

# INVASIVE SPECIES IN CALIFORNIA

## 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.

- 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.
- There are at least 212 introduced species in San Francisco Bay alone.



Giant Reed in Sequoia National Park (NPS)

## Invasive Species in California: A Quick Look

California 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
Giant reed	Grass	India; introduced in Los Angeles area in 1800s and widely planted	California to Texas and a few eastern states	Crowds out native plants in riparian areas, interferes with flood control, increases fire potential, and reduces habitat for wildlife, including the federally endangered Least Bell's vireo
Glassy-winged sharpshooter	Insect	Southeastern U.S.; probably entered CA on fruit or plants in 1990	Currently found in 9 counties in So. CA; many more at risk	Carries the bacteria which causes Pierce's disease, which has caused \$40 million in losses to California grapes
<i>Caulerpa taxifolia</i>	Marine Algae	Mediterranean Sea; probably introduced by dumping of aquarium contents into storm drain	Found in 2000 in San Diego and Orange Counties; eradication is underway	Forms a dense, smothering blanket that kills other underwater vegetation; has no value for fish, birds or wildlife, so creates underwater "wastelands"
Yellow Star Thistle	Weed	Introduced to U.S. in mid-1800s in contaminated alfalfa	Infests about 10 million acres, found in nearly every county in California	Chokes native plants, reducing biodiversity and wildlife habitat and forage; causes the often fatal "chewing disease" in horses
Sudden oak death	Fungus	Oak deaths first observed in 1995, pathogen isolated in 1999; origin unknown	Found in 14 coastal counties from Monterey to Humboldt	The pathogen has killed thousands of native oak and tanoak trees, and also infects many nursery species
Brown trout	Fish	Native to Europe and Scotland; introduced as a sport fish	Found in many rivers in the Sierra region in CA	Voracious predators on native trout, including the California golden trout, the state fish

Name	Type	Origin	Extent	Damage
European green crab	Crustacean	Europe and North Africa; arrived in San Francisco Bay in 1990	Established all along coastal CA north of San Francisco	Feeds on native clams, oysters, mussels & crabs

## 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:

California Department of Food and Agriculture, Pierce’s Disease page. <http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/phpps/pdcp/index.htm>

California Oak Mortality Task Force page. <http://www.suddenoakdeath.org/>

NPS Giant Reed Fact Sheet. <http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/ardo1.htm>

NPS Yellow Star Thistle Fact Sheet <http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/ceso1.htm>

Surviving Invasion, California Department of Fish and Game.

[http://www.dfg.ca.gov/hcpb/species/nuis\\_exo/invasiveoutdoorcal.pdf](http://www.dfg.ca.gov/hcpb/species/nuis_exo/invasiveoutdoorcal.pdf)

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