2 to 5 feet tall with many spreading branches. Leaves in first year form a rosette. Leaves hairy and prickly on upper side, cottony underneath. Stems have irregular spiny “wings”. Flower heads 1.5-2 inches. Urn shaped, pinkish purple ray florets.

Invulcral bracts fleshy and tipped with spines.

Life History: Biennial from a short fleshy taproot.

Where Found: Prince of Wales Island, Ketchikan, Haines, Gustavus, Juneau.

Illustration: NRCS PLANTS Database



Photo: Michael Shephard USDA Forest Service



Habitat: Grows on a wide variety of soil types and under various moisture conditions and can tolerate a salt content of 2%. Does best in deep fertile, well-aerated soil that does not become too hot, and is less common in light, dry soil types. Abundant wherever the soil crust has been disturbed, e.g. along roads, river banks, dam margins and fences, or on severely overgrazed and trampled grazing land. Does not do well on regularly cultivated lands.

Impacts: Reported growing in clear cuts in British Columbia

Photo: Michael Shephard USDA Forest Service



Photo: Weed Science Society of America

Fun Facts: Horses will eat the flower heads (carefully avoiding ingesting the spines) attracted by the sugary nectar found at the base of each floret.

Control Options: Cutting top growth before seed-set will prevent seed production. *Urophora stylata* (seed head fly) has reduced seed production up to 80% in tests conducted in British Columbia.

Herbicide Options: Glyphosate and 2,4-D are effective. Apply in rosette stage or force into rosette stage by mowing several weeks before application

