

Key Takeaways

- Invasive species are pervasive in Pennsylvania, cause millions of dollars in damage to Pennsylvania's agricultural and forestry industries, and degrade the quality of our recreational assets.
- Currently, there are many types of invasive species requiring immediate attention. These include plants, insects, and aquatic animals.
- Efforts to address invasive species include eradication, management, and prevention. All efforts to address invasives must include local involvement and public outreach and education.
- Dedicated state funding is essential to address the control and management of invasive species.
- Pennsylvania should consider implementing a Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) model, which is a public-private partnership that helps to prevent and minimize the harm caused by invasive species.

The following are highlights of testimony presented at the August 24, 2021, Center for Rural Pennsylvania public hearing on Invasive Species in Rural Pennsylvania. The Center's Board of Directors conducted the hearing to examine the impacts of invasive species, such as the spotted lanternfly, gypsy moth, emerald ash borer, hydrilla, and reed canarygrass, on Pennsylvania's economy, agriculture, and natural resources, and to review policy approaches to manage these invasive threats.

Background

Invasive species are a major threat to Pennsylvania's environment, economy, and communities. For more than 100 years, invasive species have threatened our agricultural lands, forests, waterways, and natural areas. Invasive species do not respect human boundaries, and state and local efforts to control and manage them are expensive.

The impact of invasive species can be grouped into three overlapping categories:

Economic: Controlling and managing invasive species can cost millions of dollars. For example, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) spends \$4.7 million annually to control *Lymantria dispar*, or gypsy moth. Research sponsored by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania indicated that the spotted lanternfly has the potential to cause \$46.6 million in damages annually statewide. The funding needed to protect public lands and waterways often must come from discretionary funds. Managing invasives is an expensive and unexpected challenge for agencies that protect public lands. For example, in Crawford County, the hydrilla plant poses a strong risk of severely compromising the economic value and ecology of Pymatuning Reservoir. If infestation should ever get to high density, it would present a major challenge to the uses and ecology of the lake and require exponential increases in management costs. One projection for a single cycle of managing an

infestation of up to 6,500 acres in size ranged between \$2.2 million and \$2.9 million annually.

Environmental: Invasive species can crowd out and destroy native plants, reduce the food supply for native animals, and reduce the biodiversity of Pennsylvania waterways, woodlands, and other natural areas. One example is the risk posed to the eastern hemlock, the Commonwealth's official state tree, by the hemlock woolly adelgid and the elongate hemlock scale. Hemlock promotes healthy streams and waterways, which are home to Pennsylvania's state fish, the brook trout. The loss of hemlock trees changes stream chemistry, and increases water temperature and light.

Recreational: Visitors to our state's recreational areas, who contribute about \$29.1 billion annually, come, in part, to enjoy our native forests and vegetation. However, kudzu, barberry, multiflora rose, mile-a-minute, and Japanese knotweed can impede human use of an area. They can also restrict access to waterways for recreation so that anglers and boaters cannot frequent lakes and streams. When exposed to giant hogweed, people can experience skin inflammation.

Current Initiatives

Recognizing the many challenges presented by invasive species, many local and regional groups and organizations have been taking action without the benefit of coordinated statewide efforts. For example, the County Conservation Districts in the Allegheny Plateau region (Warren, McKean, Forest counties and parts of Potter and Elk counties) have formed the Allegheny Plateau Invasive Plant Management Area (APIPMA). APIPMA has coordinated a five county, multi-partner collaborative to share information, disseminate educational information, provide training for residents, students, professionals, and local workforce personnel on the best ways to identify, manage, and treat invasive plants, and has started an active treatment program for prioritized species. APIPMA is recognized statewide and is an active

participant in the Pennsylvania Invasive Species Council. In Crawford County, the informal hydrilla project's coalition of stakeholders has spent the last seven years pulling in piecemeal funding to manage hydrilla and providing outreach and education.

State agencies also dedicate time and money to fight invasive species. In December 2017, Governor Wolf reenacted the Invasive Species Council, a seven-agency advisory panel that aids in developing invasive species action plans, advises policy development, and coordinates interagency initiatives related to invasives. The council now has a full-time coordinator. The 2019 Pennsylvania Farm Bill also established the Rapid Response Disaster Readiness fund to meet unplanned needs. The Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission is updating its regulations concerning invasive species, and has some grant funds for municipal boating facilities. However, these actions are not enough.

Policy Recommendations

Hearing panelists agreed that there should be a comprehensive approach to fight invasives, along with dedicated resources and continued research. A 2019 Center for Rural Pennsylvania-sponsored analysis of the statutory and regulatory efforts to control invasive species indicated that there is no uniform approach to address invasives, and the government's efforts to control invasives was characterized as slow and reactionary. Therefore, rapid response and control activities are needed to reduce and eliminate new and existing populations of invasive species in Pennsylvania.

Cooperation and partnerships at all levels must exist to effectively prevent and manage invasive species beyond rapid response. State agencies cannot fight the battle alone. Diverse and expansive partnerships with local leadership must be established.

The panelists suggested that more staff and dedicated funding sources are essential. They also supported a comprehensive and collective approach among state, county, municipal, and private entities, such as the Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) model. This public-private partnership model, which is currently being used in New York state, has a proven track record for helping prevent and minimize the harm caused by invasive species. More specifically, the PRISM model would, among other things, provide: early detection and rapid response, stakeholder education, volunteer recruitment and training, and prevention programs. The Pennsylvania Association of Conservation Districts conducted an invasive species survey in 2019. Of the 50 conservation district respondents, 96 percent said they would take part in cooperative invasive species work if there were opportunities to do so. Twenty-eight percent were already doing invasive species work and 64 percent said that their current financial resources limited the work they could do.

Thank you to the following individuals who attended the hearing and provided testimony: Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture Secretary Russell Redding; Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Secretary Cindy Adams Dunn; Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission Executive Director Timothy Schaeffer; Penn State Fruit Research and Extension Center Director Dr. Jayson Harper; Kane Hardwood Resource Manager Thomas Kase; Crawford County Conservation District Watershed Specialist Brian Pilarcik; Shippensburg University Professor Dr. Sara Grove; Pennsylvania Sea Grant Director Sarah Whitney; McKean County Conservation District Communications and Outreach Director Jody Groshek; and New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Invasive Species Coordination Section Chief Josh Thiel.

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