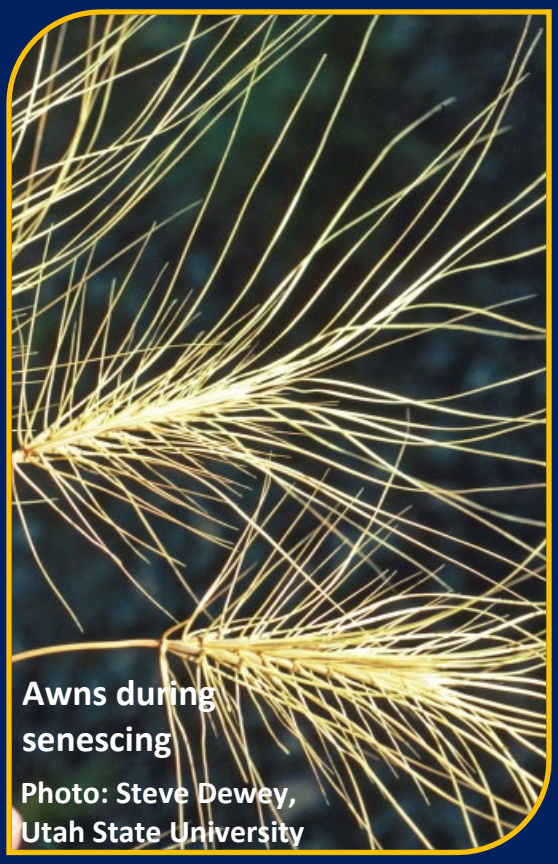
INVASIVE SPECIES ALERT!

Medusahead
(*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*)

Have You Seen This Plant?

Description

- Winter annual grass that is native to the Mediterranean region.
- Stems are slender, upright and hollow with 3-6 nodes, up to 60 cm tall.
- Leaves are narrow, 0.1-0.25 cm wide, 3-6 cm long, flat to rolled, and may be glabrous or covered in soft short hairs.
- Dense flower spikes develop long, twisting, wiry awns once seed production begins.
- Awns are 3-8 cm long and have a small upward pointing barbs.
- Plants change from bright green to purple to light-yellow as they mature and die (senesce).
- Immature medusahead may resemble foxtail barley (*Hordeum jubatum*) and squirreltail (*Elymus elymoides*) before senescing and changing colour.



Awns during senescing

Photo: Steve Dewey, Utah State University

Primary Threats: Outcompetes native plants in rangelands, contaminates crops and reduces grazing capacity. May also increase fire risk due to slow plant breakdown (high silica content).

Immature medusahead

Photo: Craig Thornsen, California Dept. of Food & Agriculture

Biology & Spread

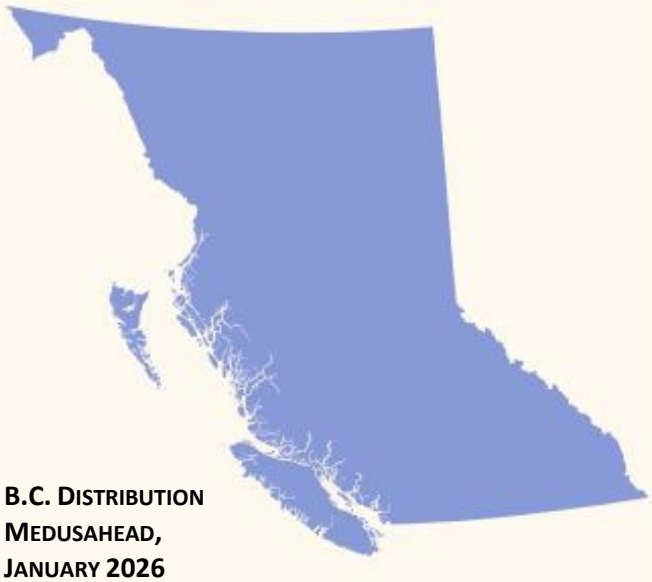
- Reproduces by seed. A single plant can produce 5,000-21,000 plants/m2. Most seed disperse 2 m or less from parent plant.
- Plants can self pollinate.
- Local dispersal mainly by wind, water as well as animal fur and feces.
- Long distance dispersal by equipment and contaminated straw, hay, or seed mixes.
- High silica content slows plant breakdown providing fuel for grassland fires.

For more information:
https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/environment/plants-animals-ecosystems/invasive-species/priority-species/priority-plants

BRITISH COLUMBIA

January 2026

Medusahead (*Taeniatherum caput-medusae*)



B.C. Distribution Medusahead, January 2026

Habitat

- Medusahead thrives in areas with dry, hot summers, sparse to no canopy, and frequented by fire.
- Found in annual grasslands, oak woodlands, and sagebrush areas.
- It grows well in drier coastal conditions as well as in intermontane areas.
- Prefers areas with less than 100 mm annual rainfall.

Distribution & Status

- Not yet occurring in BC, does occur in Washington State.
- Management goal is prevention of establishment in BC.

Mature medusahead
Photo: Steve Dewney, Utah State University

Report Invasive Species

Download the App!

www.gov.bc.ca/invasive-species

What Can You Do?

- **REPORT** new sightings
- **Maintain** healthy rangelands
- **Observe** grasslands for changes in species composition
- **Treat** Medusahead before disturbing a site with digging, mowing or machinery

Photo: Steve Dewney, Utah State U.

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