

Ontario introduces law to combat invasive species

As the province faces threats from invasive species such as Asian carp and the mountain pine beetle, the Ontario government has introduced a bill to support the prevention, early detection, rapid response and eradication of these species.

“Invasive species cost the Ontario economy tens of millions of dollars each year,” said Minister of Natural Resources David Orazietti. “With the introduction of our proposed Invasive Species Act, Ontario is taking strong action to address the social, ecological and economic threats that invasive species pose.”

Managing the impacts of just one invasive species – zebra mussels – is estimated to cost the province between \$75 million and \$91 million each year.

These, and other invasive species, have impacts on the natural environment that are often irreversible. Asian carp have overwhelmed some river systems in the United States, where they now make up more than 95 per cent of the fish by weight in some areas. The European common reed, phragmites, is damaging Ontario beaches and wetlands.

More than 180 non-native aquatic species have been found to occur in the Great Lakes basin, and some have been here for decades. Invasive species are found everywhere in the province, though the majority are in southern Ontario. For more information, visit ontario.ca/invasivespecies

If the proposed legislation is passed, Ontario will be the only jurisdiction in Canada that has stand-alone invasive species legislation.

The proposed Invasive Species Act, which was introduced in the provincial legislature on February 26, would give Ontario the tools to ban activities such as possessing and transporting certain high risk invasive species, enable rapid response actions to address urgent threats, and would help ensure compliance through modernized inspection and enforcement measures.

“Preventing invasive species from arriving and becoming established in Ontario is critical in our fight against this growing threat,” Orazietti said. “The proposed legislation would help by providing the powers to intervene earlier, so small problems don't become bigger and lead to significant environmental and economic costs for Ontarians.”

Invasive species can enter Ontario and spread across the province in different ways.

Sometimes they are spread unintentionally – for example, recreational boaters who unknowingly transfer zebra mussels that are attached to their boat, from one body of water to another. But many times people introduce invasive species into Ontario knowingly – whether it's purchasing invasive plants for gardening, dumping aquarium plants or pets into local waterways, or moving contaminated firewood.

Everyone can help prevent the spread of invasive species. Here are some tips:

– If you see an invasive species, report it to the Invading Species Hotline at 1-800-563-7711 or info@invadingspecies.com

– When camping, don't transport firewood. You could accidentally spread an invasive insect that is hitchhiking in the firewood. Buy it locally, and leave what you don't use.

– When fishing, don't empty your bait bucket in or near water. You could inadvertently help an invasive plant, fish or insect find a new home.

– When boating, wash your boat before you move to another lake or river to avoid taking an invasive species with you.

– After hiking, clean mud, plants and seeds from your boots and other equipment.

? If you're travelling, don't take plants, plant parts, seeds or fruit across borders.