

WASHINGTON INVASIVE SPECIES COUNCIL

2015

Annual Report to the Legislature



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Administrative services are provided by the Recreation and Conservation Office.

THE WASHINGTON INVASIVE SPECIES COUNCIL

The Washington Invasive Species Council was established by the Legislature in 2006 to reduce risks to Washington's economy and ecosystems. The Invasive Species Council is a partnership of local, tribal, state, and federal governments, as well as private sector and nongovernmental interests. The council provides policy-level direction, planning, and coordination support to the various public and private entities managing invasive species prevention and response throughout Washington State. In 2011, the Washington State Legislature voted unanimously to continue the council for 6 more years¹ with a sunset date of June 2017.

The council develops and maintains various tools critical to the management of invasive species in Washington State. The council writes and implements the statewide invasive species strategic plan, maintains the state's Top 50 list of priority invasive species, manages the state's invasive species reporting system, and maintains the state's education Web site (wise.wa.gov).

In 2008, the council adopted its first strategic plan – *Invaders at the Gate* – which identified five critical actions needed to protect Washington's natural resources and economic interests from invasive species. These include:

1. Determine the breadth and depth of the invasive species threat and use that information **strategically to target resources** where they are most needed and effective.
2. Improve the capability to **prevent** new infestations and **act quickly and decisively** upon **discovering new threats**.
3. Establish clear, statewide **priorities** for action.
4. Strengthen **control** efforts for established infestations.
5. **Communicate** the gravity of invasive species and, in doing so, change opinions and behaviors.

This report summarizes the work of the council in 2015 and our progress in achieving the above critical actions.

¹Revised Code of Washington [79A.25.310](#)

2015 COUNCIL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

2015 was a very productive year for the council. We updated our strategic plan, secured federal funding for invasive species management, and partnered with our member agencies to initiate some exciting new projects. We began leading an advisory committee to search for long-term funding for aquatic invasive species management, began work to reauthorize the council for another 6 years, and launched updates to our invasive species reporting system. Education and outreach continued to be an important part of our work this year, with staff participating in numerous outreach events and speaking engagements in 2015. Included below are just a few of the things we accomplished this year.

Prevention and Rapid Response

In 2015, the council's project work was very focused on prevention. Preventing the spread of invasive species is the least costly and most effective means of reducing risk from invasive species. Prevention eliminates the need for costly emergency action, application of chemicals, and harmful impacts on native species and ecosystems. We have made a lot of progress in learning how invasive species arrive here and the most effective ways to limit their access into our state. In 2015, the council worked hard to reach out to high-risk user groups as well as the general public to increase their awareness and support for invasive species management and prevention. We continued to develop creative communication tools to reach various audiences. The council also continued to prepare the state for introductions of especially harmful species by beginning work on an interagency feral swine response plan.

Institutionalizing Prevention within State Agencies

Invasive species can be easily spread on restoration or construction sites by moving contaminated materials and equipment. The state has many employees and contractors who are at risk of spreading invasive species from site to site. With this in mind, the council worked with its member agencies to get language that requires decontamination of gear and reduces the spread of invasive species on state-funded project sites into various policy and contracting documents. The council was successful in getting language into the Department of Natural Resource's *State Trails Policy* as well as in all of the Recreation and Conservation Offices' grant policy manuals. The council also is in the process of developing decontamination protocols to be included in the Department of Fish and Wildlife's Hydraulic Project Approvals along with the Department of Transportation's Standard Specifications.

Clean, Drain, Dry Outreach and Prevention Campaign



In an effort to educate boaters on how to keep our waters clean of invasive species, the council purchased two large stencils that read "Stop Invasive Species Clean, Drain, and Dry your Boat." The goal of this messaging is to remind boaters and other lake-users of the simple steps they can take to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species. On April 16, the council teamed up with the Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Ecology, and Department of Transportation to paint the message on the Lake Washington boat ramp in Kenmore. The group went back the following week to survey boaters to see if the

messaging increased invasive species awareness and clearly stated the steps that can be taken to prevent the spread of invasive species. The survey showed that the stencil was an effective outreach tool and that it was recognized and supported by the boating community. Over the course of the 2015 summer, the stencil was used by various local government entities and state agencies and the message was painted on boat launches statewide.

Promoting Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Capacity

During the 2015 Session, the Washington State Legislature requested that the Washington Invasive Species Council conduct an advisory committee process to develop recommendations on long-term funding mechanisms for aquatic invasive species management and prevention in Washington State. The council established a list of stakeholders for the committee, hired a facilitator, and helped to develop a charter for the group. The committee includes members from various industries including recreational boating, commercial shipping, and aquaculture, as well as local government, tribal government, power producers, irrigators, and environmental groups. The advisory committee held monthly meetings from September 2015 to January 2016 and is working to develop recommendations to be incorporated into a funding package for the 2017 legislative session.

Promoting Invasive Species Awareness in Washington Schools

Using federal funds, the council provided a grant to the Pacific Education Institute (PEI), to continue work to eliminate the release of invasive species from school science kits and to keep invasive species an important topic in Washington classrooms. PEI worked with educational service districts along with the Northwest Leadership and Assistance for Science Education Reform (LASER) to bring education tools focused on invasive species to teachers for use in their classrooms. They provided five training sessions reaching more than 300 teachers during the summer and fall of 2015. PEI also worked to develop citizen science curriculum for student field-based study. This curriculum helps students learn how to use the WA Invasives app to learn about and report invasive species in Washington State.

Additionally, the council provided presentations on invasive species to kindergarten through high schools and university classes and developed an exam on invasive species for the "Science Olympiad" science competition, reaching more than 400 Washington students.

Strengthen Federal Policy on Invasive Species

This year, the council continued to work closely with partners from other western states and regional organizations to highlight the need for federal support for our aquatic invasive species prevention efforts in the Northwest. This hard work resulted in the inclusion of language in the Water Resources Reform and Development Act authorizing the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to appropriate \$4 million to prevent the spread of zebra and quagga mussels in the Columbia River basin. This is an important step in protecting our state and federal investments from this particularly devastating invasive species. The funding will be used to boost the Northwest states' watercraft inspection programs – in order to catch boats traveling into our state from infested water bodies.

The council also worked with the National Invasive Species Advisory Committee to help develop a framework for a national early detection and rapid response program as a part of a larger initiative to enhance climate resilience of America's natural resources. The workgroup had members from state agencies, federal agencies, state invasive species councils, industry, and research institutions. The group developed a draft plan that is being reviewed by the National Invasive Species Advisory Committee.

Rapid Response Planning

In 2014, the council developed and released the much needed *Washington Dreissenid Mussel Rapid Response Plan*. That report received such good feedback that we decided that it would be useful to develop a similar report for feral swine. Feral swine are not known to be established yet in Washington but populations have become established in Oregon and Idaho and are causing serious harm to agricultural production as well as vulnerable native habitats. In 2015, the council convened a group of managers from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, and Washington Department of Agriculture to begin developing the plan. The interagency team developed a draft plan that identifies the roles and responsibilities of each agency in responding to feral swine. It describes the steps that need to be taken in the case of a feral swine introduction. The final report is expected to be adopted by the council in 2016.

Distribution and Early Detection

When the council was formed in 2006, we were asked many big picture questions such as “What invasive species are in Washington? Where are they? What impacts are they having? How are they moving around? Who is managing them and how effective is management?” The council has done extensive work to answer these questions, but there is still a lot that remains unknown. In 2015, the council began searching for federal funding to expand invasive species monitoring and early detection capabilities in the state to build our baseline data and make management as effective and efficient as possible. Additionally, to better engage the public in the early detection of priority invasive species, we did the following:

- Assisted citizen scientists engaged in monitoring for green crab in the Puget Sound.
- Conducted a Web training module for master gardeners on identification and reporting of common nursery pests.
- Participated in a training for arborists and forest landowners monitoring for invasive insects.

- Provided training on the WA Invasives app to various groups as a tool for early detection reporting.

Collect Baseline Data on Invasive Species

In 2014, the council completed a baseline assessment of the distribution of priority invasive species in the Puget Sound. This project provided us with a better understanding of what invasive species are present in the Puget Sound basin, how far they have spread, how well they have established, and whether management action is being taken. These data are critical for managers to prioritize actions and avoid overlapping management.

In 2015, the council began searching for funding to expand that study to the rest of Washington State. The council assisted the Great Northern Landscape Conservation Cooperative Columbia River Partnership (a regional collaborative aimed at promoting landscape-scale conservation and resource resilience in the face of climate change) to develop a large scale monitoring proposal that would gather information on critical limiting factors in the Columbia River basin including invasive species, toxics, and climate change. If funded in 2016, this proposal will use the council’s baseline assessment structure to gather information on invasive species distribution in the Columbia River basin.



Promoting the WA Invasives App

The new and improved WA Invasives App was released in March 2015. The new app includes updated data from state agencies, cities, and counties, and additional species and information on their biology and identification. A Web application also was developed so managers can access the data from the app and see what species are being found in their jurisdictions.

After the release of the new app, the council quickly got to work on promoting it to increase its use. The council has been promoting the app through presentations to various groups – recreationalists, community groups, classrooms, etc. We hope to see use of the app increase and our data on the distribution of invasive species in Washington State become more robust. The council also is in discussions with the Oregon Invasive Species Council about broadening the app to include both states. This partnership would allow for more data to be gathered and the states to share the cost of annual maintenance.

Establishing Statewide Priorities

Updating the State Strategy for Invasive Species

In 2008, the council adopted our first statewide strategic plan – *Invaders at the Gate*. This first plan was developed with extensive public input. The council hosted public forums throughout the state to gather ideas and priorities from various stakeholders and the public. While many of the critical elements in that original plan remain relevant, we have made so much progress implementing the

priority actions since 2008 that the council felt it was time to set some new goals for future work. The council collected ideas from member agencies and stakeholder groups in early 2015 and held a strategic planning session in June 2015. Priorities were written and refined during the summer of 2015 and a draft plan was released for public comment on September 28, 2015.

The revised plan provides new priorities and policy direction and formalizes the council’s commitment to working towards the common goal of preventing the introduction and spread of invasive species in Washington State. The 2015 strategic plan identifies 14 objectives and 29 specific actions within 5 major areas of work: Leadership and coordination, education and outreach, prevention, early detection and rapid response, as well as containment, eradication, and control. The final plan will be released to the public and provided to the Legislature in early 2016.

Communications and Outreach

The council believes that making investments in prevention reduce the State’s risk of paying a steep price in the future. The first step in invasive species prevention is raising awareness of the impacts caused by invasive species. In 2015, the council began tracking our public outreach efforts with a goal of increasing outreach to reach more than 1,000 people a year. We far exceeded this goal by reaching more than 3,000 people through direct communication this year; more than 400 students, more than 300 teachers, more than 100 citizen scientists, and more than 2,500 people at trade shows and other outreach events (boat shows, marine expos, beach cleanups, festivals, and fairs, etc.). These numbers don’t include the many members of the public we reach through our Web site, Facebook page, and WA Invasives app. See a list (below) of the outreach events our members and partners participated in in 2015.



Table 1. Council 2015 Outreach Events

Date	Show
8-9 May 2015	Northwest Paddling Festival
20-21 June 2015	Olympia Gold and Treasure Show
26 June 2015	Northwest Youth Conservation Fly Fishing Academy
TBD August 2015	Cabela's Fall Great Outdoor Days
11-27 Sept. 2015	Puyallup Fair
Sept.15-17 2015	Wenatchee Salmon Festival
18-20 Nov. 2015	Pacific Marine Expo
13-17 Jan. 2016	Portland Boat Show
27-31 Jan. 2016	WA Sportsman’s Show
29 Jan. – 6 Feb. 2016	Seattle Boat Show

In 2015, the council also conducted outreach to the Washington State Legislature and Northwest congressional members and staff. We visited Washington D.C. in February 2015 for National Invasive Species Awareness Week and spoke with congressional members and their staff about priority invasive species policy. The council also provided a presentation to the Washington State Senate

Natural Resources & Parks Committee in June 2015, highlighting some of the great work of the council, our members, and partners.

Evaluating the Cost of Invasive Species in Washington

Invasive plants and animals are significantly impacting Washington's landscape, ecosystems, agricultural production, development, commerce, and recreation. Though the adverse impacts of invasive species are well documented qualitatively, there has been little effort to date to quantify the impacts of invasive species on Washington's economy. This information is critically important to evaluating the costs and benefits associated with managing and preventing the spread of invasive species throughout the state.

In early 2015, the council worked with the Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board to convene an interagency team with representatives from the Departments of Agriculture, Transportation, Ecology, Fish and Wildlife, and Natural Resources. The economic analysis will focus on the impacts of the 17 most harmful invasive species in the state and will be funded jointly by the interagency team. The report should be released during the spring of 2016.

Hosting a Regional Conference on New Zealand Mud Snails

The council planned and hosted a two-day New Zealand Mud Snail Conference in Seattle in June 2015. The conference drew participants from all over the Northwest and was focused on discussing the latest research and management tools for the New Zealand mud snail. The conference was designed to spark regional dialogue about the future management of New Zealand mud snails. During the first day of the conference the group reviewed regional research and management outcomes, which lead into a discussion and re-evaluation of New Zealand mud snail impacts and management needs. During the second day of the conference, the group worked to develop regional guidance on the future of New Zealand mud snail management and set some priorities for regional management efforts. As a result of the meeting, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working to develop a regional New Zealand mud snail resource manual that includes information on best available science, effective management techniques, decontamination protocols, and management resources.

Thinking and Working as a Region

In 2015, the council continued to work closely with the Oregon, Idaho, and Montana invasive species councils on several regional invasive species initiatives, including a campaign targeted at reducing the occurrence of illegal introductions of invasive species through bucket biology and the pet trade. The council is also a member of the Pacific Northwest Economic Region Invasive Species Working Group, whose mission is to address the regional economic and environmental impact of invasive species and promote regional collaboration and sharing of best practices. In 2015, the working group accomplished several things including a framework for regional defense against dreissenid mussels, outreach on priority invasive species to border inspectors, and outreach to state and national policy makers.

THE COUNCIL IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The council continues to foster strategic, unified, and coordinated approaches to minimize the harmful effects of invasive species. In 2016, we look forward to releasing our updated strategic plan, reauthorizing the council for another 6-year term, and promoting our draft recommendations on funding for aquatic invasive species management. Additionally, the council hopes to increase our outreach efforts even further in 2016 and reach more than 5,000 individuals regarding invasive species, increasing awareness and prevention as well as our state's early detection capabilities.