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Invasive Species Task Force

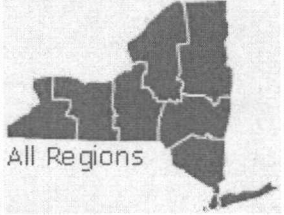
Collaborative Effort Among Agencies

Early in the 20th Century, chestnut blight arrived in North America and has since wiped out one of the most valuable trees in our forest, the American chestnut. Zebra mussels arrived here from their native Caspian Sea in the late 20th Century and have altered ecosystems, clogged pipes, and ruined bathing beaches in some of our largest waters. Near the start of the present century, West Nile Virus came here from Africa and has harmed both birds and humans. Asian Longhorn Beetle arrived within the lumber used for packing crates and has forced us to cut down thousands of prized shade trees in our cities and suburbs - in the hope that it does not spread to our forests. Swede midge is poised in Canada; it could decimate our broccoli and cabbage crops. Chronic Wasting Disease has been moving east ward from its origins in Rocky Mountain elk and mule deer. It could create havoc with our White-tailed Deer if it enters New York. Although numerous agencies and organizations across New York are combating the threats posed by these invasive species, our state does not yet have a fully coordinated or comprehensive defense.

The Governor's Task Force

In response to this growing problem, new legislation was

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passed in 2003 that called for a team to explore the invasive species issue and to provide recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature by November 2005. The statute describes the intended membership of the Task Force and directs that it be co-led by two New York State agencies: the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Department of Agriculture and Markets. Other members of the Task Force include:

- New York State Department of Transportation
- New York State Thruway Authority (and Canals Corporation)
- New York State Museum (and Biodiversity Research Institute)
- New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historical Preservation
- New York State Department of State
- Adirondack Park Agency
- New York Sea Grant
- Cornell University
- Invasive Plant Council
- The Nature Conservancy
- New York State Farm Bureau
- Empire State Marine Trades Association
- New York State Nursery and Landscape Association

The Task Force has taken numerous steps toward accomplishing its task. It first established a Steering Committee to oversee the day-to-day work of the Task Force. Early on, it arranged for the whole Task Force to consult with the leader of our federal counterpart, the National Invasive Species Council. The next big task was to design and conduct an in-depth survey of all Task Force member organizations. Then, they established several smaller teams to investigate in depth, to analyze existing efforts, to identify needs, and to develop recommendations. Each team has been designed to pull together organizations that share a common area of interest or expertise. The Task Force has reached out to

numerous stakeholders to invite them to participate as members of these teams.

The Task Force has been meeting at various locations around New York. These meetings are open to the public and dates, times and locations are announced in the Environmental Notice Bulletin. Formal public review of the Draft Report of the Invasive Species Task Force will be accomplished through a combination of both in-person public meetings and internet communication. It is planned for the summer of 2005.

The Problem

Invasive species are non-native species that can cause harm to the environment or to human health. As a threat to our biodiversity, they have been judged second only to habitat loss. Invasives come from all around the world; the rate of invasion is increasing along with the increase in international trade that accompanies globalization.

Invasive species have caused many problems in the past, are causing problems now, and pose threats to our future. A wide variety of species are problematic for many sectors of our world: our ecosystems, including both all natural systems and also managed forests; our food supply, including not only agriculture but also harvested wildlife, fish and shellfish; our built environments, including landscaping, infrastructure, industry, gardens, and pets. Invasive species have implications, too, for recreation and for human health.

Strategic Need

Existing management efforts are limited. Although the invasive species issue is recognized by professionals as a major threat to our natural resources, few resources have been allocated toward solutions. The National Invasive Species Council has been established by executive order to coordinate efforts among federal agencies, but there is no overarching federal legislation that recognizes the magnitude of invasive species as an issue. Thus, there is no dedicated funding stream