INVASIVE SPECIES IN TEXAS

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.

Invasive Species in Texas: A Quick Look

Texas 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
Saltcedar	Shrub/ Small tree	Asia, introduced as ornamental and windbreak in 1800s	Over 1 million acres of southwestern streambanks	Lowers stream flows and water tables, increases soil salinity, displaces native species and wildlife habitat
Fire Ant	Insect	South America; accidentally introduced to Alabama in 1930s	300 million acres of Southern U.S., including most of eastern Texas	Aggressive, multiple biter with painful venom and chance of allergy; may also damage fruits, berries and young crops; also damage electric boxes; ant mounds are a hazard to farm equipment.
Russian Olive	Shrub/ Small Tree	Germany; introduced to U.S. in late 1800s as an ornamental	Extends throughout western and central U.S.	Outcompetes native vegetation interferes with natural plant succession and nutrient cycling and taxes water reserves
West Nile Virus	Virus	Uganda, Africa; first appeared in TX in 2002	Throughout Texas (213 counties); spread through mosquitos	Human health hazard; a total of 202 serious cases and 13 deaths in humans as well as many affected horses and birds
Hydrilla	Aquatic Plant	Asia, Africa, Australia; introduced in the 1950s in the aquarium trade	Spread throughout SE U.S. and as far west as TX and CA	High reproductive potential thereby outcompeting native vegetation for resources; creates monoculture
Giant salvinia	Aquatic Fern	Coastal region of southern Brazil; discovered in SC in 1995 and TX in 1998	Texas, Louisiana, and southeast North Carolina	Forms dense mats which quickly grow to block out sunlight; uses up oxygen that aquatic animals need to survive

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Applesnails	Aquatic snail	Central and South America; introduced through pet trade, water garden stores (first discovered in 2000)	American Canal south of Houston in Galveston and Brazoria counties	Feeds aggressively on many types of aquatic and terrestrial plants, including commercial crops (Texas rice crop of particular concern)

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:

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Texas Dept. of Health West Nile Virus brochure http://www.tdh.state.tx.us/tdhtoday/wnvpkt.pdf

Western Aquatic Plant Management Society Hydrilla Fact Sheet http://www.wapms.org/plants/hydrilla.html

IISGCP Giant Salvinia Fact Sheet http://www.iisgcp.org/EXOTICSP/giantsalvinia.htm#origin

NPII "Applesnails in Texas Waters" http://cswgcin.nbii.org/issues/invasives/files/applesnail.pdf

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