Invasive Species and Plants Conferences Scheduled in Fairbanks

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Scientists, experts and others concerned about the spread of non-native, invasive plants and animals will gather for back-to-back conferences Nov. 13-15 in Fairbanks.

A variety of speakers from state and federal agencies will address concerns about invasive species Nov. 13 at the 2007 Alaska Invasive Species Conference, followed Nov. 14-15 by the Eighth-Annual CNIPM Conference (Committee for Noxious and Invasive Plants Management). The University of Alaska Fairbanks Cooperative Extension Service will host both conferences at the Fairbanks Princess Riverside Lodge.

Michele Hebert, agriculture and horticulture agent with Extension’s Tanana District, will welcome participants and open the Alaska Invasive Species Conference. Everything from non-native, invasive mammals and fish in Alaska to plant pathogens of concern will be discussed.

Guest speaker Gregory Ruiz, a senior scientist with the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center, will speak on “Coastal Marine Invasions in Alaska: Patterns, Processes and Predictions.” Ruiz has done a great deal of research with regional citizens’ advisory councils and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The conference will end with a discussion on future actions of the Alaska Invasive Species Working Group.

During the CNIPM Conference, presenters from across the state as well as five national speakers will talk about invasive plants prevention and management and what noxious weeds mean for Alaska. The Alaska Committee for Noxious and Invasive Plants Management includes representatives from more than 35 different state and local organizations, citizens’ groups and federal agencies. Founded in 2000, the committee is dedicated to improving statewide coordination to halt the introduction and spread of unwanted invasive plants.

Fairbanks City Mayor Steve Thompson will open the conference Nov. 14 and Franci Havemeister, director of the Alaska Division of Agriculture, will provide opening comments on Nov. 15.
Conference organizer Jamie Nielsen, Extension's Invasive Plants Program instructor, said problems with invasive plants are not as widespread in Alaska as elsewhere, but the state is behind on developing a response to deal with the problem, which can have great economic and environmental consequences.

Plants whose seeds are carried by the wind or birds regularly colonize new areas, Nielsen said. The concern is about certain species of non-native plants whose seeds are inadvertently transported to distant places by human activities. These invasive plants thrive in a foreign environment with no natural enemies, often reproducing aggressively and displacing natural vegetation. Invasive aquatic plants can damage fish habitat and choke waterways.

“They can really wreak havoc,” said Nielsen. “They can easily out-compete our native species.”

The hope is that creating greater public awareness of the problem and organizing a response will pay big dividends in protecting property value, agriculture, wildlife and wild lands—and will help minimize the problems seen elsewhere, said Nielsen. Several western states spend millions of dollars annually on invasive species control. Montana spends $14 million annually to control spotted knapweed, which covers 5 million acres in the state. Nielsen said that knapweed has been found at more than 10 sites in Alaska from Ketchikan to Anchorage.

Conference speakers will include Michael Lusk, the invasive species coordinator for National Wildlife Refuges and John Randall, the wildland invasive species team director for The Nature Conservancy. Rep. Craig Johnson, R-Anchorage, will talk about a draft statute that addresses invasive plants prevention and management.

Lusk and Randall also will present a public lecture from 6:30-8 p.m. Nov. 13 in the Noel Wien Library auditorium. Their talks are titled, “Weeds Invading Alaska: Why You Don’t Want Other States’ Problems” and “The Nature Conservancy’s Global Invasive Species Approach.”


For more information about the CNIPM Conference or to register, contact the Cooperative Extension at 786-6310. A registration form and agenda are also available at www.cnipm.org. A registration form and agenda for the Alaska Invasive Species Conference may be downloaded from www.alaskainvasives.org.

CONTACT: Jamie Nielsen at 786-6315 or ffjmn@uaf.edu.
Michele Hebert at 474-5807 or ffmah@uaf.edu