

NEW INVADERS WATCH PROGRAM: AN EARLY DETECTION AND RAPID RESPONSE NETWORK TO LIMIT THE SPREAD OF NEW INVASIVE EXOTIC SPECIES IN THE CHICAGO WILDERNESS REGION

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Early detection of new exotic invasive species and rapid response to eradicate or contain populations is an important strategy for preventing the loss of biodiversity in the Chicago Region. The New Invaders Watch Program provides the necessary tools for an effective early detection program, including: volunteer training programs, species identification cards, standardized data collection protocol, an online database and reporting system, voucher verification by herbarium staff, a Rapid Response Network, and resources to assist partners in monitoring and control efforts. In 2006, program partners reported and controlled several target species populations, including Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) in Lake County, IL, roadside populations of Leafy Spurge (*Euphorbia esula*), Japanese Knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*) in Lake Michigan ravines, and Silky Bush Clover (*Lespedeza cuneata*) in an Illinois State Natural Area. Future work includes the addition of new target species, including aquatic plants, completion of an automated alert system for the Rapid Response Network, development of an interactive online mapping module, and expansion of this early detection model to other regions in Illinois.