

The Challenge of Invasive Species

Invasive species degrade the natural communities, wildlife habitat and scenic trails that draw outdoor enthusiasts to Wisconsin's forestlands. Invasive species also threaten the economic productivity of forests throughout the state and reduce the diversity of species in forest ecosystems.

Aggressive forest pests such as the Emerald Ash Borer and Asian Longhorn Beetle threaten to cause widespread mortality and wholesale loss of tree species in forests throughout the Northeastern US. Un-checked invasive plant infestations can result in local collapse of forest ecosystems – as woodlots and entire forest stands convert from native forest species to thickets of non-native shrubs.

Seeds, root fragments, eggs and spores of invasive species can and frequently are moved within and between forest sites on recreational equipment, including hiking boots, clothing, bikes, motorized vehicles, horses, pets and firewood. A single seed spread unintentionally by a hiker can explode into a large infestation of a weedy plant in only a few years. Spread of invasive species in this manner affects our extensive northern forests as well as small woodlots and community parks in more densely populated areas. Until this time, no generally recognized guidelines to minimize the spread of invasive species in Wisconsin's forests have been developed and disseminated to the broad community of recreational stakeholders.

Although detailed research on the specific effects and costs of each invasive species is generally lacking, there is consensus among the conservation community and others that the collective impacts of un-checked invasive species will be profound, and they threaten the quality of outdoor activities and the forest ecosystems that support them. While it will not be possible to eradicate many of the species already established, it is essential that the outdoor community develop a comprehensive effort to address these threats. Recreation BMPs for Invasive Species will help outdoor enthusiasts become a part of a solution that encompasses all agencies and stakeholder groups with an interest in healthy forests.