

# A Departmental Perspective

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Each year thousands of nonnative species are introduced into our environment. Most blend with native species, but a small percentage become so harmful that they are called “invasive species”—and these invaders cause immense harm to the economy, the environment, and in some cases animal and human health. In New Jersey, for example, the Asian longhorned beetle and hemlock woolly adelgid have the potential to destroy entire forest ecosystems. Elsewhere in the state, invasive species such as purple loosestrife and the common reed push out indigenous wetland plants and create monocultures that limit available sources of food for birds and fish. In still other cases, invasive species threaten the existence of rare and endangered wetland plants.

Other examples of damage-causing invasive species include the now infamous snakehead fish, zebra mussel, brown tree snake, and asian carp. But the list also includes invasive plants such as yellow star thistle and tamarisk, insects such as the emerald ash borer and Mediterranean fruit fly, the nutria—a rodent in the southeast and mid-Atlantic, and pathogens and parasites such as West Nile virus and Exotic Newcastle Disease. Invasive species are the second leading cause—after habitat loss—of species being listed as endangered or threatened. They infest more than 100 million acres across all 50 states. They do not respect borders and cause severe problems that are local, regional, national and global in scope. Problems associated with invasive species are accelerating due to increases in trade, travel and tourism. In the United States, it is estimated by some scientists that invasive species cost the U.S. economy \$137 billion per year.

As more and more data about the harm caused by invasive species continued to emerge, scientists, farmers, ranchers, and others wrote to the Vice President expressing their concerns regarding the negative impacts of invasive species. As

a result, the National Invasive Species Council (NISC) was established by Executive Order 13112 in February 1999 to provide leadership and coordinate federal efforts to curb invasive species. The NISC is co-chaired by the Secretaries of Agriculture, Interior, and Commerce and includes the Secretaries of Transportation, State, Defense, Treasury, Health and Human Services, the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Director of the U.S. Agency for International Development. In February of 2004, the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security also became a member. The NISC is charged with coordinating with 23 federal agencies (including the Fish and Wildlife Service) that have significant invasive species programs or activities.

The Executive Order defines an “invasive species” as nonnative (or alien) to the ecosystem under consideration whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm, or harm to human health. An invasive species can be a plant, animal, pathogen, or parasite. It is important to realize that all nonnative species are not invasive. Some nonnative species are extremely important sources of food, recreation, and fiber. Only a small fraction of nonnative species that are introduced to a new environment become established, and less than 10% of those species are considered harmful and thus invasive. The work of the NISC focuses on these truly harmful species.

The Executive Order also established a group of non-federal experts and stakeholders to provide advice to the NISC. The Invasive Species Advisory Committee (ISAC) is chartered under the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), and currently consists of 29 members. The ISAC includes industry representatives, environmentalists, and academics as well as other stakeholders and experts with different interests and knowledge regarding invasive species issues.

Under the Executive Order the NISC is directed to:

- provide leadership and coordination on invasive species issues;
- encourage cooperative action at local, State, tribal, and ecosystem levels;
- recommend measures to enhance international cooperation;
- develop a web-based information network on invasive species;
- develop National Environmental Protection Act guidance related to invasive species; and
- draft and update a National Invasive Species Management Plan (Plan) every two years.

The NISC is responsible for dealing with all invasive species issues. It is not the intention of the NISC to develop or plan a master list of invasive species. The NISC is not charged with selecting or prioritizing such species. This is true for several reasons. First, the NISC primarily focuses on high-level policy and coordination, not on specific regulatory issues. The NISC works to leverage the programs and expertise of member agencies into an effective, coordinated strategy. Any regulatory authority rests with the specific departments and agencies that make up the NISC or at the state or local level. Second, species that are invasive in one region may not be invasive in another. The NISC is well aware of the flexibility needed to combat what is a global, not solely a national, problem.

The first version of the Plan was issued in January of 2001. It provides the first national, comprehensive blueprint for coordinated federal action on invasive species. The Plan was developed with extensive public input working with ISAC, federal and state officials and other interested parties to derive the action items that make up the document. Experts and agency officials identified nine significant areas as critical to addressing invasive species in the U.S and as a global problem. The areas are leadership and coordination, prevention, early detection and rapid response, control and management, restoration, international cooperation, research, information management, and education and public awareness. The Plan is available on the NISC’s website, [www.invasivespecies.gov](http://www.invasivespecies.gov).

The NISC is publishing a report describing progress made in implementing the provisions of the Plan. During the past two years the NISC and ISAC have been primarily focused on efforts to implement the Plan at the federal level and improve efforts to reach out to our state and other non-federal partners. The Plan’s 57 action items include 86 subparts; of these 7 have been completed, 64 begun, and 15 have yet to be started.

Currently, the NISC is crafting guidelines to prioritize federal invasive species control projects. The purpose of these guidelines is to assist in the prioritization and optimization of invasive species control and management efforts in minimally-managed or “natural areas.” These guidelines are intended to help resource managers and other decision-makers to more consistently and effectively evaluate the relative priority of current and proposed invasive species control projects as well as actions within projects. These guidelines are necessary due to the immense demand for resources—both time and money—to tackle the numerous invasive species issues to officials for action.

The NISC is also helping to coordinate federal legislative policy on invasive species. Important invasive species laws, including the National Invasive Species Act which deals with aquatic invasive species, are being considered for reauthorization. The NISC is also working with the Council on Environmental Policy to draft guidance for invasive species prevention and control under the National Environmental Policy Act.

Highlights of past accomplishments of the NISC include:

- Completion of the first performance-based invasive species crosscut budget for Fiscal Year 2004 (FY04). The crosscut is an interagency performance budget that provides for more efficient allocation of resources through enhanced interagency cooperation and focuses on selected interagency initiatives. The crosscut provides measurable goals for inter-agency actions and will improve coordination and planning. FY04 crosscut proposal included inter-agency proposals to control tamarisk (salt cedar), deal with several critical pathways for invasive species, and enhance early detection and rapid response efforts. Work is currently underway to complete a similar performance-based crosscut for FY05.

- The NISC has recently finalized the Early Detection and Rapid Response Guidelines. The guidelines are based on the expertise and work of federal, state, and regional experts and groups, and delineate the essential elements necessary to establish an effective early detection and rapid response efforts. This guidance can be used by federal, state, local, or private groups when organizing early detection and response activities. By detecting invasive species early, while eradication is still a possibility, before establishment or spread has occurred, we can prevent and manage invasive species more effectively and at a lower cost (available at [www.invasivespecies.gov](http://www.invasivespecies.gov)).

- The Pathways Task Team, as called for in the Plan, has developed a list of the major pathways for the introduction of invasive species and is in the process of developing criteria to rank their importance. This document is also available at [www.invasivespecies.gov](http://www.invasivespecies.gov).

Another significant accomplishment is the development and continual improvement of the NISC’s website, [www.invasivespecies.gov](http://www.invasivespecies.gov). The website, which is managed on a daily basis and staffed by the National Agricultural Library (NAL) is the major communication tool for the NISC and provides information regarding federal invasive species programs throughout the federal government. Thanks to the work of NAL, the website contains over 400 pages and over 8,600 unique links to invasive species information sources. The website is currently being updated and re-designed with input from ISAC and other stakeholders. We welcome suggestions and comments. In the next year the NISC will be emphasizing outreach, communications and education activities.

The NISC anticipates that this upcoming year much of their work will emphasize outreach, communications and education activities. It is also time for NISC to coordinate with member agencies and ISAC to update the Plan. The experience of the past five years should allow for a revision of the Plan that presents a more cohesive, strategic, performance-based overview of invasive species programs and needs.

The threats and problems posed globally by invasive species are extremely complex, diverse, and broad in scope. Dealing with the myriad possible pathways of introduction, logistical difficulties of detection and rapid response efforts, and scientific and economic considerations of control initiatives is a daunting challenge. Only by working together with critical stakeholders—such as our partner organizations at the federal, state, tribal and local level—can we make progress in limiting the negative impacts of invasive species and protect and manage our economy, environment, and health. As a team we can develop creative and comprehensive solutions that really make a difference and enhance the ongoing, successful, and vital work of member agencies and interested parties. It is a prime mission of the NISC to promote and facilitate broad collaboration to develop effective solutions to this critical, multidisciplinary issue.

**The Department of the Interior plays a critical role on the National Invasive Species Council. Secretary Norton serves as co-chair and appoints – in consultation with the other Council members – the members of the Invasive Species Advisory Committee (ISAC). In accordance with Executive Order 13112, the Department of the Interior provides staffing and administrative support for the Council and ISAC. The Council staff report to the Science Advisor to the Secretary of the Interior, Dr. James Tate. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and six other Interior bureaus have invasive species programs and activities that work with Council staff to accomplish the objectives in the Management Plan that impact natural resources. The other bureaus and offices include the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management,**

**the Bureau of Reclamation, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Mineral Management Service, and the Office of Insular Affairs. Dr. Tate and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Performance and Management Scott Cameron were leaders in crafting the first performance-based invasive species crosscut budget in FY 2004. The crosscut provided \$9 million dollars of increased funding to Interior agencies for inter-agency crosscutting efforts. A performance-based crosscut for FY 2005 is currently being finalized.**



Secretary Norton

**The NISC’s Website: [www.invasivespecies.gov](http://www.invasivespecies.gov)**