

INVASIVES DRAW CROWDS IN WISCONSIN - HOW DO WE CAPITALIZE ON THE MOMENT?

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The term “invasive plants” is more than a buzz word and activities built around this topic usually draw crowds. In Wisconsin, for example, conferences on invasives in 2001 and 2003 drew over 600 participants: more than we often have at NCWSS annual conferences. Why are invasives drawing so much attention? The reasons are numerous and vary from state to state but clearly undesirable plants are invading new areas and people see and react to this phenomenon.

For the most part, those of us at Midwestern Land Grant Universities are not key players in this arena. We often see Depts. of Natural Resource and perhaps Agriculture personnel leading noxious weed efforts.

This is fine but these agencies are not primarily research and outreach institutions, and at a minimum we must be sure we are part of the team that develops and leads noxious weed efforts. Many of our colleges of agriculture now clearly include natural resources within their mandate and as such are well positioned to be leaders in the research, outreach and teaching efforts that will be keys to successful invasive plant programs.

Here are ten ways to help us capitalize on the popularity of invasives at the moment and help ensure that efforts continue if and when the enthusiasm dwindles. By starting now, weed scientists can contribute the skills, knowledge and leadership that will help this worthwhile cause.

1. Become part of efforts to create or revise noxious weed laws. Most noxious weed laws were just that: laws. The goal should be to create invasive plant programs. Weed scientists can provide a solid framework of how to design effective research and outreach components of invasive plant programs.

2. Previous noxious weed laws were developed from an agricultural perspective. Today's concerns with invasives are much broader and include natural and aquatic areas, roadsides, forests and woodlands, prairies and green areas such as lawns, parks, trails and more. Some agricultural plants are invasive in noncrop areas. It is not unusual to see turf species (Kentucky bluegrass) and forage grasses (reed canarygrass) and legumes (birdsfoot trefoil) as potential noxious weeds. We must ensure that agriculture is represented when species are added or removed from noxious weed lists.

3. Bring the invasive plant issues into our weed science courses and training programs on campus. This is needed in our identification, management and weed ecology and biology courses. We could have graduate students and interns with invasive plant projects.

4. Add invasive plant research and outreach activities to weed science faculty position descriptions. This could be a logical component of weed ecology and biology research and teaching positions as well as those of campus and regional extension weed scientists.

5. Explore ways to interact with botanists, horticulturalists, economists, wildlife biologists, foresters and others on campus to develop and coordinate activities on invasive plants. Perhaps it would be better to do this on invasive species at the campus level with subgroups that deal with plants, insects, etc.

6. Know the organizations involved with invasive plants in your state. In Wisconsin, this means The Nature Conservancy, Dept. of Natural Resources, Prairie Enthusiasts, the Invasive Plants Association of Wisconsin(IPAW), the NRCS, the Department of Defense (the biologist at Ft. McCoy has a team of people involved with invasive on the military land).

7. Be available to work with local citizen groups that focus on invasive plants. More township, city and county level groups are appearing in Wisconsin and they are eager for information and training and are more than willing to take action once an appropriate action plan is developed.

8. Create educational materials that focus on invasive plants and place these on the internet. The “Agronomy Advice” items I prepared on Japanese knotweed and garlic mustard are on the UW Weed Science web site have been used often by new audiences well beyond Wisconsin.

9. Establish pilot projects that demonstrate how to implement an invasive weed management program. We need local examples of successful efforts to train, educate and motivate others in the battle with invasive plants.

10. Keep your eyes open for new initiatives. In Wisconsin, several counties are using NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) monies to control multiflora rose. Land owners must prepare a three-year action plan to receive partial financial support to implement the plan. We can be a valuable resource in developing plans and assessing the results.