

IRRIGATION REQUIREMENTS FOR NATIVE BUCKWHEAT SEED PRODUCTION IN A SEMI-ARID ENVIRONMENT

Clinton C. Shock, Erik B. G. Feibert, Alicia Rivera, and Kyle D. Wieland, Malheur Experiment Station, Oregon State University, Ontario, OR

Nancy Shaw and Francis Kilkenny, U.S. Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Research Station, Boise, ID

Summary

Native buckwheats (*Eriogonum* spp.) are important small perennial shrubs in the Intermountain West. Buckwheat seed is desired for rangeland restoration activities, but little cultural practice information is available for seed production of native buckwheat. The seed yield of *Eriogonum umbellatum* and *E. heracleoides* was evaluated over multiple years in response to four biweekly irrigations applying either 0, 1, or 2 inches of water (total of 0, 4, or 8 inches/season). Seed yield of *E. umbellatum* responded to irrigation plus spring precipitation in 12 of the 15 years, with 5 to 11 inches of water applied plus spring precipitation maximizing yields, depending on year. Averaged over 15 years, seed yield of *E. umbellatum* showed a quadratic response to irrigation rate plus spring precipitation and was estimated to be maximized at 203 lb/acre/year by irrigation plus spring precipitation of 8.2 inches. Over ten seasons, seed yield of *E. heracleoides* responded to irrigation only in 2013, 2017, 2019, and 2020 with seed yield maximized by 4.9, 4.7, 6.7, and 3.2 inches of applied water, respectively. Averaged over 10 years, seed yield of *E. heracleoides* showed a quadratic response to irrigation rate; the highest yield was achieved with 5 inches of water applied.

Introduction

Native wildflower seed is needed to restore rangelands of the Intermountain West. Commercial seed production is necessary to provide the quantity of seed needed for restoration efforts. A major limitation to economically viable commercial production of native wildflower (forb) seed is stable and consistent seed productivity over years.

In native rangelands, the natural variations in spring rainfall and soil moisture result in highly variable water stress at flowering, seed set, and seed development. Such stresses for other seed crops are known to compromise seed yield and quality.

Native wildflower plants are not well adapted to croplands because they often are not competitive with weeds in cultivated fields, which could limit wildflower seed production. Both sprinkler and furrow irrigation could provide supplemental water for seed production, but these irrigation systems risk further encouraging weeds. Also, sprinkler and furrow irrigation can lead

to the loss of plant stand and seed production due to fungal pathogens. By burying drip tapes at 12-inch depth and avoiding wetting the soil surface, we designed experiments to assure water availability for flowering and seed set without undue encouragement of weeds or opportunistic diseases. The trials reported here tested the effects of three low rates of irrigation on the seed yield of *Eriogonum umbellatum* (sulphur-flower buckwheat) and *E. heracleoides* (parsnipflower buckwheat).

Materials and Methods

Plant Establishment

Seed of *E. umbellatum* was received in late November 2004 from the Rocky Mountain Research Station (Boise, ID). The plan was to plant the seed in the fall of 2004, but due to excessive rainfall in October, ground preparation was not completed and planting was postponed to early 2005. To try to ensure germination, we submitted the seed to cold stratification. The seed was soaked overnight in distilled water on January 26, 2005, after which the water was drained and the seed soaked for 20 minutes in a 10% by volume solution of 13% bleach in distilled water. The water was drained, and the seed was placed in thin layers in plastic containers. The plastic containers had lids with holes drilled in them to allow air movement. These containers were placed in a cooler set at approximately 34°F. Every few days the seed was mixed and, if necessary, distilled water added to maintain seed moisture.

In late February 2005, drip tape (T-Tape TSX 515-16-340) was buried at 12-inch depth between two 30-inch rows of a Nyssa silt loam with a pH of 8.3 and 1.1% organic matter. The drip tape was buried in alternating inter-row spaces (5 ft apart). The flow rate for the drip tape was 0.34 gal/min/100 ft at 8 psi with emitters spaced 16 inches apart, resulting in a water application rate of 0.066 inch/hour.

On March 3, 2005, seed of *E. umbellatum* was planted in 30-inch rows using a custom-made, small-plot grain drill with disc openers. All seed was planted at 20 to 30 seeds/ft of row at 0.25-inch depth. The trial was irrigated with a minisprinkler system (R10 Turbo Rotator, Nelson Irrigation Corp., Walla Walla, WA) from March 4 to April 29 for even stand establishment. Risers were spaced 25 ft apart along flexible polyethylene hose laterals that were spaced 30 ft apart and the water application rate was 0.10 inch/hour. A total of 1.72 inches of water was applied with the minisprinkler system. *Eriogonum umbellatum* started emerging on March 29. Starting June 24, the field was irrigated with the drip system for stand establishment. A total of 3.73 inches of water was applied with the drip system from June 24 to July 7. The field was not irrigated further in 2005.

Plant stands for *E. umbellatum* were uneven, and it did not flower in 2005. In early October 2005, more seed was received from the Rocky Mountain Research Station for replanting. The empty lengths of row were replanted by hand on October 26, 2005. In the spring of 2006, the plant stands had improved.

In early November 2009, drip tape was buried as described above in preparation for planting *E. heracleoides*. On November 25, 2009, seed of *E. heracleoides* was planted in 30-inch rows using a custom-made, small-plot grain drill with disc openers. All seed was planted on the soil surface at 20 to 30 seeds/ft of row. After planting, sawdust was applied in a narrow band over the seed row at 0.26 oz/ft (558 lb/acre). Following planting and sawdust application, the beds

were covered with row cover. The row cover (N-Sulate, DeWitt Co. Inc., Sikeston, MO) covered two rows (two 30-inch beds) and was applied with a mechanical plastic mulch layer. The field was irrigated for 24 hours on December 2, 2009, due to very dry soil conditions.

After *E. heracleoides* emerged, the row cover was removed in April 2010. The irrigation treatments were not applied to *E. heracleoides* in 2010, and stands were not adequate for yield estimates. Gaps in the rows were replanted by hand on November 5, 2010. The replanted seed was covered with a thin layer of a mixture of 50% sawdust and 50% hydro-seeding mulch (Hydrostraw LLC, Manteno, IL) by volume. The mulch mixture was sprayed with water using a backpack sprayer.

Irrigation for Seed Production

The planted strips were divided into plots 30 ft long (*E. umbellatum* in April 2006 and *E. heracleoides* in April 2011). Each plot contained four rows of each species. The experimental designs were randomized complete blocks with four replicates. The three treatments were a nonirrigated check, 1 inch of water applied per irrigation, and 2 inches of water applied per irrigation. Each treatment received four irrigations that were applied approximately every 2 weeks starting at bud formation and flowering. The amount of water applied to each treatment was calculated by the length of time necessary to deliver 1 or 2 inches through the drip system. Irrigations were regulated with a controller and solenoid valves. Irrigation dates are found in Table 1.

Flowering, Harvesting, and Seed Cleaning

Flowering dates for each species were recorded annually (Table 1). The *E. umbellatum* plots produced seed in 2006, in part because they had emerged in the spring of 2005. *Eriogonum heracleoides* started flowering in 2011. Each year, the middle two rows of each plot were harvested when seed of each species was mature (Table 1). Seed was harvested with a small-plot combine every year, except 2013 and 2016, when seed was harvested manually. *Eriogonum umbellatum* and *E. heracleoides* seeds did not separate from the flowering structures in the combine. In 2006, the unthreshed seed of *E. umbellatum* was taken to the U.S. Forest Service Lucky Peak Nursery (Boise, ID) and run through a dewinger to separate seed. The seed was further cleaned in a small Clipper seed cleaner. In subsequent years, the unthreshed seed of both species was run through a meat grinder to separate the seed. The seed was further cleaned in a small Clipper seed cleaner.

Cultural Practices

On October 27, 2006, 50 lb phosphorus/acre and 2 lb zinc/acre were injected through the drip tape to all plots of *E. umbellatum*.

The herbicides pendimethalin (Prowl[®]), dimethenamid-P (Outlook[®]), clethodim (Shadow[®]), and sethoxydim (Poast[®]) have been used for weed control. Prowl and either Poast or Shadow were applied once per year, usually in the fall. Starting in 2018, Outlook was added to the yearly herbicide application. In addition to herbicides, hand weeding was used as necessary to control weeds.

Statistical Analysis

Seed yield means were compared by analysis of variance and by linear and quadratic regression. Seed yield (y) in response to irrigation or irrigation plus precipitation (x),

inches/season) was estimated by the equation $y = a + b \cdot x + c \cdot x^2$, where a is the intercept, b is the linear parameter, and c is the quadratic parameter. For the quadratic equations, the amount of irrigation (x') that resulted in maximum yield (y') was calculated using the formula $x' = -b/2c$. For the linear regressions, the seed yield responses to irrigation were based on the actual greatest amount of water applied plus precipitation and the measured average seed yield.

For each species, seed yields for each year were regressed separately against 1) applied water; 2) applied water plus spring precipitation; 3) applied water plus winter and spring precipitation; and 4) applied water plus fall, winter, and spring precipitation. Winter and spring precipitation occurred in the same year that yield was determined; fall precipitation used in the calculations occurred the prior year.

Adding the seasonal precipitation to the irrigation response equation has the potential to provide a closer estimate of the amount of water required for maximum seed yields of the *Eriogonum* species. Regressions of seed yield each year were calculated on all the sequential seasonal amounts of precipitation and irrigation, but only some of the regressions are reported below. The period of precipitation plus applied water that had the lowest standard deviation for irrigation plus precipitation over the years was chosen as the most reliable independent variable for predicting seed yield.

Results and Discussion

Spring precipitation in 2012 and 2016 was close to the average of 3.0 inches (Table 2). Spring precipitation in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2017, 2019, and 2020 was higher than the average and spring precipitation in 2007, 2008, 2013, 2014, and 2018 was lower than the average of 3.0 inches. The accumulated growing degree-days (50–86°F) from January through June in 2007, 2012–2018, and 2020 were higher than average (Table 2). Both buckwheats flowered and were harvested earlier in 2013–2016 than in 2011–2012 (Table 1), consistent with more early season growing degree-day accumulations (Table 2).

***Eriogonum umbellatum*, Sulfur-flower Buckwheat**

Seed yield of *E. umbellatum* exhibited a positive linear response to irrigation rate in 2006 (Tables 3 and 4). In 2007–2009 and 2012–2016, 2018, and 2019 seed yield showed a quadratic response to irrigation rate. In 2010 and 2017, there was no significant difference in yield between the irrigation treatments. In 2011 and 2020, seed yield was highest with no irrigation. The 2010 and 2011 seasons had unusually cool and wet weather (Table 2). The accumulated spring plus winter precipitation in 2010, 2011, 2017, and 2020 was higher than average. The negative effect of irrigation on seed yield in 2011 might have been compounded by the presence of rust. Irrigation could have exacerbated the rust and resulted in lower yields. In 2020, yields were the lowest of the 15 years. While the vigor of *E. umbellatum* has slowly declined in the last few years, the low yield in 2020 could have been exacerbated by the higher than average rainfall in June, which is the main flowering period.

Averaged over 15 years, seed yield showed a quadratic response to irrigation rate plus spring precipitation. Seed yield was estimated to be maximized at 203 lb/acre/year by irrigation plus spring precipitation of 8.2 inches.

***Eriogonum heracleoides*, Parsnipflower Buckwheat**

From 2011 to 2020, *E. heracleoides* seed yield responded to irrigation only in 2013, 2017, 2019, and 2020, showing a quadratic response to irrigation (Tables 3 and 4). In 2013, 2017, 2019, and 2020, seed yields were maximized at 4.9, 4.7, 6.7, and 3.2 inches of water applied, respectively. Averaged over 10 years, seed yield of *E. heracleoides* showed a quadratic response to irrigation rate, with the highest yield achieved with 5 inches of water applied.

Conclusions

Buckwheat flowering and harvests were early in 2013–2016, probably due to warmer weather. The total irrigation requirements for these arid-land species were low and varied by species. Over 10 years, *E. heracleoides* seed yields responded to irrigation in only 4 years. In the other years, natural rainfall was sufficient to maximize seed production in the absence of weed competition. Seed yield of *E. umbellatum* responded to irrigation plus spring precipitation in 13 of the 15 years, with irrigation plus spring precipitation of 8.2 inches maximizing yields.

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Table 1. *Eriogonum umbellatum* and *E. heracleoides* flowering, irrigation, and seed harvest dates by species, 2006–2020, Malheur Experiment Station, Oregon State University, Ontario, OR.

Species	Year	Flowering dates			Irrigation dates		Harvest
		Start	Peak	End	Start	End	
<i>Eriogonum umbellatum</i>	2006	19-May		20-Jul	19-May	30-Jun	3-Aug
	2007	25-May		25-Jul	2-May	24-Jun	31-Jul
	2008	5-Jun	19-Jun	20-Jul	15-May	24-Jun	24-Jul
	2009	31-May		15-Jul	19-May	24-Jun	28-Jul
	2010	4-Jun	15-Jun	15-Jul	28-May	8-Jul	27-Jul
	2011	8-Jun	30-Jun	20-Jul	20-May	5-Jul	1-Aug
	2012	30-May	20-Jun	4-Jul	30-May	11-Jul	24-Jul
	2013	8-May	27-May	27-Jun	8-May	19-Jun	9-Jul
	2014	20-May	4-Jun	1-Jul	13-May	24-Jun	10-Jul
	2015	13-May	26-May	25-Jun	29-Apr	10-Jun	2-Jul
	2016	16-May	26-May	25-Jun	27-Apr	7-Jun	1-Jul
	2017	25-May	7-Jun	10-Jul	23-May	6-Jul	26-Jul
	2018	14-May	13-Jun	30-Jun	3-May	13-Jun	24-Jul
	2019	26-May	3-Jun	5-Jul	13-May	27-Jun	17-Jul
2020	10-May	12-Jun	30-Jun	7-May	3-Jun	13-Jul	
<i>Eriogonum heracleoides</i>	2011	26-May	10-Jun	8-Jul	27-May	6-Jul	1-Aug
	2012	23-May	30-May	25-Jun	11-May	21-Jun	16-Jul
	2013	29-Apr	13-May	10-Jun	24-Apr	5-Jun	1-Jul
	2014	1-May	20-May	12-Jun	29-Apr	10-Jun	3-Jul
	2015	24-Apr	5-May	17-Jun	15-Apr	27-May	24-Jun
	2016	26-Apr	6-May	16-Jun	18-Apr	31-May	23-Jun
	2017	10-May		30-Jun	2-May	20-Jun	26-Jul
	2018	30-Apr	10-May	28-Jun	3-May	13-Jun	25-Jul
	2019	4-May	28-May	2-Jul	3-May	13-Jun	22-Jul
	2020	5-May	15-May	25-Jun	9-May	18-Jun	17-Jul

Table 2. Precipitation and growing degree-days at the Malheur Experiment Station, Oregon State University, Ontario, OR, 2006–2020.

Year	Precipitation (inch)			Growing degree-days (50–86°F)
	Spring	Spring + winter	Spring + winter + fall	Jan–July
2006	3.4	10.1	14.5	2064
2007	1.9	3.8	6.2	2203
2008	1.4	3.2	6.7	1799
2009	4.1	6.7	8.9	1908
2010	4.3	8.4	11.7	1642
2011	4.8	9.3	14.5	1533
2012	2.6	6.1	8.4	1979
2013	0.9	2.4	5.3	2064
2014	1.7	5.1	8.1	2112
2015	3.2	5.9	10.4	2327
2016	2.2	5.0	10.1	2138
2017	4.0	9.7	12.7	1962
2018	1.9	4.9	5.8	2075
2019	4.7	10.2	12.9	1912
2020	4.3	6.6	12.8	1991
15-year average:	3.0	6.5	9.9	27-year average: 1917

Table 3. *Eriogonum umbellatum* and *E. heracleoides* seed yield in response to irrigation rate (inches/season) 2006–2020, Malheur Experiment Station, Oregon State University, Ontario, OR.

Species	Year	Irrigation rate			LSD (0.05) ^a
		0 inches	4 inches	8 inches	
		lb/acre			
<i>Eriogonum umbellatum</i>	2006	155.3	214.4	371.6	92.9
	2007	79.6	164.8	193.8	79.8
	2008	121.3	221.5	245.2	51.7
	2009	132.3	223.0	240.1	67.4
	2010	252.9	260.3	208.8	NS
	2011	248.7	136.9	121.0	90.9
	2012	61.2	153.2	185.4	84.4
	2013	113.2	230.1	219.8	77.5
	2014	257.0	441.8	402.7	82.9
	2015	136.4	124.4	90.7	NS
	2016	183.4	204.3	140.8	NS
	2017	115.6	116.4	96.5	NS
	2018	44.6	92.0	66.7	24.5
	2019	274.9	370.5	226.3	49.5
2020	41.5	9.2	16.7	15.6	
	Average	159.0	215.8	196.7	24.2
<i>Eriogonum heracleoides</i>	2011	55.2	71.6	49.0	NS
	2012	252.3	316.8	266.4	NS
	2013	287.4	516.9	431.7	103.2
	2014	297.6	345.2	270.8	NS
	2015	83.6	148.2	122.3	NS
	2016	421.6	486.9	437.2	NS
	2017	221.9	319.1	284.6	62.5
	2018	187.9	146.2	127.2	NS
	2019	265.7	356.2	369.8	NS
	2020	124.6	170.3	65.0	100.5
	Average	217.4	311.4	274.6	51.7

^aNS = not significant. There was no statistically significant trend in seed yield in response to amount of irrigation at the $P = 0.05$ level.

Table 4. Regression analysis for *Eriogonum umbellatum* and *E. heracleoides* seed yield (y) in response to irrigation (x) (inches/season) using the equation $y = a + b \cdot x + c \cdot x^2$. For the quadratic equations, the amount of irrigation that resulted in maximum yield was calculated using the formula $-b/2c$, where b is the linear parameter and c is the quadratic parameter. Malheur Experiment Station, Oregon State University, Ontario, OR, 2006–2020.

<i>Eriogonum umbellatum</i>									
Year	Intercept	Linear	Quadratic	R^2	P^a	Maximum yield lb/acre	Water applied plus spring precipitation for maximum yield inches/season	Spring precipitation inch	Water applied for maximum yield inch
2006	66.6	22.9		0.52	0.05	328.0	11.4	3.4	8.0
2007	18.7	35.0	-1.8	0.69	0.05	193.8	10.0	1.9	8.1
2008	66.9	41.4	-2.4	0.73	0.01	246.6	8.7	1.4	7.2
2009	-35.6	50.6	-2.3	0.6	0.05	242.7	11.0	4.1	6.9
2010	178.5	25.2	-1.8	0.08	NS			4.3	
2011	308.9	-16.0		0.58	0.01	232.7	4.8	4.8	0.0
2012	-30.7	40.2	-1.9	0.65	0.01	185.4	10.7	2.6	8.1
2013	71.9	51.9	-4.0	0.62	0.05	241.3	6.5	0.9	5.7
2014	107.7	98.4	-7.0	0.76	0.01	453.7	7.0	1.7	5.3
2015	-35.7	70.4	-5.3	0.55	0.10	199.4	6.7	3.2	3.5
2016	96.3	48.9	-4.4	0.47	0.10	233.5	5.6	2.2	3.4
2017	94.2	7.9	-0.6	0.16	NS			4.0	
2018	-3.1	29.5	-2.3	0.46	0.10	92.9	6.5	1.9	4.6
2019	-142.7	124.2	-7.5	0.83	0.01	371.7	8.3	4.7	3.6
2020	54.2	-4.2		0.64	0.01	36.4	4.3	4.3	0.0
Average	70.9	32.3	-2.0	0.67	0.01	203.1	8.2	3.0	5.2

Eriogonum heracleoides

Year	Intercept	Linear	Quadratic	R^2	P^a	Maximum yield lb/acre	Water applied for maximum yield inches/season
2011	61.7	-0.8		0.01	NS		
2012	271.5	1.8		0.01	NS		
2013	287.4	96.7	-9.8	0.64	0.05	525.1	4.9
2014	297.6	27.2	-3.8	0.08	NS		
2015	83.6	27.5	-2.8	0.29	NS		
2016	421.6	30.7	-3.6	0.06	NS		
2017	221.9	54.7	-5.9	0.55	0.05	349.7	4.7
2018	185.1	-7.6		0.29	NS		
2019	265.7	32.3	-2.4	0.57	0.10	373.8	6.7
2020	124.6	30.3	-4.7	0.42	0.10	173.2	3.2
Average	207.8	38.1	-4.1	0.64	0.01	297.2	4.7

^aNS = not significant, indicating that there was no statistically significant trend in seed yield in response to amount of irrigation in that year.