



Talent fights weeds with organics

BY TONY BOOM FOR THE MAIL TRIBUNE | March 11, 2019

f TALENT — A plan to eliminate use of synthetic pesticides on all city lands by the end of 2021 is just getting its start as the growing season begins. The City Council approved the plan in December after citizens and an Integrated Pest Management committee worked nearly two years on its development.

t “It took that long because we really had to make sure we were working with staff and at a pace they could live with, and get the policy in place.”

m <http://mailtribune.com/news/top-stories/talent-fights-weeds-with-organics>

A turning point came in May 2018 when city staff attended a study session that included presentations by the city of Irvine, California, on its successful IPM plan and from national group Beyond Pesticides and the Rogue Valley Pollinator Project.

Talent Public Works Director Brett Marshall has been involved since the start of efforts to reduce chemicals on city lands.

“From a management standpoint, when you are being driven by a small budget, it’s really hard to see that there are other options than synthetics. They are the least expensive way to manage,” said Marshall. His crews have been testing organic pesticides for several months.

“What we are learning is they are not as effective as synthetics, but they are effective,” said Marshall, adding the “burn down” (discoloration) of weeds ranges anywhere from two weeks to nearly a month. Marshall reported on about eight organic chemicals tried so far.

More promising was the demonstration of a high-temperature steam machine system by a California firm that kills the weeds. The machine produced better results in a demonstration at the Public Works yard. Marshall is currently preparing next fiscal year’s budget with a request for the \$20,000 machine which mounts on a trailer and has a 150-foot-long hose.

“My plan is, once we get the machine, to keep it in operation daily throughout the entire growing season,” said Marshall.

“There’s an initial, up-front cost, but over time there’s less cost,” said Dolan. That’s because less is spent on chemicals and fertilizers, she said.

The goal of the IPM is to stop use of synthetics over the next couple of years, but emergency provisions in the measure allow for their use under a review process with approval by the city manager. The plan applies only to city property and not private property. Portions of the Bear Creek Greenway under the city’s jurisdiction are also covered.

At Summer Place, a subdivision park in south Talent, efforts are focused on reducing blackberries, goat’s head and puncture vine.

“We’ve started the process to learn about what we can do with the blackberries,” said Marshall. “The best things we found was a study that said mow the berries before they go to seed. Mowing over six years can reduce blackberries by 80 to 85 percent.”

A workforce increase will also help with the effort.

“Even before we started the new IPM, we would get at least some temporary positions during the growing season,” said Marshall. That will continue and the city was also interviewing this week to add another staff position for Public Works on a permanent basis.

Volunteer groups have weeded some public areas in Talent over the years. Program goals call for continued use of the volunteers.

At one point, hand pulling of all weeds was proposed, but the labor costs would have been prohibitive. The IPM committee then agreed to look at use of organic pesticides to reduce costs.

An IPM subcommittee has been formed underneath the city’s Parks Commission. The group had its first session last week and will meet quarterly to check on progress of the phaseout, Dolan said.

Th IPM also calls for education on alternatives. An education event is planned for Saturday, April 13, at the Community Center. There will be booths staffed by local groups.

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