

Weeds Gone Wild: A Web-based Public Information Project

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Abstract

The Plant Conservation Alliance's Alien Plant Working Group (APWG) was formed in August 1995 in order to address the problem of invasive exotic plants on a national level, to produce educational materials, and to forge cooperation with local and regional groups. The focus of the group is the threat and impacts of invasive alien (exotic, non-native) plants to the native flora, fauna, and natural ecosystems of the United States. Formal guidance for the APWG's future direction and activities was developed during the Plant Conservation Alliance's "Taking Initiative" workshop sponsored by the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin, Texas, in January 1999. The resulting product, "An Action Agenda for Invasive Plants" is available on the web page (<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/apwgaction.htm>) and identifies the following eight focal issues: 1) Communication, Networking and Partnerships; 2) Funding; 3) Information Management; 4) On-The-Ground Management; 5) Outreach and Education; 6) Policy and Guidance; 7) Research; and 8) Resources and Training.

The group's first project was development of a web page, "Weeds Gone Wild: Alien Plant Invaders of Natural Areas" (<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien>), online since August 1997, that is useful to the general public, land managers, researchers, and others. A background section explains the invasive species problem, defines terms, and provides suggestions for things people can do to help. The site also provides the most comprehensive list of invasive plant species affecting natural ecosystems through the U.S., to date running well over 1,000 species. Illustrated fact sheets provide plant descriptions, native origins, U.S. distribution and types of habitats invaded, biology and methods of spread, management options, alternative plants, and links to experts. An information links section helps connect users to invasive species contacts and other valuable resources worldwide. Recent additions include an electronic list-serve and electronic events calendar (http://www.eventcal.net/weeds_gone_wild). And last but not least, a theme song, "To Every Weed, Turn, Turn, Turn", is provided to encourage weed busters in their pulling, cutting, spraying and other weed-killing activities.

Participation is open to anyone interested in being involved and partners include federal, state, and local government agencies, non-governmental organizations, universities, private firms and individuals. Fact sheets and other materials are produced largely through efforts of volunteers. The National Park Service, one of 10 federal agencies that signed the Memorandum of Agreement establishing the Plant Conservation Alliance in May 1994 (<http://www.nps.gov/plants/coop.htm>), provides the internet service for the project.