Editorial

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Editorial on Management of Invasive Species

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Editorial

Invasive species can harm the values for which land is conserved. Natural lands are not fully protected unless they also are managed for the features that first motivated preservation. Invasive species can change community structure, composition, and ecosystem processes on these lands in ways that may not be anticipated or desirable. Careful management can minimize these negative impacts. One of the most serious problems and others face in the management of open space is the presence of invasive species. Vines climbing trees and exotic shrubs that choke abandoned fields have the ability to displace native vegetation, halt the natural process of succession from field to forest, and homogenize the structural and food resources of a site, thereby reducing its habitat value for native fauna. Many, but not all, of the invasive species were introduced by humans from other regions of the world. After habitat loss, invasive plants and animals represent the greatest threat to endangered species.

In natural areas management the most efficient and effective strategy usually results from a thorough understanding of the environmental forces in the area and having management goals that work with and not against these forces. Given that growing space (light, water, nutrients, etc.) in any site is finite, successful management will be a combination of practices which make more growing space available to desirable species and less to non-desirable species-in this case, invasive.

Chemical methods involve the use of herbicides. The decision to use chemical controls is a carefully considered one. The exclusive use of herbicides alone is not likely to be an effective long-term solution for controlling invasive. Difficulties include controlling only target plants at the correct time during their life cycle, and the potential health risks to workers and the environment. Herbicides need to be applied only by trained and licensed personnel. In combination with physical methods of reducing the above-ground portion of a plant, herbicides may limit re sprouting or effectively control plants when used in combination with other techniques. Typically herbicides are used in small quantities for a stump application immediately after an invasive is cut back, or they are used to control re sprouts sometime after the cutting. The environmental damage from invasive plants is considered to be greater than the risk associated with the use of non-persistent herbicides.

The risks associated with species introduction are high and only well-funded and thoughtfully researched programs are effective. It may benefit from the existence of such programs, perhaps, for example, in the case of purple loosestrife. But it does not have the resources or the mandate to undertake such research on its own. Also considered biological control is the use of grazing animals, such as goats, to control invasive such as multiflora rose.

Implementation

Implementation of an invasive species management plan requires a long-term commitment to ongoing stewardship. Expertise is needed to identify resources and the threats to them, and the ability to prioritize by threat, by geographic site or resource being threatened, and by individual plants. Assessment and interpretation of the scale and type of work required are key factors in ensuring a successful species management plan. Plan implementation involves the following steps:

Prioritization

Prioritizing which species to control is an important consideration, there are never sufficient resources to manage them all and there will always be external sources of weeds, so it is important to determine which species are interfering most with your goals for the land. Ongoing funding for long-term maintenance may be limited, so prioritization is significant in the planning process.

We want to prioritize species that have the capability of forming dense populations, halting succession, and/or changing soil chemistry or some other chemical or physical property of the site. We also wish to prioritize species that are just beginning to invade the preserve-those that are not already ubiquitous. Deciduous woods, the natural vegetation of the Piedmont physiographic province, is the habitat to which we assign the highest priority score.

