



A Chance to Catch the Problem Early

Noxious and invasive plants are a problem in Alaska, but land management agencies are working together to keep it from growing into an unmanageable one.

Biologists and land managers thought Alaska's remoteness offered protection from the introduction of noxious and invasive plants. However, the state now has well-established infestations of several invasives, including Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*), White sweetclover (*Melilotus alba*), Japanese knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*), and bird vetch (*Vicia cracca*). These, along with other invasive species, now threaten to invade Alaska's forests, riparian areas, and its nonforested wetlands.

governmental organizations in Alaska began working together to address the introduction of invasive and noxious plant species. Under a memorandum of understanding, the agencies developed a plan and laid the groundwork for cooperative surveys, education, prevention, control, and eradication of invasive plant species. The Forest Health Protection Program of State and Private Forestry has a new emphasis to help address invasive plants. The program has provided \$100,000 to accelerate the excellent cooperative efforts already underway. The program focuses on the following five areas:



Bird vetch (*Vicia cracca*) crawling up and over planted spruce along the Seward highway in Anchorage. (Photo by Michael Rasy)

Inventory and Monitoring

The cooperating agencies are first focusing on inventory, using uniform field survey protocols and reporting. We are also determining how best to merge existing databases into a statewide Geographic Information System (GIS) invasive plant layer that will hold existing and future weed survey information. State and Private Forestry is providing seed money for the project. The Alaska Geospatial Data Clearinghouse, operated by the US Geological Survey, is also cooperating in the effort.

Invasive plants are aggressive non-native plants that have been introduced without the insect predators and plant pathogens that help keep them in check in their native habitats. Noxious weeds are a subset of invasive plants legally defined by each state or province.

Cooperative Effort

Alaska is in a unique position to keep its invasive plant problem from growing into an ecological quagmire. The costs can be low if we quickly identify, control and/or eradicate infestations.

In 2000, six state agencies, eight federal agencies and many non-

State and Private Forestry is also providing funding to the Integrated Pest Management Program, a part of the Alaska Cooperative Extension Service, for invasive species surveys.

The inventory effort in 2002 will be near Anchorage in south-central Alaska. Anchorage is the state's major population center and one of the primary locations for invasive plant introductions. Inventory work will also continue in the Delta Junction and Fairbanks areas, and within Alaska's national parks. Data from these new and continuing surveys will be added to the new "invasives" GIS layer. These inventories will help direct eradication efforts and will serve as a principle monitoring tool.

Education

Web-based and printed informational materials about specific invasive plants in Alaska are being developed. This information will help landowners recognize and work on controlling and eradicating invasive species. A web-based field guide to noxious and other weeds of Alaska will be created to assist the general public as well as those doing the inventories.

Coordination

State & Private Forestry funds are being used in support of an invasive plant species coordinator who will facilitate information exchange between agencies. A statewide steering committee may be set up to streamline decision making across agencies.

Research

Once the preliminary invasive plant inventory work has been



Left: Japanese knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*) found in an estuary on the Tongass National Forest in SE Alaska. (Photo by Brad Krieckhaus)



Above: White sweetclover (*Melilotus alba*) found along the road in Denali National Park. (photo by Roseann Densmore)



Above: Canada thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) in a Anchorage city park, most likely brought in with tree plantings. (Photo by Corlene Rose)



Above: Flower of Bird vetch (*Vicia cracca*), the plant shown in the photo on the front of this story.

completed, literature searches and research will begin to determine the best treatment options for these invasive plant species in Alaska.

Eradication and Control

Several eradication projects are already underway, including:

- 1) a Japanese knotweed eradication project on Baranof Island
- 2) a white sweetclover trial control project along the Stikine River, Wrangell District, Tongass National Forest
- 3) a cooperative project between Kenai Fjords National Park and the Seward Ranger Dis-

trict (Chugach National Forest) to control and eradicate invasives before they reach the recently deglaciated moraines of Exit Glacier

4) a roadside dandelion pulling project in Denali National Park

Further information on the Alaska invasive plant network is available online at www.invasivespecies.gov/geog/state/ak.shtml

Partners in this Project

- Forest Service, Alaska Region, State and Private Forestry
- Tongass & Chugach National Forests
- Cooperative Extension Service
- US Fish and Wildlife
- Alaska Division of Forestry
- Alaska Division of Agriculture
- Alaska Dept. of Fish & Game
- Alaska Dept. of Transportation
- US Geological Survey
- Bureau of Land Management
- National Park Service
- Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- U.S. Dept. of Defense

To Find Out More

Michael Shephard, Ecologist
Forest Service, Alaska Region
S&PF, Forest Health Protection
Phone: 907-743-9454
E-Mail: mshephard@fs.fed.us