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## Plan aims to stop bug, weed 'invasion'

BY SARA FOSS Gazette Reporter

Invasive species have been a problem since the first European settlers arrived in the New World.

What's changing, according to Steve Sanford, director of the state's Office of Invasive Species Coordination, is the rate of invasion, a trend largely due to increased globalization and greater mobility. While some invasive species, such as the plant purple loosestrife, have been in New York for hundreds of years, others, such as the emerald ash borer insect, have arrived only recently.

In a new report, the New York State Invasive Species Council recommends developing a regulatory system to prevent the importation and release of invasive species in the state's waterways, forests and farmlands.

This system would assess each invasive species for its level of threat and divide the state's invasive species into three lists: prohibited, regulated and unregulated. It would create the first official lists of invasive plants, insects and animals in New York.

Under the recommended system, it would be illegal to possess, buy, sell or transport invasive species placed on the prohibited list except under a permit for disposal, control research or education. It would be legal to possess, sell, buy or transport the invasive species on the regulated list but not to bring or introduce them into the state if they don't already exist. And it would create a category of invasive species not subject to regulation because they do not pose a significant threat to New York.

"Awareness and outreach are going to be a big part of the effort," Sanford said. "But sometimes you need enforcement action."

### INVASIVE SPECIES FORUM

On Aug. 10 and 11, Paul Smith's College will host a free public forum on invasive species in the Adirondacks. Sanford will be one of the speakers.

The event is being sponsored by the Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program, which is based at The Nature Conservancy in Keene Valley, and will bring together residents, government officials, community groups and environmental organizations. The first day will focus on how to protect the region, while the second day will focus on what the state is doing. Participants will also learn about grassroots efforts to prevent the spread of invasive species.

"We wanted to provide an opportunity for people to tell their story," Smith said.

Smith said residents of the town of Inlet, in the southwestern Adirondacks, formed the Regional Inlet Invasive Plant Program to deal with Japanese knotweed, a large perennial plant. “They’re really working in a coordinated way to combat a serious threat,” Smith said. At the forum, a volunteer with the Inlet program will talk about that effort.

## PATHWAY STRATEGY

Sanford said the state has a “pathway by pathway” approach to slowing the spread of invasive species. Instead of focusing on specific species, the state focuses on the pathways by which organisms move around the globe, he said, passing firewood regulations to address the spread of insects and bait regulations to address the spread of fish diseases such as VHS, or viral hemorrhagic septicemia.

“If we can shut down a pathway, maybe we can stop the next invasive species,” Sanford said.

And when people move, they sometimes take invasive species with them. Plant fragments get tangled on boats; invasive fish get caught in ballast water.

Forest pests such as the Asian longhorn beetle hide out in firewood. Invasive plants such as purple loosestrife are still sold in plant nurseries.

The issue of invasive species “only seems to be getting more important,” said John Sheehan, a spokesman for the Adirondack Council.

He noted that *didymosphenia geminata* — a type of algae known as rock snot — has spread rapidly in the Adirondacks over the past five years and that the spiny water flea is now present on Great Sacandaga Lake.

“We’re seeing long strands of Japanese knotweed on the Great Sacandaga where we’ve never seen it before,” he said.

The concern, Sheehan said, is that invasive species will destroy the diverse ecosystem of the Adirondacks.

“When [the movement of invasive species] is abrupt, it tends to muck around with the life support system,” Sheehan said. “The fact that everything is nice and hospitable for us on this planet is not something we should take for granted.”

Sheehan said that the Adirondack Council would like the state to create an invasive species institute to serve as a clearinghouse for research and information.

The emerald ash borer, a small beetle that infests and kills ash trees, is a particular concern. It was detected in New York for the first time in 2009, in the town of Randolph in Cattaraugus County. Since then, 7,500 traps have been placed in ash trees to detect the beetle as soon as

possible. Earlier this year, the emerald ash borer was discovered on private properties in Steuben and Ulster counties.

Since its discovery in 2002 in Michigan, the beetle has killed and sickened tens of millions of ash trees in the U.S.

The state is also working to curtail the spread of the northern snakehead fish, which has been found in Orange County and Queens.

Sanford said the key to controlling and possibly even eradicating an invasive species is a rapid response and the ability to adapt.

In 2008, New York banned untreated firewood from entering the state and restricted the movement of untreated firewood to within a 50-mile radius of its source. These regulations are part of an effort to prevent the spread of the emerald ash borer and other invasive species.

In 2003, the state created an Invasive Species Task Force; in 2005, the group presented its final report to Gov. George Pataki.

That document described invasive species as a form of “biological pollution” that could endanger the state’s food supply, decimate forests and throw New York’s ecosystem out of whack. The state later established the New York Invasive Species Council and created the Office of Invasive Species Coordination, which is based at the Department of Environmental Conservation.