

INVASIVE SPECIES IN WASHINGTON

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.



Citrus Longhorned Beetle
Washington State Department of Agriculture

- 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.
- Invasive species like Spartina, oyster drills and green crabs pose a major threat to Washington’s \$73 million per year shellfish industry, which employs about 2,000 people.

Invasive Species in Washington: A Quick Look

Washington 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
Cheatgrass	Plant	Mediterranean, entered in shipments of grain or in packing material	Throughout intermountain west	Increases fire frequency and intensity on rangelands, degrades sagebrush & grassland habitats, problematic weed in wheat fields
Leafy Spurge	Plant	Eurasian, brought to U.S. in late 1800s	Found in 18 counties in WA	Irritant “latex” in plant causes blisters and blindness; cattle will not graze in areas with >20% cover by spurge.
Yellow starthistle	Plant	Mediterranean region and Asia	133,000 acres in WA	Decreases rangeland value and poisons horses, outcompetes native plants
English Ivy	Vine	Native to temperate Europe and Asia, first documented in North America 1727 as an ornamental	Infests city parks and forests, and Olympic National Park, where 2100 pounds was pulled from a single tree.	Chokes out native plants and tree seedlings, smothers large trees, provides poorer wildlife habitat than the species it replaces, can damage buildings and increase erosion on slopes.
Spartina (cordgrass)	Aquatic grass	Native to the East Coast and South America, varieties arrived accidentally and were intentionally planted from 1800s to 1960s	Infests 8,500 acres of Washington’s marine intertidal areas	Disrupts estuaries by outcompeting native plants that provide habitat for birds, shellfish and other organisms;

Name	Type	Origin	Extent	Damage
Citrus longhorned beetle	Insect	Korea, entered on a shipment of bonsai trees in 2001	1,000 trees in Tukwila have been destroyed to prevent permanent establishment of the beetle	Citrus longhorned beetle could kill maple, willow, oak and fruit trees, and has been called “one of the worst non-native pests to ever enter the United States”

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.

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