Trade policy and prevention of nonnative species invasions

Approximately half of the invertebrate and disease pests imported into the United States come in on live plants; most of the other half of pests comes in on raw wood and wood packaging. Quantities of these items are increasing with increasing trade. Horticultural imports are not only risky because of the small (1–2%) but highly significant numbers of invasive exotics that escape, but also because of the hitchhikers on these imports. Because biological invasions are rarely reversible, prevention seems desirable. However, the current process in the United States and most other countries is to try to balance native biodiversity protection and trade promotion. The rules established by the United States and its trading partners are based on the premise that phytosanitary regulations should not be more restrictive than necessary to achieve a country's chosen level of protection. Furthermore, the World Trade Organization regards phytosanitary measures as a potentially unjustified barrier to free trade. Therefore, the burden of proof is placed on advocates for the prevention of exotic species invasions and the protection of native biodiversity.

Recent articles detailing the major pathways of pests entering the United States may be useful for resource managers in achieving a broad understanding of invasions and options for improvement in U.S. strategy, policy, and techniques for prevention. Campbell (2001) examines U.S. and international policies governing the structure and implementation of invasive species prevention programs, and recommends approaches for addressing the huge consequent problems that arise for protection of biodiversity. Campbell and Schlarbaum (2002) provide much detail on the biological outcome of prioritizing trade above protection—which results in forests, especially those of eastern United States, dying because of introductions of damaging foreign pests and diseases. Campbell and Kriesch (2003) review and outline pathways for invasive species into the United States. —L. Loope, Haleakala Field Station, USGS, Pacific Island Ecosystems Research Center, Maui.

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