



Alaska Region Invasive Species News

October - November 2006

Pull Together – and Pull Soon!

“Dithering and endangering are often linked.” (Soulé 1986)

When we hear about “invaders,” we may imagine the danger these interlopers pose is obvious and immediate. However, newly introduced species may not become invasive for decades after they arrive. In 1993, biologist W. R. Courtenay warned that “every introduction must be viewed as a potential biological ‘time bomb’ waiting to explode.” A national review of invasive species risks and management approaches (OTA 1993) adds that “rapid response is essential.”

In this story, Alaskans are literally pulling together and pulling soon -- no dithering here!

Purple loosestrife, with its beautiful flowered stalk, had been known in Alaska for years, but was not considered invasive because it had not (yet) spread beyond cultivation. That all changed with news that Alaska’s first ever feral population of this plant had been discovered in an Anchorage stream.

Whether its newfound ability to spread to the wild was the result of the introduction of a new cultivar or local adaptation and global climate change, a new and potentially damaging invasion had begun. An initial weed pull was organized less than a week later, and this Fall, partners from girl scouts to gardeners, and from the Extension Service to the extended state and federal family of conservation agencies all “pulled together” with the Municipality of Anchorage to try to halt the invasion before its impact spread to



Laura L. Whitehouse/USFWS

FWS Regional Director, Tom Melius, congratulates the Girl Scouts as they proudly display their hard earned “Invasive Species” patches.



Alaska’s critically important wetlands.

studied the value of biodiversity, and learned about some Alaska-specific threats from invasive species, while earning their Invasive Species Patch (which features purple loosestrife!).

The purple loosestrife pull this past September was the signature event

for the “Citizen Weeds Warriors” campaign, a collaborative venture funded by two Service programs (Coastal Program & Aquatic Nuisance Species Program) and organized and carried out through the Anchorage Parks Foundation. This citizen-based campaign resulted in more than 100 volunteers putting in over 200 hours of labor, and collecting more than 120 bags of invasive plants.

Regional Director Tom Melius and Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich combined to present these future conservation leaders with their patches at a special event held immediately before the annual meeting of Alaska’s leading professional forum for invasive plant concerns, the Alaska Committee for Noxious and Invasive Plants Management (CNIPM, aka “snip’em!”).

References:

Courtenay, W. R. 1993. Biological pollution through fish introductions. pp. 35-61. In: Biological Pollution: the control and impact of invasive exotic species. B. N. McKnight (Ed.) Indiana Academy of Science, Indiana.

Girl Scouts who helped with the pull also



Corlene Rose, UAF/CES

Girl Scouts take to the water to help stop the purple loosestrife invasion.

Office of Technology Assessment (OTA, U. S. Congress). 1993. Harmful non-indigenous species in the United States. OTA-F-565. GPO, Washington, DC.

Soulé, M. E. 1986. Conservation biology: the science of scarcity and diversity. Sinauer Associates, Sunderland, MA

Highlighted Species

Chinese Mitten Crab (*Eriocheir sinensis*)



This new menace to the West Coast threatens flood protection, agricultural production, fish passage, salmon production, and coastal river systems across the United States.

The mitten crab, named for its furry claws, lives in freshwater and migrates to estuaries to spawn. First seen in California in 1992, its population has boomed and its range is expanding. Millions of migrating mitten crabs clog irrigation systems and fish passage facilities, and their burrows weaken levees and increase bank erosion. Another scary observation, particularly for Alaska, is that mitten crabs can feed directly on eggs in the redds (nests) of spawning salmon.

In their native range, mitten crabs (particularly their eggs) are considered something of a delicacy – but they can be hazardous to your health! Persistent spitting of blood, chest pain, breathlessness, brain lesions, lung cysts, and partial paralysis are just some of the potential symptoms of Paragonimiasis – the disease caused by eating live lung flukes in raw or partially-cooked mitten crabs.

Mitten crabs have not yet reached Alaska, but a recent PhD project by Erik Hanson of Portland State University warns that Alaska’s estuaries have suitable habitat and “if water temperatures rise due to climate change, many Alaskan estuaries would be at risk.”

If you catch a mitten crab in Alaska, do not throw it back alive! Preserve it in rubbing alcohol or freeze it, note the precise location, and contact the Invasive Species Coordinator for either the USFWS (907-786-3813) or the Alaska Department of Fish and Game at their toll free number: 1-877-INVASIV (1-877-468-2748).

For more information on mitten crabs, visit these links:

http://www.iisgcp.org/EXOTICSP/Chinese_Mitten_Crab.htm
(Sea Grant -- Exotic Aquatics on the Move website)

<http://anastaskforce.gov/control.php>
(Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force, national management plan for Chinese mitten crab [and other species]).

Japanese Knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*)



Britt Slattery/USFWS

Japanese knotweed is ranked as the most invasive plant species currently in Alaska (see Alaska Natural Heritage Program link below).

Introduced to the U.S. in the late 1800s, it has been used as an ornamental, as a fodder plant, and for landscape screening and erosion control. In Alaska, invasions

are currently known in the Tongass National Forest, along roads in Southeast Alaska, and in Anchorage, where it may have escaped from gardens (see map and keys to identification at AKNHP website listed below).

This invader threatens native plants and wildlife, particularly in riverbank habitats, where it forms dense monocultures and shades out all other plants; alters the quality and quantity of food that enters a stream from its banks; restricts access for native animals; and even blocks angler access – a very unhappy circumstance!

It can spread by cuttings or pieces of rhizome, whether as cultivated plants or garden discards. It can also spread by washing downstream after floods. Road work or redevelopment (e.g., in contaminated fill dirt) can also move it.

Japanese knotweed is difficult to eradicate. Hand pulling can work in some situations, but any portion not removed may resprout. Double bag and landfill any pulled plants. Because it often occurs near water, herbicidal treatments must be done with caution. However, some success is being achieved in the Northwest using a labor intensive “cut stem application” method.

For more information (& fun), visit these links:

<http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/plants/knotweed.shtml>
(National Invasive Species Council, Information Center)

<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/pocu1.htm>
(Plant Conservation Alliance, Alien Plant Working Group)

<http://aknhp.uaa.alaska.edu>
(Alaska Natural Heritage Program)

<http://www.cnipm.org>
(Alaska Committee for Noxious & Invasive Plants Mgt.)

<http://tncweeds.ucdavis.edu/products/outreach/knotweed.mp4>
(Whateom County Noxious Weed Board PSA – scary!)

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