

Environmental Standard Operating Procedure

ESOP Name Ragwort control

ESOP Number 20

Revision Date 21/01/2024

Related ESOPs [2 Biosecurity](#)
[15 Herbicide application](#)



Aim

Ragwort is an invasive weed, toxic to horses and livestock. It is classed as a harmful weed under the 1959 Weeds Act and the 2003 Ragwort Control Act. Consequently, landowners have a legal requirement to stop ragwort spreading to agricultural land areas. However, ragwort is also an important food plant for a number of insect species, including the cinnabar moth, some of which are reliant on the plant for their survival. Ragwort should therefore only be eliminated in high risk areas, due to its inherent conservation value.

This standard procedure aims to eradicate ragwort safely and effectively in grazing fields or those fields used to cut hay. In other areas, not used in anyway for livestock grazing/feed, the intention is to prevent ragwort from spreading whilst maintaining enough plants to support healthy invertebrate populations.

Standard Methodology

- See diagram overleaf for appropriate treatment type.
- Pulling ragwort by hand or using spot treatment with herbicide should take place in Spring, while the plant is in rosette form, with a second treatment in the Autumn to target missed rosettes.
- Various herbicides can be used on ragwort including Glyphosate; Roundup ProActive360 is currently in use across BA spraying operations (2022).
- Appropriate PPE is required as skin irritation can occur from handling Ragwort.

Procedure

Pre-works

- The risk that ragwort poses to livestock should be identified. Where high risk areas are found, immediate action should be initiated. Medium risk areas should be carefully monitored. Control in medium risk areas should, at a minimum, stop the area escalating to high risk.
- Ragwort should be clearly identified.

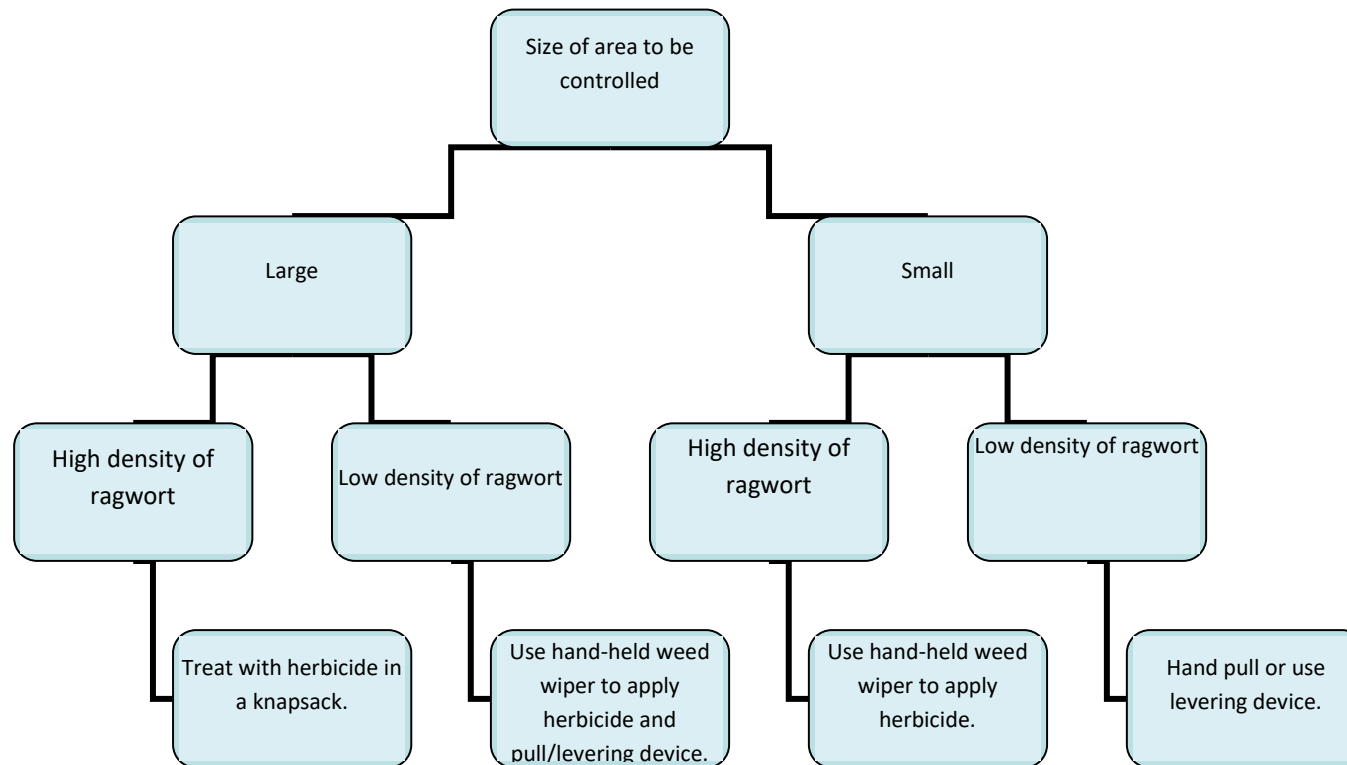
Operational

- When ragwort is pulled or levered all of the roots need to be completely removed for the method to be effective.
- If removing by pulling, use of a narrow-pronged fork or special ragwort tool is recommended to avoid digging up clods of grass and exposing bare soil and to avoid injury to the back.
- Please refer to ESOP 16 before applying herbicide.
- If herbicide is used, this should be targeted on the rosettes in spring and autumn and when the plants are dry i.e. not following rain or heavy dew. Follow up visits will be needed in mid-summer to remove any flowering heads that have survived treatment.
- Ragwort should be composted in an enclosed area or left to rot under a plastic sheet away from grazing animals and least 10m from a watercourse. If this is impractical ragwort can be left to dry out and then be burnt on site, well away from livestock.
- If grazing animals are present in treated fields, prevention of consumption of the pulled material should be achieved by immediate collection of all ragwort into bags, trailer or placed in fenced piles.

Consultation

- When composting more than 5 tonnes of plant matter at any one time contact the EA for an exemption from Waste Management Licensing.
- When burning ragwort contact the Environment Agency to register an exemption from Waste Management Licensing Regulations or the Agricultural Waste Regulations.

Ragwort Decision Making Tree



Risk Assessment

Hazard	Initial Risk			Controls / Safeguards / Precautions	Revised Risk		
	S	L	R		S	L	R
Ragwort plants go to seed before treated or pulled	4	4	C	Time removal operations appropriately – should be planned in before the end of July. Repeat visits may be necessary to prevent plants missed on first treatment from seeding.	4	1	B
Heaps of ragwort going to seed	4	4	C	Compost in an enclosed, biosecure area and/or cover with plastic sheeting	4	1	B
Affecting non-target species when applying herbicide	4	3	B	Pre-works survey for rare or endangered plants species and exclusion zones marked around these plants/review control options.	4	1	B

Matrix

		LIKELIHOOD					RISK
		Very unlikely	Unlikely	Moderately likely	Likely	Very likely	
SEVERITY		1	2	3	4	5	
Low (minimal, short-term disturbance levels and negligible damage to native habitats.)	1	A	A	A	A	A	A OK. Work to provisions in risk assessment
Medium (moderate, short-term disturbance levels, some damage to native habitats/species. Regenerates quickly.)	2	A	A	A	B	B	B Proceed with caution. Dynamically review risks.
High (high disturbance levels over a longer period and displacement of species. Damage to native habitats. Significant time to regenerate)	3	A	B	B	C	C	C Cancel task. Approach project in a different way.
Very High (Long-term disturbance with displacement/death of species. Significant damage to native habitats that takes a significant time to regenerate.)	4	B	B	C	C	C	