

Alaska

Exotic Plant Management Team



Partner Parks: Alagnak WR, Aniakchak NM & PRES, Bering Land Bridge N PRES, Cape Krusenstern NM, Denali NP & PRES, Gates of the Arctic NP & PRES, Glacier Bay NP & PRES, Katmai NP & PRES, Kenai Fjords NP, Klondike Gold Rush NHP, Kobuk Valley NP, Lake Clark NP & PRES, Noatak N PRES, Sitka NHP, Wrangell-St. Elias NP & PRES, Yukon-Charley Rivers N PRES

While people may think of Alaska as too cold and remote for invasive species to become problematic; the past decade has demonstrated that Alaska is just as vulnerable as other states, and the invasion has truly begun.

2008 Accomplishments

Inventoried Acres	310
Gross Infested Acres	716
Infested Acres	716
Treated Acres	58
Monitored Acres	4,122
Maintained	26

Alaska's 54 million acres of National Park lands preserve vast areas that have seen no addition or subtraction of species over the past century. However, invasive plants have gained footholds in the developed areas of the most highly visited Alaska parks. To meet this growing challenge in 2008, its sixth year, the Alaska EPMT (AK-EPMT) further developed its comprehensive and vigilant efforts to keep invasive plants from becoming major problems in Alaska's National Parks. An Invasive Plant Management Plan and environmental assessment were completed for the entire Alaska Region, the first of its kind in Alaska and a great achievement.

In the nine Alaska parks with documented invasive plants, just over half of the Region's units, 17 employees and interns inventoried, controlled, and monitored small, scattered invasive plant infestations. Two months of assistance provided by AmeriCorps crews from the Southeast Alaska Guidance Association enabled treatment within the seven parks having large infestations. This also provided work experience in National Parks for over 50 youth and an opportunity for education in natural resource management. Sixty-five infestations were eradicated this year, adding to the 35 eradicated in 2007. This prevented small

infestations from increasing and becoming a widespread landscape issue.



Figure 15. The seasonal training at the beginning of the summer is the only time the Alaska EPMT gathers in one place before dispersing to keep invasive plants from doing so in the parks.

Examples of AK-EPMT's successes include the elimination of populations of annual sowthistle (*Sonchus oleraceus*) and oxeye daisy (*Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*) from the entrance area to Denali National Park and Preserve. These early efforts have kept numerous invasive plant species from spreading along the single road to the millions of uninfested acres beyond. At Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, the AK-EPMT is eradicating populations of reed canary grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*) and creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*) that can obstruct wetlands and damage fish and wildlife habitat. Populations have been treated and confined to the park entrance area. Work at Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve has resulted in the elimination of several invasive species that would have swiftly spread into the northern area of America's largest National Park. Sweet clover (*Melilotus spp.*) is a growing problem in

Alaska and now dominates stream banks along several rivers in Alaska. Ongoing efforts to control sweetclover have protected the Copper River from widespread infestations. The only known invasive plant infestation in Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve has been eradicated. Finally, eight invasive species have been purged from Kenai Fjords National Park, preserving the ability of native plants to colonize when glaciers recede.

The AK-EPMT participates regularly in the Alaska Committee for Noxious and Invasive Plants Management and in Cooperative Weed Management Areas across the state, serving a leadership role and sharing information on invasive plant management. In 2007 and 2008, this involved contributing to recommendations for the State Legislature about effective ways to address invasive plants statewide. In 2008, the Alaska House and Senate passed a bill to establish an Invasive Plant Program within the Alaska Department of Natural Resources. As Governor Palin signed the bill into law in June, she spoke of the importance of learning from the problems other states are facing by addressing invasive plants while they are still manageable.



Figure 16. AK-EPMT Liaison Jeff Heys teaches Alaska Governor Sarah Palin, her daughter Piper, and friends about spotted knapweed shortly after she signs Alaska's first legislation to deal with invasive plants.

To help provide national attention to invasive species issues in Alaska, the NPS Alaska Regional Office hosted the biannual Invasive Species Advisory Committee meeting in May. This group of experts was impressed by the level of Alaskan participation in the meeting and the opportunities and challenges presented by the early stages of invasion in an enormous and remote state.

Alaskan National Parks still face challenges garnering support and understanding for invasive plant management. Consequently, outreach and education programs are an active component of the AK-EPMT. Several community events occurred at Glacier Bay this summer. The fourth annual Fourth of July outreach event featured invasive plant arrangements, interactive invasive plant games, and a dandelion cookbook with a featured recipe - roasted dandelion root coffee served piping hot. At a separate event for local schoolchildren, the EPMT led a morning of invasive plant activities including listening to stories, playing games, and learning to identify non-native plants. Finally, for park staff, presentations and informative emails were presented throughout the summer. Similar activities across Alaska's parks are the avenues to long-term success for preventing invasive plant problems.



Figure 17. AK-EPMT Data Manager Whitney Rapp teaches the next generation at Glacier Bay to identify invasive plants.

Our method for keeping Alaska's National Parks free of invasive plants involves scouring the areas most likely to be invaded, such as campgrounds, trailheads, and parking lots, and locating small populations of invasive plants as soon as they are noticeable. They are then precisely mapped, immediately controlled, and closely monitored until they have been eliminated. It is a simple formula but one that now yields growing returns. After one to several years of treatment, a population fails to turn up, and another battle has been won. Since we also take steps to ensure that invasive plants are not introduced by park operations, we will face fewer battles in the future.