

# INVASIVE SPECIES IN IDAHO

“Make no mistake, invasive species are a first order threat to Idaho's economy and our quality of life.”  
 -- Governor Dirk Kempthorne, January 29, 2003

## What is an invasive species?

Invasive alien species are plants, animals, or other organisms that are introduced to a given area outside their original range and cause harm in their new home. Because they have no natural enemies to limit their reproduction, they usually spread rampantly. Invasive alien species are recognized as one of the leading threats to biodiversity and impose enormous costs to agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and other human enterprises, as well as to human health.



- The cost to control invasive species and the damages they inflict upon property and natural resources in the U.S. is estimated at **\$137 billion** annually.
- It is estimated that 8 million acres of Idaho (15% of the state's lands) are infested with invasive weeds.
- Noxious weeds in Idaho cause direct losses of \$300 million annually,

## Invasive Species in Idaho: A Quick Look

Idaho has been invaded by a number of harmful exotic plants and animals. Here is a quick look at some of the worst current and potential invaders:

Name	Type	Origin	Extent	Damage
Rush skeletonweed	Plant	Eurasia, first detected in ID on 5 acres in 1960	Now 4 million acres in Idaho	Displaces beneficial forage plants and also invades cropland
Cheatgrass	Plant	Mediterranean, entered in shipments of grain or in packing material	Throughout intermountain west; 17.5 million acres in ID & UT	Increases fire frequency and intensity on rangelands, degrades sagebrush & grassland habitats, problematic weed in wheat fields
Spotted knapweed	Plant	Europe	Throughout Idaho	Displaces native plants, reduces forage value, increases erosion
Leafy spurge	Plant	Eurasian, brought to U.S. in late 1800s	Found in nearly every county in Idaho	Irritant “latex” in plant causes blisters and blindness; reduces forage values
Yellow starthistle	Plant	Mediterranean region and Asia	500,000 acres in Idaho	Decreases rangeland value and poisons horses, outcompetes native plants
Balsam wooly adelgid	Insect	Europe, introduced in 1908	14,000 square miles in ID	Feeds on and destroys fir species
White pine blister rust	Fungus	Probably Asia, entered U.S. in 1910 on infected pine seedlings from Europe	Has impacted Western white pines through most of Idaho	The rust has reduced inland Northwest white pine stands by 90 to 95 percent. Only scattered remnants remain of Idaho's state tree.

Name	Type	Origin	Extent	Damage
Zebra mussel	Mollusk	Black sea and Aral Sea region of Asia, introduced to Great Lakes in 1986	Discovered last spring at the WA-ID border on a boat on a trailer	If established in Idaho, the zebra mussel could cause billions in damage, by damaging habitats, clogging power plant intake pipes, and damaging boat engines

## What Congress Can Do:

### A. Make Prevention Our Top Priority

- Reverse current U.S. policy on the intentional import of live plants and animals, that is, switch from a “dirty” to a “clean” list approach that requires screening for invasiveness before import and which keeps out or limits import of species so as to prevent harm to native species or ecosystems – and make the legislative changes to do so.
- Substantially cut the unintentional introduction of aquatic invaders by overseeing federal standard-setting on the discharge of ballast water in the United States, supporting the development of technology to meet these standards; ensuring that agencies monitor and enforce compliance; and reauthorizing the 1996 National Invasive Species Act in the strongest and most comprehensive form.
- When considering, reviewing, or approving trade agreements, rigorously address invasive species, e.g., by allowing for restriction of imports of non-native species that are invasive elsewhere and by identifying pathways by which inadvertent introductions travel so that they may be interrupted.

### B. Make Federal Agencies More Effective

- Use oversight authority to ensure that all federal agencies immediately and strongly implement that part of Executive Order 13112 that asks them to identify and reduce actions that introduce or spread invasive species in the United States or elsewhere.
- Appropriate adequate funds so that federal agencies have the resources to address invasive species problems promptly and comprehensively over the long-term.
- Strengthen the structure and leadership of the National Invasive Species Council and prompt more aggressive implementation of its National Management Plan.
- Oversee the work of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service to ensure that the agency and its Administrator are committed to protecting biological diversity as well as agriculture.
- Evaluate the serious problems with border inspection for pests, weeds, and pathogens, e.g., in staffing and cross-department coordination, exacerbated by moving these functions into the Department of Homeland Security and amend its authorizing legislation if needed.

## References:

Idaho’s Noxious Weeds <http://www.oneplan.org/Crop/noxWeeds/nxWeed00.htm>

Idaho Strategic Plan for Managing Noxious Weeds: <http://www.agri.state.id.us/PDF/Animal/Strategic%20Plan.pdf>

Preparing to Meet the Challenge: An Assessment of Invasive Species Management in Idaho

[http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/wildlife/plans/invasive\\_species/invasive\\_species.pdf](http://fishandgame.idaho.gov/wildlife/plans/invasive_species/invasive_species.pdf)

Idaho Forest Products: Western White Pine. <http://www.idahoforests.org/whitpine.htm>

Westbrooks, R. 1998. Invasive Plants, Changing the Landscape of America: Fact Book. Federal Interagency Committee for the Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds (FICMNEW), Washington, DC, 109 pp.

Zebra mussels discovered at Washington-Idaho border, News release, May 25, 2004.

<http://www.biodiversitypartners.org/state/wa/zebra.shtml>

R.L. Livingston, J.E. Dewey, D.P. Beckman, and L.E. Stipe. Distribution of the Balsam Woolly Adelgid in Idaho. West. J. Appl. For. 15(4):227—231

*For more information, please contact Aimee Delach at Defenders of Wildlife  
202-682-9400 x271 ♦ [adelach@defenders.org](mailto:adelach@defenders.org)*