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State Launches Hotline, Web Site to Report Invasive Species Sightings

OLYMPIA – The Washington State Invasive Species Council announced today the launch of a hotline and Web site for people to report sightings of invasive species.

Invasive species are plants and animals that are not native to Washington and can crowd out local wildlife and plants, destroying entire landscapes. From ivy choking city parks, to Spartina filling estuaries, to apple maggots infesting orchards, invasive species cost Washington millions of dollars to control every year.

“Invasive species can devastate our native plants and animals,” said Chris Christopher, chair of the Washington Invasive Species Council. “If left unchecked, they can change how Washington looks and what wildlife lives here, and devastate farming, fishing and other businesses that depend on this state’s natural resources. They also can affect where and how people can recreate in the state’s lakes, rivers and Puget Sound.”

The creation of the hotline, 1-877-9-INFEST, is one of a series of actions being taken by the Invasive Species Council and its partners to combat invasive species. The council also has revamped its Web site at www.invasivespecies.wa.gov and created posters in state parks and other materials to help educate the public about what they can do to help stop invasions.

“We hope this telephone number and Web site will encourage citizens, gardeners, boaters, hikers, and others who are outdoors to tell us when they spot an invasive species so we can stop it before it has a chance to spread,” Christopher said.

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People are encouraged to call the hotline or report online if they see a new plant, insect or animal in their neighborhood or know of someone smuggling plants into the country or releasing pets, such as snakes or aquarium fish, into a stream or park. To learn more about what plants and animals might be invasive, the council's Web site at www.invasivespecies.wa.gov has photographs and stories about invasive species as well as links to many resources for combating their spread.

In Washington, state agencies and academic institutions spend an estimated \$28 million every two years to control and prevent the spread of invasive species. In the United States, nearly half of the 958 species of plants and animals listed as threatened or endangered under the federal Endangered Species Act are at risk primarily because non-native species out compete them for food or eat them.

In addition to the hotline, the council recently received a \$221,000 grant from the Environmental Protection Agency, through the Puget Sound Partnership, to address invasive species in Puget Sound. With the grant, the council will:

- Identify the extent and impact of invasive species in Puget Sound and the gaps in protection so that agencies can better target future efforts. The council will create a database showing the extent of invasive species and maps to show existing efforts and gaps, and make the information available online to the public.
- Educate the public on the damage caused by invasive species and the role people can play in prevention.

“There are many successful programs to combat invasive species,” Christopher said. “But there is no system in place to tell us where the species are statewide, how well we are preventing their spread, whether the investments are cost-effective, and which species we should be targeting. Without that information, state leaders can’t make strategic choices about where to invest limited funding and staff time. This grant will allow us to develop that strategic vision for the Puget Sound area as a start.”

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