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BEYOND GIANT HOGWEED: AQUATICS PLANTS POSE A THREAT

Spreading Invasive Pond Plants Degrade Native Ecosystems

Non-native aquatic plants, popular in the new and trendy water gardens, are escaping into natural environments and posing a serious threat to the health of Canada's aquatic ecosystems. The National Invasive Species Working Group (NISWG) believes Canadians need to be aware of the risks posed by these plants becoming invasive in wetlands and waterways.

Flowering Rush and Yellow Flag Iris, prized for their attractiveness in the water garden, have escaped into the natural environment. Both plants can choke out natural vegetation, dominating the otherwise diverse mixes of native plants. This in turn alters the habitat for animals, insects and birds that rely on native species in healthy ecosystems to sustain them. Readily spread by boaters and anglers, Eurasian Watermilfoil, found in waterways in Ontario and British Columbia, can cause rivers and lakes to stagnate, rendering them uninhabitable and impeding their use for recreational purposes.

As a partnership of Invasive Species Councils across Canada, including Aboriginal organizations, concerned about the threat of invasion posed by non-native species, the goal of the NISWG is to educate the public and raise awareness of the impacts of invasive species, including aquatic plants.

According to Gail Wallin, Coordinator of NISWG, the cost to eradicate invasive plants and restore waterways and riparian areas to their former pristine beauty, health, and function is greater than the cost of preventing them from being invaded in the first place. She says volunteer detection networks (i.e. 'spotters') and early response protocols are being developed to train concerned citizens to recognize invasive species across Canada. Having an informed public who recognize and report newly discovered invasive species will help to protect and preserve Canada's natural heritage.

'Canadians who are concerned about the health of the environment are a vital part of the solution to protect our natural heritage and life support systems from coast to coast to coast. Prevention is the most cost effective way of dealing with invasive, non-native species.'

While the health risks and environmental threats of Giant Hogweed were highlighted across Canada by the NISWG last year, Wallin says there are other,

ongoing impacts to the integrity and health of the environment, like these aquatic invaders, that Canadians need to be equally informed about.

New invasive, non-native plants are moving up from the Southern U.S., or are being introduced from one province to the next. Newly discovered invasive plants include Salt Cedar in Saskatchewan, one of the most costly invaders of waterways and riparian areas in North America. Himalayan Balsam is also threatening the integrity of shorelines, increasing erosion, impacting wildlife, and changing the natural vegetation in natural areas across Canada.

Individuals can report an invasive species in Nova Scotia by emailing info@invasivespeciesns.ca. Visit www.invasivespeciesns.ca to learn more or get involved.

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The National Invasive Species Working Group is comprised of council groups from across the country, including the Invasive Species Alliance of Nova Scotia (ISANS), who are working together to raise awareness about invasive alien species and their impacts. Current national initiatives include the development of ‘spotters’ networks, and horticulture outreach projects.

The Invasive Species Alliance of Nova Scotia (ISANS) is a non-profit group of individuals and organizations focused on improved communication and information sharing to better address the threat of invasive alien species at the provincial level.

For more information about invasive aquatic plants, or any invasive species, contact ISANS:

902.585.1935

www.invasivespeciesns.ca

info@invasivespeciesns.ca