

# Cutleaf Vipergrass

*A new non-native species to Alberta*

In 2018, Alberta Biodiversity Monitoring Institute (ABMI) staff working in Cypress Hills County found a small population of an unknown plant. An ABMI taxonomist at the Royal Alberta Museum identified it as cutleaf vipergrass (*Scorzonera laciniata*), an ID confirmed by the Montana State Herbarium in 2019. This was the first reported occurrence of the species in Canada, highlighting the value of broad-scale monitoring and early detection of non-native species.

Cutleaf vipergrass is native to Europe, Asia, and Africa, and is a relatively new non-native species in the mid-western United States, where it was introduced for erosion control. In Utah, it is now listed as a noxious weed, and it may therefore pose a threat to native grasslands in Alberta. In 2020, the ABMI confirmed that the discovered population is stable and being privately managed.

## Appearance and habitat

Cutleaf vipergrass is similar in appearance to western salsify or goat's beard (*Tragopogon dubius*). Cutleaf vipergrass differs in having distinctive, deeply pinnately lobed leaves, and its dandelion-like flowers and seed heads are smaller. The involucre (the green portion immediately below the yellow florets) may be covered in cobwebby white hairs, and the stems are hollow. The discovered



population—at the northern edge of the species' North American range—had already flowered and set seed by mid-June, which is earlier than its US counterparts.

Little is known about cutleaf vipergrass in North America. Based on what is known, it likely prefers the dry grasslands of the Rocky Mountain rain shadow, and has the potential to spread in Alberta's dry mixed grasslands. In the US, cutleaf vipergrass is reported from disturbed areas such as lawns, roadsides, and pastures.

## Why it matters

Non-native species are adapted to ecological communities elsewhere. Their arrival can destabilize native communities, threatening biodiversity and agricultural productivity. Non-native species can be difficult to control once established. Ongoing monitoring and increased awareness are vital to detecting and controlling species like cutleaf vipergrass before they become established.

Photo credits: Yellow vipergrass inflorescence - Tony Frates. All others - Jacqueline Dennett. References: United States Department of Agriculture, Natural Resources Conservation Service. Montana State University, Judith Basin County Extension. Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health. State of Utah. (2019) Utah Noxious Weed Act Rule R68-9.

*The ABMI tracks changes in Alberta's wildlife and habitats from border to border, providing ongoing, relevant, scientifically credible information on Alberta's living resources.*

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