

Invasive Species Impacts on Wildlife and Natural Communities

Nonnative species that cause environmental or economic harm or harm to human health are collectively known as invasive species. Invasive species introduced into the United States from around the globe are affecting plant and animal communities on our farms, ranches and coasts, and in our parks, waters, forests and backyards. Human activity such as trade, travel and tourism have all increased substantially, increasing the speed and volume of invasive species movement to unprecedented levels. As global climate patterns shift, the distribution of species will change, and so will the susceptibility of particular habitats to the impacts of new species introductions.

In California, the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) leads the effort against most aquatic invasive species and terrestrial vertebrates. Staff is relied upon to provide leadership and promptly address national and regional invasive species concerns. DFG game wardens are tasked with investigations and prosecutions of those who illegally import or release invasive species into the state. Working closely with local, state and federal agencies, DFG provides expertise and guidance in the prevention and containment of detrimental species.

While generally complimentary of our efforts, stakeholders and academics indicate that DFG should be doing more to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species. Academics also are concerned by the lack of a California Invasive Species Center to address invasive species research needs. Current staffing and funding resources limit DFG's ability to establish a technical working group to help set priorities and expand its research efforts. Critics contend not enough is being done to protect the state's natural resources and water infrastructure from invasive species because the state's primary focus has been on agricultural pests. In addition, some stakeholders question DFG's commitment to protecting sensitive ecosystems when it cannot provide funding for early detection monitoring or small scale eradications.

DFG maximizes the resources it does have to address invasive species issues. Over the past five years, governmental agencies and the public have become more aware of invasive species issues. California is a leader in both education and outreach activities in the nation, and DFG's aggressive media and outreach campaigns reach millions of boaters and anglers annually. The DFG Invasive Species Program Manager is the chair of the federal Organizational Collaboration committee of the federal Invasive Species Advisory Committee and the representative and liaison for the governor's Invasive Species Council of California, which is composed of secretaries from six agencies. DFG staff will continue to work with other states and national and international agencies to prevent future introductions of invasive species into California, pursue grants and other sources of funding, increase engagement of stakeholders and evaluate the need for a permanent advisory position in the Natural Resources Agency.