

SUMMARY and FISCAL NOTE

Department:	Dept. Contact:	CBO Contact:
Seattle Public Utilities	Zoe Loutos	Akshay Iyengar

1. BILL SUMMARY

Legislation Title: AN ORDINANCE relating to the Cedar River Municipal Watershed; amending the Secondary Use Policies, adopted by Ordinance 114632, to provide for the limited application of the herbicide imazapyr to treat invasive knotweed species; and ratifying and confirming certain prior acts.

Summary and Background of the Legislation:

This legislation would amend a 1989 ordinance banning herbicide use in the Cedar River Municipal Watershed. Knotweed control is required for the Cedar River and its tributaries per RCW 17.10 and WAC 16-750.

Knotweed spreads rapidly along stream banks, posing a significant threat to water quality and fish and wildlife habitat by displacing native vegetation and eroding stream banks. The utility attempted manual control of knotweed from 2002 to 2010 by covering patches with geotextile fabric and digging isolated plants. This strategy was labor intensive and costly and is impractical for treating acres of knotweed infestations. Manual control can also spread knotweed; the tiny stem and root fragments that break off when pulling or digging are easily transported downstream in high flow events and can create new infestations. After exhausting all other control options and still not seeing a reduction in knotweed coverage, the utility investigated the use of the herbicide imazapyr. Land managers downstream of the municipal watershed use imazapyr to control knotweed and the ecological risk of imazapyr is widely accepted to be significantly lower than the ecological risk of uncontrolled knotweed.

This legislation would amend the Secondary Use Policies, enacted in 1989 by Ordinance 114632. The Secondary Use Policies include an herbicide moratorium intended to prevent the broadcast spraying of roadside vegetation and did not consider how herbicide may be selectively applied to control noxious weeds. The City Council took similar action in 2010, 2013, 2015, 2019, and 2023, each authorizing application of the herbicide imazapyr for three years.

This legislation would allow limited application of the herbicide imazapyr to continue treating knotweed within the municipal watershed for six additional years, through 2031. During the last ordinance period the utility transitioned all knotweed sites to a biennial control schedule with half the total sites being treated each year. The utility anticipates that similar amounts of herbicide will be applied in six years as was previously applied in three years and is requesting a longer ordinance period to reflect this change in management.

2. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

Does this legislation create, fund, or amend a CIP Project? Yes No

3. SUMMARY OF FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Does this legislation have financial impacts to the City? Yes No

3.d. Other Impacts

Does the legislation have other financial impacts to The City of Seattle, including direct or indirect, one-time or ongoing costs, that are not included in Sections 3.a through 3.c? If so, please describe these financial impacts.

The long-term implications of this legislation would result in cost savings. Cost savings will be used to survey for knotweed in high-risk areas and control other priority regulated noxious weeds.

If the legislation has costs, but they can be absorbed within existing operations, please describe how those costs can be absorbed. The description should clearly describe if the absorbed costs are achievable because the department had excess resources within their existing budget or if by absorbing these costs the department is deprioritizing other work that would have used these resources.

Please describe any financial costs or other impacts of *not* implementing the legislation.

No effective control alternative exists without this authority. SPU tried covering knotweed patches with geotextile fabric, which was ineffective on these large patches. Covering knotweed with geotextile fabric is also much more costly than the use of the herbicide proposed by this legislation. SPU spent an estimated \$44,000 an acre covering knotweed with geotextile fabric; this compares to the \$585 an acre to treat knotweed with herbicide in 2025. The no action alternative was ruled out because the infested areas would continue to be sources of knotweed, undermining efforts by SPU and King County to control the plant in downstream areas, ultimately increasing the cost of control and/or resulting in substantial negative ecological impacts. Under a related but different program, over \$1,000,000 has been spent controlling knotweed with herbicide (allowed outside of the municipal watershed boundary) in these downstream areas, projects that would be put at risk if control of the knotweed in the municipal watershed is not continued.

Please describe how this legislation may affect any City departments other than the originating department.

This legislation will not impact other City departments.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

a. Is a public hearing required for this legislation?

No.

b. Is publication of notice with The Daily Journal of Commerce and/or The Seattle Times required for this legislation?

No.

c. Does this legislation affect a piece of property?

Yes, this legislation affects the 92,000-acre Cedar River Municipal Watershed.

d. Please describe any perceived implication for the principles of the Race and Social Justice Initiative.

- i. How does this legislation impact vulnerable or historically disadvantaged communities? How did you arrive at this conclusion? In your response please consider impacts within City government (employees, internal programs) as well as in the broader community.**

This legislation would improve ecosystem health in the Cedar River, benefitting tribal and non-tribal fishers and protecting water quality in the unfiltered drinking water supply for 1.6 million people, including vulnerable and historically disadvantaged communities.

- ii. Please attach any Racial Equity Toolkits or other racial equity analyses in the development and/or assessment of the legislation.**

N/A

- iii. What is the Language Access Plan for any communications to the public?**

N/A

e. Climate Change Implications

- i. Emissions: How is this legislation likely to increase or decrease carbon emissions in a material way? Please attach any studies or other materials that were used to inform this response.**

Controlling knotweed will allow SPU to plant treated areas with native plant species, including woody species that sequester significantly more carbon than knotweed.

- ii. Resiliency: Will the action(s) proposed by this legislation increase or decrease Seattle's resiliency (or ability to adapt) to climate change in a material way? If so, explain. If it is likely to decrease resiliency in a material way, describe what will or could be done to mitigate the effects.**

The action authorized by this legislation would increase Seattle's resiliency to climate change. Knotweed poses a significant threat to biodiversity by outcompeting and displacing native plant species. Preserving diversity of our native plant communities

will also enhance Seattle’s resiliency to disease and pests, which are predicted to become more prevalent with climate change.

f. If this legislation includes a new initiative or a major programmatic expansion: What are the specific long-term and measurable goal(s) of the program? How will this legislation help achieve the program’s desired goal(s)? What mechanisms will be used to measure progress towards meeting those goals?

No.

g. Does this legislation create a non-utility CIP project that involves a shared financial commitment with a non-City partner agency or organization?

No.

5. ATTACHMENTS

Summary Attachments:

Summary Attachment 1 – Map of 2025 Knotweed distribution in the Cedar River Municipal Watershed

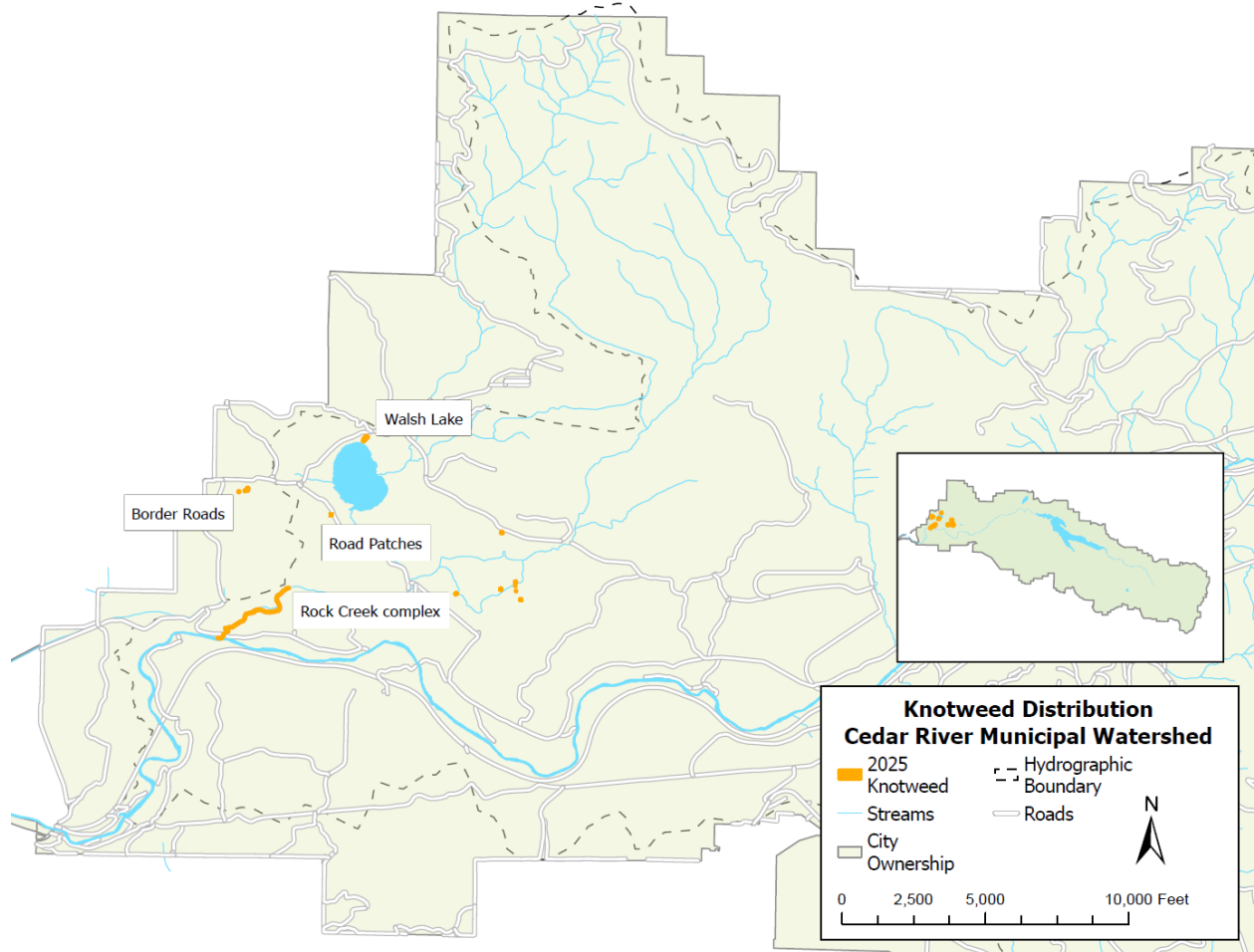


Exhibit A – 2025 knotweed distribution in the Cedar River Municipal Watershed. City land ownership extends from the crest of the Cascades to Landsburg Dam, located in the Maple Valley area