

# INVASIVE SPECIES IN ALASKA

## 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.



Japanese Knotweed in southeastern AK  
(UAF – Cooperative Extension)

- 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 in Alaska: A Quick Look

Alaska 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
Garlic mustard	Weed	Europe; brought by settlers as a vitamin-rich winter herb	Serious weed in much of northern U.S.; found in SE AK	Grows earlier in spring than native plants, allowing it to dominate forest understory and crowd out natives
Reed Canarygrass	Wetland plant	Europe; introduced for hay and forage	Southern Alaska, Canada and all but SE portion of U.S.	Forms dense monocultures that reduces native species including plants and wildlife; may cause siltation in ditches and irrigation banks; increase human allergies
Japanese Knotweed	Weed	Asia; introduced as an ornamental plant	SE Alaska	Growth on streambanks limits flow and degrades salmon spawning grounds; chokes drainage ditches and damages pavement; outcompetes native vegetation
Orange hawkweed	Weed	Europe; introduced to U.S. before 1818, and Alaska in Juneau in 1950s as an ornamental	Southcentral and SE Alaska	Serious threat to riparian and wildlife areas due to dense patching behavior which outcompetes and displaces native vegetation and lowers biodiversity
Canada Thistle	Weed	Europe; introduced to Alaska in 1982 possibly in contaminated seed	Fairbanks and southcentral Alaska; recently introduced to SE Alaska	Densely packed colonies spread to displace native vegetation, degrade wildlife habitat, and compete with crops and pasture

Name	Type	Origin	Extent	Damage
Atlantic Salmon	Fish	British Columbia and Washington; escapees from fish farms	Found in streams near Cordova, Ketchikan, and Yakutat (and as far N as the Bering Sea)	Compete with native steelhead, cutthroat trout, Dolly Varden, and coho salmon and may adversely affect other species of Pacific salmon

## 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.

## References:

NPS Garlic Mustard Fact Sheet <http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/alpe1.htm>  
 Access WA Reed Canarygrass Factsheet <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/plants/weeds/aqua011.html>  
 Forest Health Protection Alaska Canada thistle Fact Sheet <http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/spf/fhp/>  
 Forest Health Protection Alaska Japanese Knotweed Fact Sheet <http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/spf/fhp/>  
 Forest Health Protection Alaska Orange Hawkweed Fact Sheet <http://www.fs.fed.us/r10/spf/fhp/>  
 State of Alaska Aquatic Nuisance Species Management Plan [http://www.anstaskforce.gov/AK-Final-ANS%20plan%20governor%2010-4%20final.htm#\\_Toc21225684](http://www.anstaskforce.gov/AK-Final-ANS%20plan%20governor%2010-4%20final.htm#_Toc21225684)  
 University of Alaska Fairbanks- Cooperative Extension Service, Invasive Plant Links of Interest. <http://www.uaf.edu/ces/ipm/plants/plantlinks.html>

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