Watercress and arsenic salad, anyone?

WATERCRESS (*Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum*) is often found growing in disturbed wetlands and drains from Geraldton to Albany. Revelling in the nutrients these drains often carry, the plant grows lush and succulent, just right for a salad - or is it?

Bannister Creek Catchment Group (Canning) noticed some growing in their superb rehabilitation area and, knowing what the water contained, decided to get the plant tested. It proved to be very high in the 'big five' heavy metals, lead, zinc, arsenic, copper and cadmium, a lethal salad indeed! The question arises about where the contaminents come from - are they a by-product of the industrial area upstream, or are they simply leaching out of the natural acid sulphate soils that had been cut into so that the 'creek' could drain the area for industrial and urban development? Acid sulphate soils are a real problem in parts of WA - they helped shut down the mineral sands mine at Beenup, near Augusta, for example - and they could have a severe effect on aquaculture or irrigated agriculture using groundwater ... even a backyard veggie patch ...

The moral of this particular story? Don't eat weedy watercress!

'Weed Watcher' - a new Internet map site

AGWA website at: http://www.agric.wa.gov.au/weeds/wwatcher.htm

AgWA has mapped 50+ agricultural and environmental weeds, covering the agricultural region between Northampton and Esperance and including the Metropolitan area. Detail is given of size and density of infestations, when and how they were discovered, and any control mechanisms in place. Users can then enter the details of their own observations on a form which is entered into the database.

As a management tool, it will enable groups to produce maps of local weed problems, which will assist in developing project plans and applying for funding and resources.