



# Invasive Species Challenge for the 2012 Presidential Candidates

Invasive species threaten the safety and health of people and nature, and the economic interests of the United States. Thousands of non-native plants, animals, and diseases have been introduced, and continue to be imported, with the effect of reshaping our country into something unrecognizable from mere decades ago. Invasive species are:

- attacking our farms, forests, lakes, rivers, and oceans;
- costing more than \$100 billion in damages and control efforts each year;
- causing outbreaks of crop, forest, wildlife, and human diseases; and,
- threatening nearly half of our rare plants and animals with extinction.

The rapid growth of global trade has multiplied the speed and number of new invasions reaching our shores. Increased stresses on ecosystems, such as droughts, floods, and fire, are shifting the natural balance toward favoring invasive species over native ones. The further spread of existing invaders will magnify the costs and harm they already inflict.

This need not happen. We can stop this runaway train of invasive species. We know how to confront and repel these invasions. Real solutions—based on good science—are available. They have bipartisan support. The need NOW is for dramatic policy reform that allows the government to ACT.

Two proven cost-effective means to stop invaders are prevention and rapid response. Prevention requires analyzing the risks posed by species proposed for trade and blocking import of plants and animals that are likely to invade areas of the US. Pythons and lionfish are two problems that could likely have been prevented through the risk analysis process. Prevention also requires regulations combined with voluntary measures to close off the major pathways of introduction: global trade in live plants and animals (pests and diseases), ballast water contamination (zebra and quagga mussels), packing crates and pallets (insects), and shipborne disease vectors (mosquitoes carrying West Nile virus). Halting introductions requires monitoring of pathways and entry points (Early Detection) and dedicated resources to attack incipient populations while they can still be eradicated (Rapid Response). This system to quickly discover and destroy these invaders is a vital backup measure.

Despite the immense damage caused by biological invasions, the United States lacks an effective system to prevent new invasions, to detect and respond to new invasions, or even to control those invaders that have established themselves and are causing economic and environmental harm. The impacts of invasive species ignore political boundaries and go well beyond the capacity of a local government or a single state to address them. The federal government must take the following steps to protect our nation's health and economy.

## **ENDORISING ORGANIZATIONS**

**from the National Environmental Coalition on Invasive Species**

**Alliance for the Great Lakes    Great Lakes United    National Association of Exotic Pest Plant Councils  
National Wildlife Federation    Natural Areas Association    The Nature Conservancy    The Wildlife Society**



### **INTRODUCTIONS OF AQUATIC INVADERS IN BALLAST WATER**

The nation's aquatic resources are suffering immense damage from invasive species hitchhiking in commercial vessels' ballast tanks. **Do you support protecting those resources by ensuring the Environmental Protection Agency adopts the strongest possible Vessel General Permit?**

Needed strengthening measures include (1) establishing a national standard that is higher than the International Maritime Organization's ballast discharge standard, and at least as stringent as the highest standards established by the states; (2) regulating vessels currently not proposed for regulation, including Great Lakes-based vessels; (3) establishing a water-quality-based effluent limitation as required under the Clean Water Act; (4) requiring speedier compliance; and (5) ensuring that states' rights to protect resources from ballast mediated invaders remain intact.

### **SEPARATING GREAT LAKES & MISSISSIPPI BASINS TO PREVENT INVADERS' SPREAD**

Asian Carp and other aquatic invasive species now in the Mississippi River and its tributaries threaten to enter the Great Lakes via the Chicago Sanitary & Ship Canal, where they could cause immense damage. **Do you support a permanent solution to this threat through requiring the Army Corps of Engineers to take all necessary measures to construct a permanent barrier to hydrologically separate the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes basin at Chicago?**

Needed measures include (1) completion by December 31, 2013 of a study to determine the best means of hydrological separation; (2) interim actions to prevent the Asian carp from establishing breeding populations in Lake Michigan until the construction of the permanent barrier is completed; (3) providing funds necessary to implement those measures in your budget proposals to Congress; and (4) the development and implementation of a long-term financing strategy to construct and operate the permanent barrier.

### **PREVENTING INTRODUCTIONS OF PLANT PESTS**

Each week, a new insect or plant disease that threatens agricultural production and the environment enters the country. Many of these pests arrive on imported plants. **Do you support amendment of USDA regulations to require foreign plant suppliers to incorporate pest-minimization measures in their operations to protect our agriculture and environment from pests?**

The US Department of Agriculture relies primarily on visual inspection of incoming plants to prevent introductions – but inspection often fails when the pest is small, inside the plant, or not showing symptoms at the time. The USDA has begun but has not completed amending its regulations so as to require foreign suppliers of plants to implement pest-reduction programs in their nurseries that will prevent pests from reaching our shores.

### **IMPORT AND TRADE OF LIVE ANIMALS**

Foreign animals imported and released into the wild – ranging from pythons to hogs – have caused enormous damage to native wildlife and the economy. **Do you support strengthening authority for the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service to identify and rapidly and cost-effectively prohibit import of injurious non-native animal species? Do you support enhanced funding for regulation, enforcement, early detection and rapid response to reduce threats posed by invasive animals?**

The USFWS' new authority would include (1) rapid assessment of the risk posed by particular animals, (2) emergency prohibitions on imports of invasive species not yet proposed for trade, (3) increased user fees, (4) enhanced enforcement powers to curtail trade in injurious species already listed, and (5) comprehensive authority over wildlife diseases.

### **KEEPING OUT INVASIVE PLANTS**

Invasive plants destroy wildlife habitats and reduce agricultural yields. Half of invasive plant species were introduced deliberately for some purpose. **Do you support keeping out plant imports that pose a significant risk for becoming invasive in the U.S.?**

This power includes USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service using its existing authority assertively to assess potential risks for plant imports and to require that risky plants undergo a full risk assessment before they are approved for import.

### **STOPPING SPREAD OF INVASIVE PLANTS**

**Do you support efforts to coordinate existing state and regional invasive plant detection and response entities into a national system?**

Such coordination includes engaging all players, especially the U.S. Geological Survey, the National Invasive Species Council, state agencies, and regional invasive plant centers associated with universities and non-governmental organizations.