

Invasive Plants on Our Roadside

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Invasive plants are non-native species that out-compete native vegetation, which disrupts ecosystems. They are found along many roadways and are one of the greatest threats to biological diversity and general ecology in the United States.

What do invasive species have to do with roads in particular? Highway and road corridors provide numerous opportunities for the movement of invasive species: seeds can move on vehicles and in the loads they carry; seeds and plants can be moved from site to site during spraying and mowing; seeds can be introduced into the corridor during construction by riding on equipment and in mulch, soil, and sod; and existing plants allow wind to spread the seeds to other locations along the right-of-way.

Purple loosestrife is one example of an invasive species. It was introduced into gardens as an ornamental plant because of its showy purple flower



Figure 1: Purple loosestrife - Photo courtesy of The New York State Museum

(see Figure 1). The seeds then spread to wetlands near the gardens. After many growing seasons of seed spread, purple loosestrife is currently found in many large wetland areas, in numbers greater than those of native plants. It outcompetes native wetland plants that provide food for waterfowl and other animals that rely on the wet-

land area. As a result, waterfowl have less to eat during migration and nesting seasons, and the wetland cannot support as many birds.

Invasive species control and management is a significant concern to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA). Executive Order 13112 prohibits federal agencies from authorizing, funding, or carrying out actions that it believes are likely to cause or promote the introduction or spread of invasive species.

The FHWA encourages construction and landscaping techniques that help to accomplish the intent of the Executive Order and promote environmental stewardship. Methods include minimizing soil disturbance to reduce opportunities for the introduction of invasive species, control of existing areas through mowing or spraying, using more efficient equipment cleaners, and using improved seeding equipment for steep slopes.

For more information:

- Attend the UNH T² Center workshop on Invasive Plants on 10/13 in Concord: www.t2.unh.edu/training/invasive_plants.pdf
- NHDOT BMPs for Roadside Invasive Plants: www.nh.gov/dot/org/projectdevelopment/environment/units/technicalservices/documents/BMPsforRoadsideInvasivePlants.pdf
- FHWA Roadside Vegetation Management: www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/vegmt/index.htm
- NH Dept. of Agriculture & NH Invasive Species Committee Guide to Invasive Upland Plant Species: http://agriculture.nh.gov/divisions/plant_industry/documents/InvasivesBooklet2005.pdf
- USDA - Invasive Plants: <http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/plants/main.shtml>
- USDA - Executive Order 13112: <http://www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov/laws/execorder.shtml>

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