



Avoid spreading noxious weeds this winter.

Winter is my dogs' favorite season. Nothing makes them happier than heading out with me for a ski, and since they're Australian shepherds with thick and woolly coats, they have no problem keeping warm. The downside, though, is that they easily pick up unwanted burs, especially houndstongue seeds.

Houndstongue is a state-listed noxious weed, and its seeds are covered with barbs that have been referred to as nature's Velcro. This characteristic facilitates the effective, widespread dispersal of seeds on the fur of passing wildlife, livestock and pets, and also on the clothes of humans.

Invasive weeds are one of the greatest threats to Montana's environment, as they're known as "habitat transformers" because they change an area's physical structure and forage availability, eventually pushing resident wildlife out. Additionally, invasive species degrade fisheries through erosion and sediment buildup, reduce property values, and erode our beautiful viewsheds. Houndstongue foliage also has the potential to poison livestock and wildlife.

Seeds are the only source of reproduction for houndstongue, so it's important to look for seeds clinging to you or your dog and dispose of them properly. Take an extra plastic bag with you—many responsible dog owners already have pet-waste bags with them—and if you find your dog covered in burs, take the time to collect and dispose of them in the trash. If you just toss the seeds alongside the trail, you'll be spreading noxious weeds and could make it worse for years to come.

Anyone who enjoys the amazing trails in our area can do their part in reducing the spread of noxious weeds. Pay attention to what clings to your pet when you're out and about and help keep our trails beautiful and noxious weed free.



Houndstongue flowers & burs (seeds)



Black bear covered in houndstongue burrs (photo by Jack Bell)

