



An Unwelcome Visitor



Invasion of Musk Thistle two years after the 2002 Long Mesa Fire

Musk Thistle head

Aliens have invaded Mesa Verde. Summer visitors are likely to see their round purple flower heads nodding atop tall prickly stalks. These unwelcome invaders are Musk Thistles (*Carduus nutans*, Latin for “nodding thistle”), aggressive weedy plants native to southern Europe. Arriving in the late 1970s, today these thistles occupy hundreds of acres in the park, sometimes in dense stands where little else can grow. But Mesa Verde is fighting back. We’re attempting to eradicate these and other alien weeds using mechanical, chemical, and biological methods, but we need your help. Although this species produces beautiful purple flowers, resist the urge to collect them. Each flower head may produce hundreds of seeds that can remain viable in the soil for many years just waiting for an opportunity to spread. Like other “invasive” weeds, Musk Thistle is adapted to disturbed environments such as road shoulders, construction sites, and landscapes altered by wildfire such as those that visitors pass through on Chapin and Wetherill mesas. Don’t allow this marauding menace to hitch a ride with you.