

Invasive Species in Rhode Island

Evaluating Current State Law in Light of Federal Support



Purple loosestrife



Lionfish



Multiflora rose

Stronger federal leadership is needed to protect Rhode Island from invasive species. The entire nation would benefit from such a change.

Invasive species—non-native plants, animals, and pathogens that cause harm to the environment, economy, or public health¹—are spread easily by global commerce, undermining the productivity of agriculture, forests, and fisheries and threatening the survival of native species and ecosystems. One Rhode Island nonprofit organization spent about **\$30,000** just to control terrestrial invasive plants in 2009, and plans to spend **\$350,000** in 2010 for the same purpose.²

Prevention Begins at Home

The states bear primary responsibility for avoiding, detecting, eradicating, and managing invasive species. As a result, state laws are integral components in a comprehensive and effective national policy.

The best way to solve invasive species problems is to prevent already- or potentially harmful non-native species from being introduced in the first place—by narrowing or closing off the pathways along which they enter the country and are spread by humans. These pathways can be geographic routes or corridors (like a canal or roadway), economic activities (like importing plants or pets), or transportation vectors (like ships' ballast water). Few states address all of these pathways, and some pathways (like international trade) are the sole responsibility of the federal government. Therefore the success of state efforts to prevent invasions depends partly on the effectiveness of federal policy. Similarly, state efforts can be helped or hindered by laws in neighboring states (where invaders may be causing problems or being successfully managed).

But there is much states *can* do on their own. To help point the way, the Environmental Law Institute (ELI) and the Union of Concerned Scientists have evaluated the effectiveness of invasive species laws in 11 states, revisiting an analysis conducted by ELI in 2002.³ We focused on six areas that experts agree are critical: 1) legal definitions, 2) statewide coordination, 3) prevention, 4) regulation, 5) control and management of invasions, and 6) enforcement and implementation of state policies.

How Rhode Island's Laws Compare

Rhode Island laws and regulations do not adequately prevent introductions of invasive species, detect invasions early, or respond to them rapidly (see the table). Like many states, Rhode Island does not address non-native biofuel crops or screen imported animals and plants, but it also lacks common preventative measures such as dedicated funding for detecting invasive species.

Since 2002, Rhode Island has changed some laws and regulations governing several types of invasive species. For example, the state has amended rules for wildlife possession and nuisance species and substantially strengthened quarantine and identification requirements governing animal diseases. An *ad hoc* interagency working group has completed an aquatic invasive species management plan; a new law targets non-native, freshwater aquatic plants; and a state biosecurity board helps prevent aquaculture facilities from spreading diseases and non-native species. Rhode Island has adopted provisions that address specific issues related to wildlife, aquatic life, and plant pests and diseases, but it has not significantly altered its provisions for plants that are invasive.

A Commitment Unfulfilled: Federal and State Efforts to Prevent Harm from Invasive Species

1. Prevent intentional introduction of potential invasive species	US	CA	CO	FL	LA	ME	MD	NJ	NM	OR	RI	TN
a. Require science-based risk screening for non-native plant species <i>Example: Colorado outlaws the use of introduced species in revegetation projects unless approved and demonstrated to be beneficial</i>	P	✓	✓	✓	-	P	-	-	-	-	-	-
b. Develop specific policies to govern non-native biofuel crop production <i>Example: Florida requires permits and financial bonds prior to planting</i>	-	-	-	✓	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
c. Require science-based pre-import risk screening for wildlife <i>Example: Maine considers five factors, including potential invasiveness, prior to issuing wildlife permits</i>	-	-	-	-	-	✓	-	-	✓	-	-	-
2. Minimize unintentional introduction of non-native species via known invasion pathways												
a. Require ballast treatment and address biofouling in commercial shipping <i>Example: Oregon outlaws ballast water discharge without treatment or exchange, requires vessels to report, and enables compliance inspections</i>	P	✓	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	✓	-	-
b. Require recreational watercraft to be cleaned prior to transport <i>Example: New Mexico requires certification on recreational vessels when moved between bodies of water</i>	-	✓	✓	-	-	-	-	-	✓	✓	-	-
3. Eradicate invasive species (through early detection and rapid response) before they become established												
a. Create ongoing funds to detect, research, and eradicate invasive species <i>Example: Louisiana established an Aquatic Plant Control Fund for this purpose</i>	-	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	-	-	✓	-	-
b. Establish early detection and monitoring requirements <i>Example: New Jersey requires surveys near ports of entry to detect pests, such as the Asian longhorned beetle, that can be accidentally introduced</i>	-	✓	-	✓	-	✓	✓	✓	-	✓	-	-
c. Require research and planning to predict invasions before they occur <i>Example: California has legislative authorization to study species that represent a potential threat</i>	-	✓	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

KEY: ✓ POLICY EXISTS P IN PROGRESS - POLICY NOT PRESENT

No State Is an Island

With its fragmented approach to invasive species, Rhode Island cannot solve its problems without federal support.

However, federal policy is lax, incomplete, and can hinder state efforts (see the table). The federal law that allows most non-native animals to be imported regardless of invasiveness or disease risk, for example, is ineffective,⁴ out of date, and puts Rhode Island's wildlife at risk. Likewise, federal rules governing the import of potentially invasive plants (and the pests and diseases associated with them) are too weak to protect the state's forests and parks. Stronger federal leadership is needed to protect Rhode Island's economy, environment, and public health from invasive species. The entire nation would benefit from such a change.

ENDNOTES

- Executive Order No. 13112. 1999. Federal Register 64:6183. Online at http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=1999_register&docid=fr08fe99-168.pdf. Accessed March 12, 2010.
- Gregg, D.W. 2010. Personal communication with K. Lininger, UCS. February 25. David W. Gregg is executive director of the Rhode Island Natural History Survey.
- Environmental Law Institute. 2002. *Halting the invasion: State tools for invasive species management*. Washington, DC. Online at http://www.eli.org/Program_Areas/Invasives/index.cfm.
- Fowler, A.J., D.M. Lodge, and J.F. Hsia. 2007. Failure of the Lacey Act to protect US ecosystems against animal invasion. *Frontiers of Ecology and the Environment* 5(7):353–359.

This fact sheet was prepared by the Union of Concerned Scientists based on findings in the Environmental Law Institute's report *Status and Trends in State Invasive Species Policy: 2002–2009*, which can be found online at www.ucsusa.org/stateinvasivepolicy. For more information, contact Phyllis N. Windle (pwindle@ucsusa.org) or Katherine Lininger (klininger@ucsusa.org) at the Union of Concerned Scientists, or Read Porter (porter@eli.org) at the Environmental Law Institute.

©Union of Concerned Scientists, May 2010

The Union of Concerned Scientists is the leading science-based nonprofit organization working for a healthy environment and a safer world.



National Headquarters
Two Brattle Square
Cambridge, MA 02238-9105
Phone: (617) 547-5552
Fax: (617) 864-9405

Washington, DC, Office
1825 K St. NW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20006-1232
Phone: (202) 223-6133
Fax: (202) 223-6162

West Coast Office
2397 Shattuck Ave., Ste. 203
Berkeley, CA 94704-1567
Phone: (510) 843-1872
Fax: (510) 843-3785

Midwest Office
One N. LaSalle St., Ste. 1904
Chicago, IL 60602-4064
Phone: (312) 578-1750
Fax: (312) 578-1751