

RESOLUTION from the Town of Qualicum Beach for AVICC 2023 Control of Scotch Broom (*Cytisus Scoparius*)

WHEREAS Climate Change brings us longer periods of drought and hotter temperatures in which Scotch broom, a highly flammable invasive species with high oil content and dry branches, will thrive and act as a volatile flash fuel, increasing the risk of wildfires and specifically Urban Interface Fires; and

WHEREAS Scotch broom spreads densely and rapidly, inhibiting forests regrowth, and negatively impacting agricultural production and native species, with a 2021 study for the Invasive Species Council of BC (ISCBC) designating Scotch broom as the Top Worse Offender - the invasive species doing the greatest harm to species at risk in BC;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that AVICC and UBCM work with the Province to establish and implement actionable steps to control the aggressive spread of Scotch broom all across BC, including implementing broom-free fire breaks along long stretches of broom; and

FURTHER BE IT RESOLVED, that local governments are encouraged to use bylaws and policies to control and manage Scotch broom near and within urban boundaries.

BACKGROUND

Scotch broom was first brought to Vancouver Island in 1850 and has been spreading intentionally and unintentionally since then. To say that Scotch broom is now “naturalized” implies that it has found a niche in the ecosystem. But Scotch broom is an aggressive colonizer that can and will spread into *any* open area, as it did on whole mountain sides in New Zealand. Scotch broom has just gotten started! We could still get it under control (not eliminated), but time is running out. With invasive plants, *every year lost is land lost*.

AVICC passed a resolution in 2017 regarding Scotch broom.

2017 Town of Qualicum Beach MOTION, was ENDORSED and PASSED

WHEREAS invasive Scotch broom has spread from an initial infestation in Sooke to become ubiquitous across Vancouver Island, creating a significant fire hazard and choking out native species;

AND WHEREAS cooperative effort by local government and a local volunteer community group— Broombusters Invasive Plant Society—in the Qualicum Beach area has shown that concerted action can prove effective against invasive Scotch broom; AND WHEREAS increased resources are needed to expand this project Island-wide:

THEREFORE be it resolved that the AVICC call on the Province to work with Vancouver Island local governments and community groups to effectively clear Scotch broom from highways, rail lines and power line rights-of-way over the next three years.

Unfortunately, little action has been taken. There is justified hesitation for passing BC-wide legislation regarding Scotch broom because the plant is already so widespread and out of control. But ignoring the severity of this problem is clearly negligent of our responsibility to the land, current residents, and future generations.

What's the Problem? Scotch broom:

Colonizes aggressively, matures quickly
Grows densely, crowding out native species
Threatens biodiversity
Highly Flammable – a volatile flash fuel
Negatively impacts forestry, agriculture, and tourist industries
Limits and prevents forest regrowth
Toxic to grazing animals, wild and domestic
Changes soil chemistry making it less suitable to native species
Takes over environmentally sensitive and favourite community wild spaces
Impacts medicinal plants on First Nation land

• Scotch broom increases FIRE DANGER

Climate change is bringing longer, hotter, drier summers and drought to BC, increasing fire danger. Mature Scotch broom is extremely flammable, with high oil content and naturally occurring dry branches, and it increases the likelihood of wildfires and Urban Interface Fires.

"Fire Smart initiatives are an important part for any community's survivability. The presence of Scotch broom will increase a wildfire's fuel potential and escalate its intensity. Test burns of this invasive noxious weed have proven to be highly flammable in large concentrations making a wildfire more volatile and difficult to extinguish."

Terry Peters, Fire Chief & Emergency Services Powell River

Broom under TRANSMISSION LINES: Dense, mature broom currently grows extensively under transmission lines creating long interconnected corridors of a highly flammable fuel.

• Scotch broom and BIODIVERSITY

Among all invasive species in BC, this aggressive colonizer is the biggest threat to biodiversity. A 2021 assessment study for Invasive Species Council of BC¹ designated Scotch broom as the "Top Offender", the invasive species doing the greatest harm to species at risk in BC.

• Scotch broom negatively affects AGRICULTURE - Land, Livestock, and Food Security

Scotch broom is called "the Scourge of Pastureland." It makes agricultural land unmanageable as seeds survive for 30+ years and sprout whenever soil is turned or disturbed. Scotch broom is toxic to cattle and all grazing animals (wild and domestic) and crowds out native plants and grasses upon which these animals depend for food. In addition, Scotch broom releases toxins into the soil and changes soil chemistry, making the soil less suitable for native plants.

• Scotch broom negatively impacts FORESTRY through Lost Timber Sales

Scotch broom inhibits and prevents forest regrowth. This is verified by statistics from Oregon and Washington: in 2014, Oregon reported \$47 million in lost timber sales because of Scotch broom² and in 2017, western Washington reported that widespread Scotch broom has the potential to cause \$142.7 million in lost timber sales.³

- **SCOTCH broom invades PRIVATE LAND.**

It has become too common for private land to be purchased for resale or development, then cleared of forest and ignored as Scotch broom takes over. This is happening all over. Local governments have the ability to stop this practice.

- **PEOPLE CARE about the spread of Scotch broom and they want to see action.**

There are many dedicated environmental groups cutting broom. Broombusters alone has between 600-700 volunteers cutting broom 6-7000 hours each spring.

Many AVICC municipalities actively support Broombuster volunteers: Qualicum Beach, Parksville, Nanaimo, Lantzville, Cumberland, Comox, Courtenay, Campbell River, North Cowichan, Ladysmith, Powell River, Sooke and Coquitlam. There were also volunteers working in the RDN, ACRD, CVRD, Ucluelet, Gabriola Island, Lake Cowichan, District of Highlands, Youbou and others. MOTI has supported Broombusters since 2003. **But this problem is bigger than volunteers. Much bigger.**

A Few Suggestions of What a Local Government Can Do:

This Resolution was deliberated non-specific, as situations vary dramatically across the Islands and BC Mainland. Solving this problem will require creativity, cooperation, commitment, and communication among all parties.

- Many municipalities have passed **bylaws about broom**, and when enforced, are highly effective. Bylaws will be necessary in regional districts.
- Eliminate Scotch broom from gravel pits. Make it EASY for residents to dispose of broom cut from private and public land. Engage city workers. Hire small teams to cut broom in the spring. Support volunteers so that their efforts are successful. Require that any Scotch broom infestation that is spreading seeds be kept broom-bloom free.
- *Early Detection-Rapid Response (EDRR)* practice is highly effective strategy targeting new invasive species. It does not apply to Scotch broom as it has spread extensively. But broom isn't everywhere. Broadly across the islands and within local area, *declare broom free zones and keep them clear*. Broom could be stopped from spreading extensively into the mainland now, but soon it will be too late.

THE GOOD NEWS

Qualicum Beach had huge broom lining its roads in 2006. The town is now mostly free of broom, except under the transmission lines. With recognized exceptions, when Scotch broom is cut at ground level or below before the drought of summer, the plant will die. "Cut Broom in Bloom" works. Where volunteers are at work, Scotch broom is disappearing. Everywhere else, it is spreading – like wildfire.

Scotch broom can be controlled but action must be taken now.

References:

- 1 <https://bcinvasives.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/A-Systematic-Assessment-of-Invasive-Species-Impacts-to-Species-at-Risk-in-BC-2021.pdf>
- 2 <https://www.oregon.gov/oda/shared/Documents/Publications/Weeds/ScotchbroomProfile.pdf>
- 3 <https://kingcountyweeds.com/2017/03/23/learn-the-latest-on-scotch-broom-at-symposium-in-snoqualmie-on-may-23/>