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Local environment is experiencing damaging effects of invasive plant species

May is invasive species awareness month, and the Campbell River Forestry Task Force is calling on the community to take action to protect local forests.

Jason Hutchinson, a member of the task force, has experience managing outbreaks of invasive species. He explains, “Once established, invasive plant species (*aliens*) bring harmful impacts to our environment, economy and society.”

Over the next few months the local forest industry will be looking for invasive plants that affect native stands and will develop brushing (removal) plans to limit the damage these species have to establishing forest plantations, road corridors and riparian areas.

Invasive species are non-native organisms that cause harm and can spread quickly to new areas beyond their natural range of distribution. These organisms are often introduced by people. One of the greatest challenges in the fight to limit the negative effects posed by invasive plants is that they take root without natural predators and pathogens that would help keep their populations in check.

Here in Campbell River, invasive plants have the potential to pose the greatest undesirable or detrimental impacts on our neighbouring forests and surrounding ecosystems. The economic impacts of invasive species are significant, and according to Environment Canada the damage to the agriculture and forest industries results in an estimated \$7.5 billion of lost revenues annually, across the country.

“In Campbell River, we are recognizing increased maintenance costs to public parks, managed forestlands and private properties from these alien plants,” Hutchinson adds.

Plants that can have significant negative effects on surrounding forests and green spaces include: yellow flag iris (water bodies and estuaries), Daphne (forest understories), Scotch broom (disturbed soils and infrastructure corridors), giant hogweed (roadsides), and knotweed (riparian areas, parks, infrastructure corridors and forests).

Invasive plants can alter habitat and damage ecosystems by displacing native vegetation and competing for water, nutrients and space. During the process of invading, they can reduce soil productivity and water quality and degrade wildlife and fish habitats. For example, Scotch broom, has negatively affected regenerating forests by displacing young trees and competing for nutrients, light and water. This competition reduces productivity and future economic activities such as timber harvesting and the gathering of non-timber forest products. As well, the various knotweed species are very prolific and difficult to eradicate once established on a site. They grow quickly and shade out native trees seedlings, reducing the value of the future forest.

Negative social impacts from invasive plants establishing in forests, green spaces and parks include lost income, reduced water quality, increased maintenance costs, seasonal allergies and hay fever.

The City of Campbell River has an invasive plant management and five-year implementation plan to target, control and eradicate various invasive species on publicly-owned, environmentally-sensitive lands. The City has also previously helped fund Greenways’ yellow iris management work within the Campbell River estuary.

What can you do to help protect forests and natural ecosystems from these damaging invasive species?

1. Report sightings through Report-a-Weed, a free online application available for mobile devices;
2. Do not dump yard waste or plant materials into natural areas, watersheds or surrounding forests (this is the most common way these alien plant species end up in our forests and waterways); and
3. Choose plants for your garden wisely and avoid unwanted exotic plants.
4. Visit bcinvasives.ca to learn to identify exotic plants and animals and how they can affect our community, our natural environment and surrounding forests.
5. Volunteer with Greenways Land Trust during an organized Broom Bash or yellow iris plant pull in the Campbell River estuary. Find more information at www.greenwaystrust.ca.

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Photos:

- Daphne or Spurge-Laurel (Poisonous sap), Photo courtesy of Jason Hutchinson
- Knotweed species, Photo courtesy of the Coastal Invasive Species Committee
- Giant Hogweed (Human health hazard), Photo courtesy of the Coastal Invasive Species Committee
- Butterfly Bush, Photo courtesy of the Coastal Invasive Species Committee
- Yellow Flag Iris, Photo courtesy of the Coastal Invasive Species Committee