

## UAF to study effect of invasive sweet clover

by Jeff Richardson / [jrichardson@newsminer.com](mailto:jrichardson@newsminer.com)

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**FAIRBANKS** — The University of Alaska Fairbanks has landed a \$493,000 federal grant to study the impact of the invasive white sweet clover on wild food sources.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture funding will allow researchers to look at the effect of the clover species on local blueberry and cranberry bushes.

Christa Mulder, an associate professor with the UAF Institute of Arctic Biology, said white sweet clover thrives in newly burned areas, which can put it in competition with berry plants. But researchers believe it's possible the clover species isn't just competing for soil but might also be affecting the pollination process of indigenous vegetation.

Bees that collect pollen from clover patches don't do other plants any good when they unintentionally transfer it during visits, Mulder said. As a result, the neglected berry plants might not get the attention they need from bees to thrive.

"You're out in the field and the bumblebees are all over (the clover)," said USDA crop scientist Steven Seefeldt, who co-wrote the grant with Mulder. "It leads to the question, 'Shouldn't they be out fertilizing something else?'"

But invasive plants aren't necessarily bad for pollination. If the newcomers have different flowering cycles than native plants, they might allow insects that visit them to survive better during the growing season. That, in turn, could help berry plants by creating a bigger, healthier crop of bees.

Mulder said the study also will look at other native food sources, including the Eskimo potato and lupines, and how they might be affected by the emerging clover species.

White sweet clover, which is native to Europe and Asia, has had explosive growth in Alaska during the past few decades. The leggy flowering plant is often seen along roadways and the banks of some rivers, and the four-year study will take place from the Fairbanks area to the Kenai Peninsula.

Mulder said the highly visible presence of white sweet clover made it an obvious subject to examine. "We picked those because they're some of the most aggressive and common invasive species," Mulder said.

Another element of the grant will look at how Alaskans can deal with the rapidly spreading species.

Seefeldt, who works for the USDA's Agricultural Research Service, said the study will look at the consequences of trying to manage the clover species.

"There is so much white sweet clover in Alaska, I don't think anyone talks about eradication," Seefeldt said. "It's a management issue."

Seefeldt said low levels of herbicide have proven effective in controlling the plant, and the research will look at how that approach affects the soil, water and native plants in areas where it's used.

Contact staff writer Jeff Richardson at 459-7518.



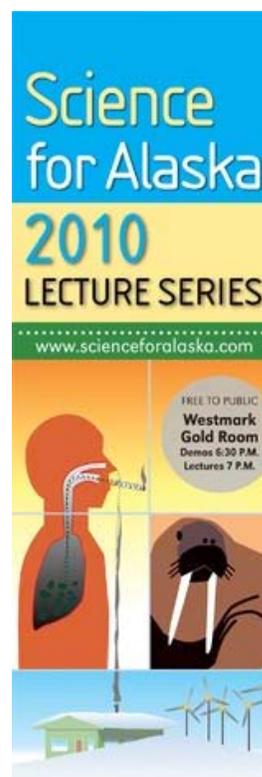
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« [say\\_what64](#) wrote on Thursday, Jan 14 at 09:52 AM »

We seem to be awful quick to condemn a particular plant species as being a noxious weed. We are even quicker to think about using herbicides against them. I've been away from taxonomy for a lot of years but I would venture a guess that this sweet clover is Lotus Major. At the very least, it is leguminous and, therefore, is nitrogen fixing. Something we need more of here in the interior. I believe that it can be grown with hay and grain crops and significantly increase production while adding nutrition to the end product.

Sweet clover is like the dandelion, in that it grows on rather poor soils and requires very little water. It's a fairly good plant for erosion control. That might have been it's intended purpose and it was planted along the highway to help stabilize the banks and ditches.

It's bloom time is later than the berries so I don't believe it competes for pollination. I raise honey bees and like the extended honey flow.

The study is probably a wise thing so we can educate ourselves. I don't think it is the demon weed it's made out to be.

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« [babylon](#) wrote on Thursday, Jan 14 at 09:27 AM »

litespeed: Best FDNM comment ever.

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« [mackie1](#) wrote on Thursday, Jan 14 at 08:39 AM »

I hope the U only uses good local union clover workers in this endeavor.

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« [TananaRiverRat](#) wrote on Thursday, Jan 14 at 07:18 AM »

The article left one important piece of the puzzle out... How did the clover get here to begin with?

Farmers? Military? Landscapers? On the wings of a snow-white...oops never mind.

Would be curious. Growing up, I remember being told by my dad that someone spread it over my home town by airplane. That was in the 60's, in the interior.

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« [litespeed](#) wrote on Thursday, Jan 14 at 01:40 AM »

Dove, that's awesome. What can you tell us? How does it compare to lythrum salicaria, insofar as spread potential and damage?

I've wondered what, if any, relationship there is with centaurea stoebe. Your thoughts?

While probably more attractive, do you think that it's more damaging than hieracium caespitosum?

The real question, however, is this: Do you know anything about melilotus alba?

I await your reply!

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« [Dove wrote on Wednesday, Jan 13 at 11:58 PM](#) »

Just a reminder that I'm happy & willing to study sweet clover for a mere \$100,000. Competition in the free world!

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