

# Comprehensive Invasive Species Preparedness Strategy for Rhode Island (2006)

## Executive Summary

### Rhode Island Natural History Survey (RINHS)

**Opportunity:** Invasive species are plants, animals, or microorganisms reproducing outside their natural range to the detriment of ecologically or economically important natural resources such as species, ecosystems, or significant landscapes and/or human health. As global trade and transportation have increased so have introductions and invasions. Invasives are a direct threat to environmental stability in RI and hence to its economy and the health of its people.

Invasive species is one area where systematic monitoring, good communication, and coordinated response can prevent damage and save effort and money. RINHS's proposed Invasive Species Preparedness Strategy consists of a coordination system and data repository, collaboration with existing monitoring programs in-state and regionally, and creation of a sustainable invasive species rapid response capacity that involves ongoing communication and close coordination with appropriate public authorities, existing research capacity, and existing community organizations to maximize leverage and total impact.

**Plan:** RINHS's *Comprehensive Invasive Species Preparedness Strategy* recognizes that a coordinated program for detection, monitoring, and response to invasive species includes the following ten elements:

1. A recognized forum and *criteria for reviewing and prioritizing invasive species* threats.
2. A *long-term plan for monitoring* the state's ecosystems (terrestrial, freshwater, estuarine, and marine).
3. *Active collaboration and regular data exchange* with existing environmental monitoring efforts.
4. *Information technology resources* for acquiring, integrating, and assessing monitoring data and invasives sightings from any source, with a mechanism to ensure access to and timely dissemination of data and assessments to all pertinent parties.
5. A *system for "vouchering" (identifying and archiving) specimens*: people who can do field visits, identify specimens brought in, and/or get specimens to the appropriate taxonomic experts for verification, and a place to locate, gather, or properly house reference materials, including samples from the field. This becomes especially important when monitoring plans include volunteers, and when obscure taxa need to be reliably identified. Where introducing a species is a crime, or where introduction may result in claims for criminal or civil damages, specimens must be identified by recognized experts and handled according to the rules of evidence.
6. An *rapid response system* that brings appropriate resources to each event with designated lead agencies having enforcement powers.
7. *Review of existing or needed state and local statutory and regulatory tools* for invasive species prevention, early detection, and rapid response.
8. *Collaboration with industry/trade concerns*, regulatory agencies, and other decision makers to ensure that policies and regulations do not encourage, and are effective in preventing new introductions of potentially invasive species.
9. *Networking with regional and national invasive species programs*. Rhode Island could benefit from existing ideas, data, protocols, and first hand experience of other jurisdictions dealing with invasions.
10. *Public education and outreach* will be critical to the success of any invasive preparedness plan in Rhode Island. Through media releases, published outreach materials, seminars/workshops, and the internet, public engagement improves prevention, detection, and response.

This is only a proposal and its primary goal is to encourage strategic thinking about a problem that has widespread impact.