

PROGRESS IN WISCONSIN WITH INVASIVE WEEDS. Jerry D. Doll, Extension Weed Scientist, Department of Agronomy, University of Wisconsin, 1575 Linden Dr., Madison, WI 53706.

The Wisconsin Noxious Weed Law, adopted in the 1970s, never functioned well because it lacked a mechanism for adding and deleting species, did not attempt to educate or train, only focused on agricultural settings, and lacked financial support. So this failed to be effective because even though we had rules on the books, we had no way to develop a functional program. In 1999, we formed a working group with approximately 25 people that represented nearly all areas interested in invasive plants to reinvent a functional noxious weed program to replace our defunct law. We reached the point where we had a consensus as to what the program should contain and how it would function and the document went to the Legislative Reference Bureau of our state government to be transcribed into legislative language. This proved to be a daunting task and when the state budget crisis of 2003 hit, progress to take the effort forward ceased and to date it has not been introduced into the legislative process for approval and implementation.

In contrast to the old day, the new one will 1) allow for annual modifications, 2) establish prohibited, restricted and watch categories at the state and county levels, 3) create a Noxious Weed Board, 4) include education and research as significant components, 5) provide funding to subsidize the costs of combating prohibited species, and 6) assign responsibilities within government agencies regarding implementation and execution of the law. More than a year transpired with no movement in the legislature to consider our proposal so it lay dormant during this time.

Nevertheless, the efforts to organize, educate, monitor and manage invasive species are anything but dormant due in large part to a relatively new development on the invasive plant scene in Wisconsin. That is the creation of the Invasive Plants Association of Wisconsin (IPAW) in 1999. IPAW has convened two well attended biennial conferences on invasives and we are starting to systematically document the location of invasive plants, and we are providing education on invasives via the IPAW web site (<http://www.ipaw.org/>), conferences, printed word, and field demonstration. Federal monies are subsidizing the control of multiflora rose. The state Departments of Transportation and of Natural Resources are cooperating to control leafy spurge along roadsides. Local groups are tackling purple loosestrife with biocontrol agents and biennials like wild parsnip with mechanical and chemical means. With such efforts, we are holding our own on several fronts.

In early 2004, our governor appointed an Invasive Species Council. The Council has subcommittees that tackle research, education, regulations and interagency issues but they have no budget so the impact will be limited in the near term. The Council meets regularly, has momentum and at least keeps the invasives issues on the legislative radar screen. The Council has a mandate to give the state legislature a report in February 2005 that will describe the mechanism and criteria by which a species would be classified according to its invasiveness. The efforts of the Noxious Weed Task Force in developing the criteria and categories of noxious weeds will dovetail nicely into this mandate and we have offered our blueprint to the Council. Ours may well be the blueprint for other invasive species.

Wisconsin now has a mechanism for reporting new invasive weeds in the state. And it's just in time. Giant hogweed invaded via the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, hill mustard (also known as Turkish warty cabbage) has appeared on our southern border and devil's claw appeared in a garden on our western border. This is a great step forward and allows anyone in the state to register as an official "weed watcher." A full explanation of the system is found at:

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/invasive/futureplants/>. This will be a very fruitful venture as many members of The Nature Conservancy, Prairie Enthusiasts, The Wild Ones, Master Gardeners and similar organizations will eagerly become watchers and report introductions and movements of

invasive plants.

As Rome took awhile to emerge, so it is with our efforts in Wisconsin to develop a fully function invasive weed program. We remain optimistic that such a program will arise and regardless of the pace of action at legislative and administrative levels, the troops at the grass roots level are fully engaged and doing the best they can under the limitations we face.