

INVASIVE SPECIES IN UTAH

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 Utah: A Quick Look

Utah has been invaded by a number of harmful exotic species 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
Cheatgrass	Plant	Mediterranean, entered in shipments of grain or in packing material	Throughout intermountain west; 17.5 million acres in UT & ID	Increases fire frequency and intensity on rangelands, degrades sagebrush & grassland habitats, problematic weed in wheat fields
Yellow star thistle	Weed	Unintentionally introduced into California around 1850; spread through contaminated hay	15-22 million acres in CA, and throughout southwest	Can cause the fatal chewing disease in horses; forms dense stands that displaces native vegetation and therefore increases the likelihood of horses eating it
Camelthorn	Weed	Asia; most likely in contaminated seed	Most commonly found in irrigation ditches, waterways, and roadways	Hardy weed that spreads rapidly and has deep root system; may even grow through asphalt
Purple loosestrife	Wetland plant	Europe and Asia; introduced in 1800s as ornamental and medicinal plant or ship ballast water	Isolated communities found throughout Utah	Displaces native wetland plants; has less food and habitat value for waterfowl and other wildlife

Name	Type	Origin	Extent	Damage
Eurasian watermilfoil	Aquatic Plant	Eurasia; introduced as an aquarium plant	Otter Creek Reservoir and Fish Lake	Forms thick stranded dense mats which interfere with native vegetation and water recreational capabilities
Channel catfish	Fish	Eastern U.S.; introduced as a sport fish in 20 th century	Colorado River basin	Channel catfish and the 66 other introduced fish species in UT are a major threat to four species of endangered native 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.

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