

INVASIVE SPECIES IN WYOMING

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.
- Noxious weeds infest approximately 1.3 million acres of lands in Wyoming.
- Grazing losses from leafy spurge infestations in Wyoming, Montana, and the Dakotas amount to \$129 million and represent the potential loss of 1,433 jobs

Invasive Species in Wyoming: A Quick Look

Wyoming 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 |
|-------------------------|--------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Dalmatian toadflax | Plant | Central Europe and Asia, introduced as ornamental in 1800s | Present in all but two WY counties | Reduces forage value of infested rangelands, outcompetes native plants |
| Hoary cress | Plant | Eurasia, probably arrived in soil ballast in 1800s | Present in all but 1 WY county | Outcompetes native plants and is a serious agricultural weed |
| Spotted knapweed | Plant | Europe | Known to occur in all but one WY county | Displaces native plants, reduces forage and wildlife value, increases erosion |
| Leafy spurge | Plant | Eurasian, brought to U.S. in late 1800s | Covers 5 million acres in 35 states | Irritant "latex" in plant causes blisters and blindness; cattle will not graze in areas with >20% cover by spurge. |
| Canada thistle | Plant | Despite the name this thistle is native to Europe and Western Asia, introduced in 1600s | Found in every county in Wyoming – over 20,000 acres in some counties | Displaces native plants, and is considered unpalatable to livestock and detrimental to recreation because of its spines. |
| White pine blister rust | Fungus | Probably Asia, entered U.S. in 1910 on infected pine seedlings from Europe | Has damaged 46,000 acres of pine forests in Wyoming | The rust has reduced inland Northwest white pine stands by 90 to 95 percent. |

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| New Zealand mud snail | Mollusk | New Zealand, first discovered in Snake River in 1987 | Established in Bighorn River and every drainage in Yellowstone | The tiny snails can reach densities of 100,000 snails per square meter. Outcompete native wildlife and provide poor food source for fish. |

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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