

INVASIVE SPECIES IN FLORIDA

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.
- Florida has spent over **\$300 million** to control a single invasive species, the citrus canker.
- In fiscal year 1999-2000, nine Florida agencies spent **\$90.8 million** on prevention, monitoring, control, and restoration efforts.
- The annual cost of invasive plants, animals and diseases in losses to Florida's agriculture is estimated at **\$179 million**.

Invasive Species in Florida: A Quick Look

With its warm climate, multitude of habitats and bustling port cities, many people consider Florida to be a tropical paradise. Unfortunately, invasive species from around the world have also found Florida very welcoming. Here is a quick look at some of the worst invaders:

Name	Type	Origin	Extent	Damage
Brazilian Pepper	Shrub	Brazil & Paraguay; introduced in 19 th century	700,000 acres of Central & South Florida	Shades out other plants, toxic to wildlife, causes poison ivy-like reaction
Melaleuca	Tree	Australia; introduced 1906 for windbreaks, timber & landscaping	400,000 acres of South Florida	Displaces native plants, alters water flow in Everglades, oily leaves promote serious fires
Hydrilla	Aquatic plant	Africa & Southeast Asia; introduced in Tampa area as an ornamental in 1950s	50,000 acres; 140,000 acres of tubers that could still resprout	Clogs waterways, restricting recreation; kills other aquatic life by blocking sunlight and using oxygen; promotes mosquito breeding
Water hyacinth	Aquatic plant	South America; introduced in 1880s	120,000 acres in 1960s, reduced to 2000 acres	Kills fish by lowering oxygen in water; promotes mosquito breeding; blocks waterways and crowds out native species
Chinese tallow	Tree	China; introduced in 18 th century	38 counties in Northern & central Florida	Displaces native trees; falling leaves contribute to nutrient loading in streams; oily seeds toxic to cattle
Cane toad	Amphibian	Amazon basin to the Rio Grande Valley; introduced to FL accidentally in 1955	Spread via canals, found in 21 counties	Toxic secretions can kill pets or native predators; compete with native amphibians, eat insects

Name	Type	Origin	Extent	Damage
Cogon grass	Grass	Southeast Asia; introduced in 1920s and '30s for forage and soil stabilization	Roadsides, fields & woods in Central & North Florida	Displaces native plants; little food value for wildlife; creates severe fire hazards
Citrus canker	Bacteria	Southeastern Asia; first found in U.S. in 1910	11 Florida counties currently quarantined	Highly contagious disease that causes citrus trees to drop their leaves and fruit; 2.9 million trees have been destroyed

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:

Florida Department of Environmental Protection Weed Alert Pages,

<http://www.dep.state.fl.us/lands/invaspec/2ndlevpgs/wedalrt.htm>

Florida Invasive Species Strategic Plan:

http://ipm.ifas.ufl.edu/reports/FL_invasive_species_Strategic_Plan.pdf

Citrus Canker: The Threat To Florida’s Agriculture:

<http://www.doacs.state.fl.us/pi/canker/menu1.htm>

*For more information, please contact Aimee Delach at Defenders of Wildlife
202-682-9400 x271 t adelach@defenders.org*