

Shortcomings & Solutions for Massachusetts' Invasive Species Management

Massachusetts' current approach to invasive species management lacks sufficient funding and coordination to provide meaningful assistance to those trying to steward our natural environment.

Without sound educational resources, landowners may pursue invasive species eradication methods that are unnecessarily expensive, laborious, and toxic, or delay action that allows infestations to get worse.

H.999/S.563 provides a coordinated approach to invasive species management with streamlined assistance and funding.

This bill aligns with the recommendations of experts and those in the field:

This legislation would implement the suggestion from a [2003 MIPAG report](#): *"We recommend that Massachusetts establish and support a **centralized means** within state government for **inter-agency coordination** on invasive species management, in partnership with public and private sector interests. This mechanism should help produce a **strategic management plan** for invasive plant species in the Commonwealth based on MIPAG's recommendations. It should help coordinate invasive species management efforts within the Commonwealth and integrate efforts with regional and national partners."* (page 8).

The following are quotes from interviews done by Mass Rivers:

An **MDAR** staff person: "I don't feel like there's a place people can go for info on invasives at the State, nobody's regulating the impacts of well-established invasive plants."

Lowell Parks and Conservation Trust: "Yes, it would be absolutely helpful to have a state coordinator."

Pelham Conservation Commission: "A funding source and a coordinator would be really helpful. It's easier for us to do one-stop shopping. It'd be great to have some reliable place to go at the state level."

Brookline Conservation Commission: "I support the idea of a coordinated office at the state level because it's so expensive now for municipalities to spend all that time sorting it out."

Groton Conservation Commission: "Educational resources, coordination with the state and other town bodies, and access to training would be helpful from an Invasive Species State Coordinator. Anything that could help them do their job more easily without billing the town. A centralized repository for materials to help them do their job."

Danvers Conservation Commission: "We really support the program and hope they create a grant opportunity. We would definitely apply because it's definitely needed."

Amherst Conservation Commission: “There’s very little money out there for this problem. Even a couple \$100,000 would be a lot to do educational campaigns for private landowners and landscaping companies and to physically get to the infestations and bring them under control. It’d be helpful to know what the most effective approaches are to managing each invasive.”

Existing resources are difficult to identify because agencies are working in silos.

For municipal staff or volunteers, it’s not clear where to go for advice, funding, or educational information on invasive species. Several state agencies have disparate resources, but there is not a comprehensive database for all this information for Massachusetts. Finding up to date information on invasive species, their impacts, and how best to manage them is time consuming and confusing, as confirmed from interviews with municipal staff.

- The Massachusetts Invasive Plant Advisory Group (MIPAG) published [Strategic Recommendations for Managing Invasive Plants in Massachusetts](#) in 2005. MIPAG maintains a list of invasive plant species on their website that does not include photos, nor advice on how to manage them. In a [separate document](#), the group gives general management advice, but it is not species specific.
 - The Department of Agricultural Resources maintains the [Massachusetts Prohibited Plant List](#) of species that are illegal to import, sell, or propagate in the state. This document is a list of plant names without photos nor advice on what to do if you have one of these plants on your property. In their FAQ section, the agency recommends landowners consult “online resources” for management advice, but does not link to those resources.
 - The Office of Coastal Zone Management (CZM) monitors coastal invasive species, and [published identification cards](#) on the most common marine invasives.
 - The Department of Fish and Game (DFG) sells an [identification guide](#) to accompany MIPAG’s list of invasive plant species for \$5. The guide was published in 2008.
 - Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) maintains its own [list](#) of aquatic invasive plants, as does the [USGS](#). Neither include management recommendations.
 - UMass Amherst offers a [phone app](#) where users can report and identify invasive species, funded through a USDA grant. They also can identify invasive specimens in their [diagnostic lab](#) mailed in from the public.
- This bill would provide a venue for dialogue between agency staff to share resources and plan more strategic prevention, eradication, and education work.
- This bill would create a centralized office to house all of these resources, and state coordinators could guide people to the right resources, saving time for municipal staff who are seeking guidance on invasive species management.
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Current grant opportunities have limited scope.

The agency programs listed above only provide funding to focus on a few priority invasive species in narrow circumstances, while municipalities deal with a wide range of invasives.

- MassWildlife has [small grants](#) (\$10-50k) for improving habitat for endangered species or game.
- DCR's Lakes & Ponds Program [trains](#) lake associations to monitor their ponds for invasive plants and to develop a removal plan.
- DCR also offers [Partnership Matching Funds](#) to small non profit organizations that care for DCR properties, but a staff member described that program as "slow-going and piecemeal," and the funds can only be used to improve DCR properties.
- NRCS offers [grants](#) for agricultural producers or forest landowners for a variety of conservation practices, including invasive management.
- MDAR does not offer money to municipalities for invasive species work, though the agency will work on infested sites when they're called in. They've spent \$25,000 on three priority species over 6 years.

None of these grant programs support preventative work, nor many maintenance projects. Unless a landowner's situation falls into one of these specific categories, they have nowhere to turn for funding. As new species emerge, not all of these funding sources react to include new threats.

- This legislation provides the bread-and-butter funding municipalities and conservation organizations need to prevent invasive species infestations before they begin and keep them at bay once treatment has begun.
- Since the Invasive Species Trust Fund is not tied to any one specific species, it will be able to adapt to new invasive species that may threaten Massachusetts in the future.

There is a funding gap between what is offered and what is needed.

- Even if an entity qualifies for one of these grant programs, the funding is often limited. To be effective, invasive species management must occur consistently year after year. A single year of grant funding will be wasted without follow up funding.
- In both Connecticut and New York, the state's most recent round of invasive species grants received over double the applications than they were able to fund. That demand in our neighboring states is indicative of the need experienced here in Massachusetts.

- In Pepperell, the water chestnut in Pepperell Pond grew so bad that the stench kept visitors away from downtown. Treatment for that infestation is about \$75k per year, costing less with each year of successful treatment.
 - The Lowell Parks and Conservation Trust has been unable to find any grants to provide the \$20k in funding needed to keep up with invasives on their public properties.
 - Lincoln is \$50k behind in maintenance funds to tackle ongoing terrestrial invasive species on town property, including garlic mustard, barberry, and knotweed.
- The longer a species is left to grow, the more expensive management becomes. By offering grants for prevention work, we can be proactive about protecting our ecosystems and save municipal and state money down the line.
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