



Meeting Summary

Strategies for Managing Invasive Plants

Southern New England Chapter of the Soil & Water Conservation Society Annual Winter Meeting
Vernon, Connecticut
February 15, 2001

This meeting served as the second of three workshops on invasive plants that NRCS in Connecticut has co-sponsored. The first was on environmental and economic issues related to invasive plants. The third will be a hands-on course on identification of invasive species.

In today's meeting, we focussed on strategies for managing invasive plants. These strategies include early detection of invasive species, a variety of techniques for control, consideration of logistical issues related to control, the importance of monitoring of results, finding alternatives to planting invasive species, and actively working together across disciplines and economic interests to share information and develop strategies for invasive plant management.

The importance of early detection cannot be over-emphasized. It is a lot easier to pull out a few individuals than it is to deal in operations that are measured in acres or hundreds of acres. For example, Mile-a-Minute Vine is a highly invasive plant for which we have a very short window of opportunity to prevent its spread from the few sites on which it is now found in Connecticut and Rhode Island.

The other side of early detection is to take steps to prevent invasive species from ever getting turned loose in areas where they are not native. One way to do this is to refrain from planting plants that are likely to become invasive. Sarah Reichard offered some ideas on predicting which plants will become invasive – including taking into account readily assessed characteristics that either increase a species' birth rate or decrease its death rate. As Peter Picone suggested, using native plants instead of importing in new ones can be a good alternative to preventing the spread of invasives.

Risk assessments for new plants (such as suggested by Dr. Reichard) are something people didn't used to think about. The NRCS Plant Materials Centers did a lot of studies to understand which plants would work best for establishing cover on eroded sites. But, no one in NRCS or elsewhere thought much about studying what the effect would be on native ecosystems suddenly having a new and aggressive plant species in the area. It is too bad someone wasn't doing risk assessments 100 years ago – or even 30 years ago – because New England now has many plants that are spreading in an out-of-control manner.

Today we heard about a variety of techniques for removal of invasive plants ranging from the use of chemicals to hand pulling with weed-wrenches. As Chris Mattrick of the New England Wild Flower Society pointed out, there are certain species and certain levels of infestation where herbicides seem to be the best approach. Of course, there are drawbacks to herbicide use related to obtaining permits and to effects on non-target species.

MEETING SUMMARY – Strategies for Managing Invasive Plants *(continued)*

Besides chemicals, a variety of machines are being developed or modified for the control of invasive plants. Today we saw this with Lori Benoit's poster on Water Chestnut and Paul Capotosto's poster on using machines to clear the way for herbiciding and later for chopping down *Phragmites*.

In contrast to using large machines, the removal of invasive plants by hand pulling with shovels or weed wrenches also is a viable strategy. As Lillian Willis noted in her poster on Japanese Barberry, hand pulling tends to require a lot of people. People management is an important component of any control operation, particularly if you are using volunteers.

We also heard about biological control. Purple Loosestrife is a good plant for this because there are insects that are easy to raise that generally feed only on this plant. As Donna Ellis noted, biological control is a reasonable strategy if the goal is control of the *level* of the invasive plant population, not eradication of all the plants at a site.

One thing that came out of the talks and posters today is that total removal of an invasive plant infestation often may not be a reasonable goal. Rather, long-term commitments to maintaining control efforts are needed. And, it is important to monitor your results so that you and others can find out what techniques are successful in the long run, and under what conditions those techniques are successful.

The other day I told my boss that I wanted to make a collage of fact sheets on invasive plants combined with the old Soil Conservation Service facts sheets from the 1960s on how to plant things such as Multiflora Rose, Autumn-Olive, and Japanese Knotweed. My boss raised her eyebrows a bit when I told her this, but then she said that it is important to acknowledge that what is "The Truth" today may not be "The Truth" tomorrow.

"The Truth" will change as we continue to learn, and as we learn to work across disciplines. The Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group and The New England Invasive Plant Group (who presented posters here today) are good examples of diverse groups of people learning to share information and work together.

The meeting summary follows the format of the wrap-up and concluding statement presented by:

Charlotte Pyle
Landscape Ecologist
USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service
344 Merrow Road, Suite A
Tolland, CT 06084

The Program and Abstracts provide more details on the strategies for invasive plant management presented at the SNEC-SWCS Winter 2001 meeting

*For more invasive plant information from NRCS, visit
www.ct.nrcs.usda.gov/plants.html*