

## **N. Hoary Cress (“Whitetop”)** (*Cardaria draba*)

### **Key Characteristics:**

Hoary cress, a member of the Mustard family, was probably introduced from Europe in alfalfa seed. It is a perennial which reproduces by both root and seed. The extensive **root system** spreads horizontally and vertically with frequent shoots arising from the rootstock. Growth begins in the early spring from a rosette, with bolting, flowering and seed-set occurring my early to mid-summer. Whitetop grows erect from 10 to 18 inches high. **Flowers** are 4-petaled, white, about 1/8 inch across, and numerous in compact, flat-topped clusters. **Leaves** have a blue-green hue. Lower leaves are stalked; upper leaves are alternate, clasp the stem, and are oval or oblong with toothed or almost smooth margins. Each leaf is 1/2 to 2 inches long with blunt ends.



### **Locations:**

Whitetop is becoming increasingly common in parts of Pitkin County. It is extremely prolific and moving quickly throughout the Little Elk Creek and Old Snowmass areas towards East Sopris Creek. Hoary cress is one of the earliest perennial weeds to emerge in the spring. Flowers are produced in late April and May.

### **Biological control:**

No known biological controls at this time.

### **Cultural control:**

Mowing or cultivation effectiveness will be increased if other plants like perennial native grasses or alfalfa are seeded in the whitetop stands as competitors. Maintain range and pasture in good condition. Promote healthy grass growth through proper irrigation and fertilization. Do not overgraze.

### **Mechanical control:**

Tilling will increase infestation due to extensive underground root system. Cutting and removal of top growth is somewhat effective. Repeated cutting/mowing may reduce production and spread of seed.

### **Chemical control:**

There are some herbicides available that are effective against Hoary Cress. Herbicide treatment is most effective when applied before bloom or in the fall. Contact Pitkin County Land Management Department for more specific information about herbicide products, application rates, and equipment calibration.

## N. Hoary Cress (*Cardaria draba*) (continued)

### Native Look-Alikes:



**Field Pennycress**  
(*Thlaspi arvense*)

Field Pennycress is a non-native, non-noxious weed that often appears as a pioneer species in areas of recent ground disturbance. While non-native, Pennycress is not very aggressive and thus not a very pernicious threat to native vegetation. However, it is often confused with Hoary Cress, which looks similar at early growth stages.



The foliage of Field Pennycress is generally more coarsely toothed than Hoary Cress and lacks the latter's blueish-green hue. The fruit is a distinctive "penny" shaped silicle.



Photo by Robert Nagel

**Yarrow**  
(*Acillea lanulosa*)  
Distinguish Yarrow from Hoary Cress by its