



# Alaska Region Invasive Species News

May - June 2007

## Privileged or Precarious?

Is Alaska privileged by (so far) having fewer invaders than most States, or poised precariously at a tipping point where climate change, a growing role as a center of global commerce, and new infrastructure development could spark a wave of ecologically, economically and culturally harmful invasions? Are we prepared?

These questions trouble many groups in Alaska, but until recently we have had no unifying forum to share our concerns and organize our collective expertise for the full breadth of potential Alaska invaders. That is changing. With the direct help of the Cooperative Extension Service, EPA and others, the Alaska Region of the Service hosted a formational workshop in the Spring of 2006 and by last Fall had joined over 20 state, federal, tribal, and citizen-based entities to create the Alaska Invasive Species Working Group (AISWG).



Future AISWG partners gather in one of the breakout sessions at the FWS-hosted workshop.

Bonnie Harper-Lowe/FHA

AISWG cooperators are already working actively on improving communication by maintaining a listserv and website (<http://www.alaskainvasives.org>), enabling collaboration through monthly information sharing conference calls, and organizing a professional conference to enhance our collective expertise.

AISWG is set to host a first ever all-taxa (from fungi to foxes) statewide invasive species conference in Fairbanks in the Fall of 2007. For more information on the conference, contact AISWG through the UAF

Cooperative Extension Service at either [ffmah@uaf.edu](mailto:ffmah@uaf.edu) or [fndmj@uaf.edu](mailto:fndmj@uaf.edu).

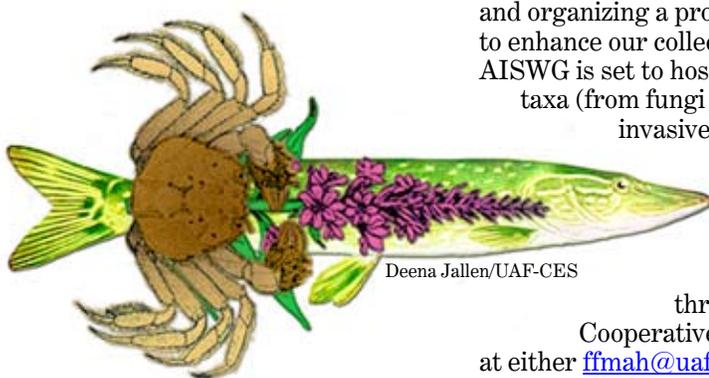
AISWG member organizations are also in the midst of reviewing their respective jurisdictional authorities for invasive species management to better understand how these authorities can be used and improved in a complementary way. For example, State of Alaska agencies, reflecting rising citizen concern, have recently taken some positive steps and worked effectively through the AISWG network to improve

management of such invasive species as rats, freshwater fish (non-native pike), and detrimental plant species (purple loosestrife and orange hawkweed). Another highly collaborative effort is shaping up under the aegis of the AISWG to organize a citizen-based coastal invasive species monitoring network – but that will be the subject of a future ARIS News story!

All of this effort to improve collaboration is important. However, Alaska remains the only West Coast state that does not have a formal all-inclusive statewide invasive species council. That is why one of the key goals of the AISWG is to help the State of Alaska establish an Alaska Invasive Species Council with a formal structure for the continued long-term collaboration, cooperation and communication that the AISWG has begun.

*“...Idaho’s programs have been likened to a “patchwork quilt”, where each “patch” represents an individual program or effort. So long as the patches connect, the quilt is useful, but if they do not, then there are gaps in the coverage through which undesirable species can enter.”*

Idaho Action Plan for Invasive Species



Deena Jallen/UAF-CES

*The logo of the AISWG, highlights three species of major concern (northern pike, purple loosestrife, and mitten crabs), and resembles a sword -- to take up battle against invasives!*

The mission of the AISWG is to minimize invasive species impacts in Alaska by facilitating collaboration, cooperation and communication among AISWG members and the people of Alaska.

## Red and Arctic Foxes (on Aleutian Islands)

Red and arctic foxes are native to Alaska and occur naturally on some Alaskan islands. However, both species of foxes were introduced to more than 400 islands by fur merchants. This practice began during Alaska's Russian period, but continued and became more widespread during the territorial days. The cumulative impact from this practice was a loss of more than a million acres of pristine Aleutian island breeding and nesting habitat for seabirds, shorebirds, and waterfowl.

The Service began eradicating introduced foxes from uninhabited refuge islands in 1949. The program of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge continues today with more than 40 islands (more than a million acres) restored to their original fox-free status.

The Aleutian cackling Canada goose was once reduced to only a few fox-



Robin West/USFWS

Red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*)

free Aleutian Islands and listed as an endangered species, but was successfully reintroduced to some islands after fox eradication. This invasive species eradication and island restoration effort helped achieve full recovery of this unique goose and enabled its removal from the endangered species list.

The fox eradication project is one part of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge's effort to eradicate invasive species to restore island ecosystems and their natural biodiversity.



Brian Anderson/USFWS

Arctic fox (*Alopex lagopus*)

*This profile was abstracted from material provided by Steve Ebbert of the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge. For more information, visit these AMNWR web pages:*

<http://alaskamaritime.fws.gov/wildlife-wildlands/wildlife/nonnative/alien.htm>

<http://alaskamaritime.fws.gov/whatwedo/bioprojects/restorebiodiversity/restoremain.htm>

## Reed Canary Grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*)



Jamie Nielsen/UAF-CES

Over time, it forms dense single species stands that are of little use to wildlife. Once a foothold is established, reed canary grass can build up a huge seed bank that can eventually erupt, germinate, and even re-colonize treated sites.

Initially introduced as a superior forage base that could outperform North American varieties, the Eurasian variety of reed canary grass is more aggressive and has proven difficult to control.

Reed canary grass is ranked as the fourth most invasive plant species currently in Alaska (see Alaska Natural Heritage Program link below).

A "cool-season, sod-forming, perennial wetland grass" (see Wisconsin DNR link below), reed canary grass can grow to over 2 meters tall and spread aggressively by seed or creeping rhizomes.

Seeds can disperse from one wetland to another by waterways, animals, humans, or machines. In fact, initial invasion is often linked to wetland or wet forest disturbances like ditching, stream channelization, and deforestation projects.

Reed canary grass has invaded southeast and south-central Alaska. Fortunately, the recently formed Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management Area is developing a management program for reed canary grass infestations. For more information on this effort, contact Caleb Slemmons of the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District ([caleb@homerswcd.org](mailto:caleb@homerswcd.org)).

*Much of this information was abstracted from these sources:*

<http://aknhp.uaa.alaska.edu>

(Alaska Natural Heritage Program)

[http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/invasives/fact/reed\\_canary.htm](http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/invasives/fact/reed_canary.htm)

(Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources)

<http://www.cnipm.org>

(Alaska Committee for Noxious & Invasive Plants Mgt.)

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