

Meeting of the Pennsylvania Governor’s Invasive Species Council (PGISC)

Thursday, June 11, 2026 | 10:00am (virtual)

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Attendance

Council Members, Designees, & Alternates Present	
State Agencies	
PA Department of Agriculture (PDA)	Chris Davis
PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources (PA DCNR)	Rosa Yoo, Andrew Rohrbaugh
PA Department of Environmental Protection (PA DEP)	Jim Grazio
PA Department of Transportation (PennDOT)	Lucas Crawford
PA Department of Health (PA DOH)	(Not present)
PA Fish & Boat Commission (PFBC)	Sean Hartzell
PA Game Commission (PGC)	(Not present)
Non-Governmental Organizations	
Allegheny Plateau Invasive Plant Management Area	(Not present)
County Governments	(Not present)
PA Association of Conservation Districts (PACD)	Piper Sherburne
PA Farm Bureau (PFB)	Grant Gulibon
PA Lake Management Society (PALMS)	(Not present)
PA Landscape & Nursery Association (PLNA)	Claire Zuidervliet, Gregg Robertson
PA Sea Grant (PASG)	Sara Stahlman
PA State Association of Township Supervisors (PSATS)	Brian Harris
Penn State University (PSU)	Deah Lieurance
PennAg Industries Association (PennAg)	(Not present)
Temple University (TU)	(Not present)
Transportation Sector	(Not present)
University of Pennsylvania (UPenn)	(Not present)
Western PA Conservancy (WPC)	Amy Jewitt, Brian Daggs
Total Members, Designees, & Alternates Present	15

Members/Designees/Alternates Not in Attendance: Andrew Ernst (PFB), Betsy Schroeder (PA DOH), Harold Brecht (PennAg), Jeff Thomas (County Governments), Jocelyn Behm (TU), John Taucher (PGC), Josh Burnside (PALMS), Kate Harms (PALMS), Katie Sasala (APIPMA), Lisa Murphy (UPenn), Ray Boronyak (PennDOT), Sarah Whitney (PASG), Sean Mahoney (Port of Philadelphia)

Other Participants Present: (29) - Alexa Bixel, Amber Stilwell, Angela Spagnoli, Benjamin Mummert, Chad Greenlee, Corinne Garda, Daniel Blottenberger, Daniel Graci, Eli Wisor, Frank Schneider, Hunter Kauffman, Jonathan Wenger, Justin Royer, Kierstin Carlson, Kris Abell, Kylie Wirebach, Marie Maiuro, Mary Walsh, Meagan Hopkins-Doerr, Molly Burns, Patricia Prade, Phineas Saum, Ryan Reed, Sarah Gettys, Scott Parkhill, Shaina Walker, Shayna Seeley, Theresa Culley, Trilby Libhart

In total, 44 individuals (including both members and non-members) are present for today's meeting.

Welcome/Introductory Remarks, Roll Call, & Approval of Minutes

Speaker: **Chris Davis**, Acting Deputy Secretary-Plant Industry and Consumer Protection; Executive Director for the Commission for Agriculture Education Excellence; Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (chmdavi@pa.gov)



Chris Davis (PDA) welcomed everyone to today's meeting, highlighting the importance of partnerships as a continued important part of the Council. Chris conducted the roll call. A quorum is present for today's meeting.

MOTION: Brian Harris (PSATS) moved to approve the March 19, 2026 PGISC meeting minutes. Deah Lieurance (PSU) seconded the motion. **Motion approved.**

Addressing the Regulatory “Cultivar Problem”: Developing a Practical and Scientifically Based Screening Tool for Cultivar Exemption

Speaker: **Dr. Theresa Culley**, Professor, University of Cincinnati (theresa.culley@uc.edu)



Theresa began by highlighting the screening tool that's being developed with the Midwest Invasive Plant Network (MIPN), a group which she is a board member of. In her role, Theresa studies both endangered species and invasive plant species. She's also affiliated with the Ohio Invasive Plant Council (past president). In that role with Ohio, she had the good fortune to lead the Ohio assessment team that lists invasive species for the state. Because of that, she's also on the regulatory advisory team with the Ohio Department of Agriculture that regulates and bans the commercial sale and distribution of some of these plants (that will be the focus of today's presentation).

Theresa credited her many colleagues who have taken part in this 10-month effort (*see list below*), including Theresa's co-chair, Dr. Deah Lieurance from Penn State University (PGISC member). Theresa mentioned the project is still ongoing (in draft form), and the project team intends to have a finalized screening tool ready soon.

Academic Partners:

- Theresa Culley – University of Cincinnati (co-chair)
- Deah Lieurance – Pennsylvania State University (co-chair)
- Michelle Beloskur – MIPN Director
- Mark Renz – University of Wisconsin
- Kay Havens – Chicago Botanic Gardens

Natural Resource Professionals and Land Managers:

- Mackenzie Manicki – Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
- Tara Bergeson – Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
- Laura Van Riper – Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
- Monika Chandler – Minnesota Department of Agriculture

- Dawn Slack – State of Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management
- Jennifer Larson – U.S. Department of Agriculture – Forest Service

Nursery and Plant Breeders:

- Chris Plane – Midwest Groundcovers, Inc.
- Mark Brand – University of Connecticut
- Thomas Buechel – McKay Nursery Company
- Tim Wood – Spring Meadow Nursery, Proven Winners
- Kim Shearer – The Morton Arboretum

The cultivar issue is something that continues to happen in various states, including in Ohio (where Theresa is based). A cultivar is a specific variety of a given species, usually an individual plant that's been cloned or produced in cultivation through selective breeding for certain traits (e.g., cultivars of Japanese barberries focus on leaf color, size, vigor, disease tolerance, or pest resistance). Often, a cultivar focuses on a visual trait because a gardener wants to have beautiful plants.

The big question is: What if a particular cultivar is invasive that is being commercially produced? How is this handled?

If a plant species is assessed by a state and then banned from commercial sale and production, how are its cultivars handled? Currently, there are two different approaches:

1. The cultivar may be assessed separately (often ineffective because of lack of data)
2. In some states with **regulation**, cultivars are now included with the parental species (if deemed invasive), unless a cultivar can be otherwise exempted and shown not to have certain invasive characteristics. **However, usually no regulatory exemption process exists!**

The first option (listed above) was tried in Ohio and failed. This was because we often don't have data for given cultivars (so running a cultivar through an invasive species risk assessment often produces an unknown result due to lack of data).

There are only a few U.S. states in which a cultivar is separately exempted if regulatory rules or laws automatically include all cultivars of a species assessed as invasive (e.g., New York, Ohio, and Maryland). We are, however, starting to see more states list that a cultivar can be exempted, but oftentimes, there's no process to do so. New York does have a process, and we've been using that as a resource in what Theresa and her project team have been working on.

In Ohio, we have regulatory power – not through the law-making ability, but through the rule-making process. Specifically, “[Rule 901:5-30-01 | Invasive plant species](#).” lists many species deemed to be invasive. At the end of the list (in section F), there’s text that states “The director may exempt a cultivar of any invasive plant species defined in paragraph (A) of this rule if scientific evidence is presented that the cultivar is not invasive.” That’s all well and good, but in Ohio, the problem is that we have no process to do this.

An example of this is for Winged Burning Bush (*Euonymus alatus*) for which we have evidence that this species has been spreading within OHIO with many known “escaped” populations. The Ohio Invasive Plant Council has assessed this species and according to our assessment criteria, Winged Burning Bush is indeed invasive (with a score of 46). The problem is, when we go to the Ohio Department of Agriculture (who has regulatory authority) and request listing this species as regulated from commercial production, distribution, and selling, there’s resistance by the nursery industry due to the economic importance of the cultivars (e.g., *E. alatus compactus*, Fire Ball®, etc.) Though this makes sense, the problem is, there’s no way to exempt cultivars.

Note: Theresa has done genetic work on Winged Burning Bush and has discovered that the cultivar *Euonymus compactus* is the culprit species spreading in wild (natural) areas of Ohio. With this research experience, Theresa would advocate for regulating this specific cultivar by banning it from further commercial sale.

With this situation in mind, we’re currently at a stalemate in Ohio with many of these types of species. We can’t get species listed and regulated because there’s no process to exempt any cultivars that could have low fecundity (and there are cultivars that exist). So, we’re stuck! This is the point where Theresa stepped into the situation with a goal to make change.

So, the question becomes: Can we create a feasible and scientifically accurate cultivar exemption tool?

The project team comprising academic partners, natural resource professionals and land managers, and nursery and plant breeders was structured this way on purpose because Theresa felt that everyone needs to be at the table if we’re to make any logical progress and create a tool that is both useful and feasible. The team’s goal is to determine if specific cultivars of invasive plant species are not problematic. If so, then they could be excluded or exempted from state-based regulation.

The big picture objective is to replace the sale and use of plants that would normally be invasive with much less harmful (or not harmful at all) alternatives for use by the gardening public and green industry. This will lead to a decrease in the introduction and spread of

invasive plants in the U.S. and ideally prevent new invasions, especially on the range limits of existing species.

So, what if **multiple states adopted the same exemption framework** and worked from the same cultivar screening tool? This has several advantages:

- States could share cultivar assessments with each other for greater efficiency. There would likely be some customization associated with this.
- Plant breeders don't have to go state to state for each cultivar's exemption; consistency would be very helpful for them.
- Plant breeders would know expectations, so as they develop new plant varieties, they would know what they need to target (e.g., seed production, etc.). This is something plant breeders are asking for.

The cultivar screening tool is designed to balance **scientific principles** (*based on traits linked with invasive potential*) **with feasibility** in terms of what traits can be practically measured within the amount of time available for screening.

It's also important to discuss terminology:

- **Sterile** – From Theresa's perspective as a scientist, sterility is something that can be very complex and difficult. A plant could be sterile one year, and then three years later it starts producing seeds. Or perhaps a plant is sterile, but something happens later, in a different generation, that loses that aspect of sterility. Because of this, the term sterile isn't used very much.
- **Seedless** – (*Self-explanatory*)
- **Sets Little to No Seed** – (*Self-explanatory*)
- **Low Fecundity** – Refers to the potential to produce seeds
- **Low Fertility** – Refers to the actual production of seeds

An example of this type of terminology seen from the commercial sale of invasive plants is "**Fire Ball® Seedless Burning Bush**". Keep in mind that plant breeders are focusing on female fertility, so they are solely focusing on seed production. But as a scientist, Theresa is considering the number of offspring (not just the seeds). What happens to those seeds? How many offspring are there? How many are getting into the environment?

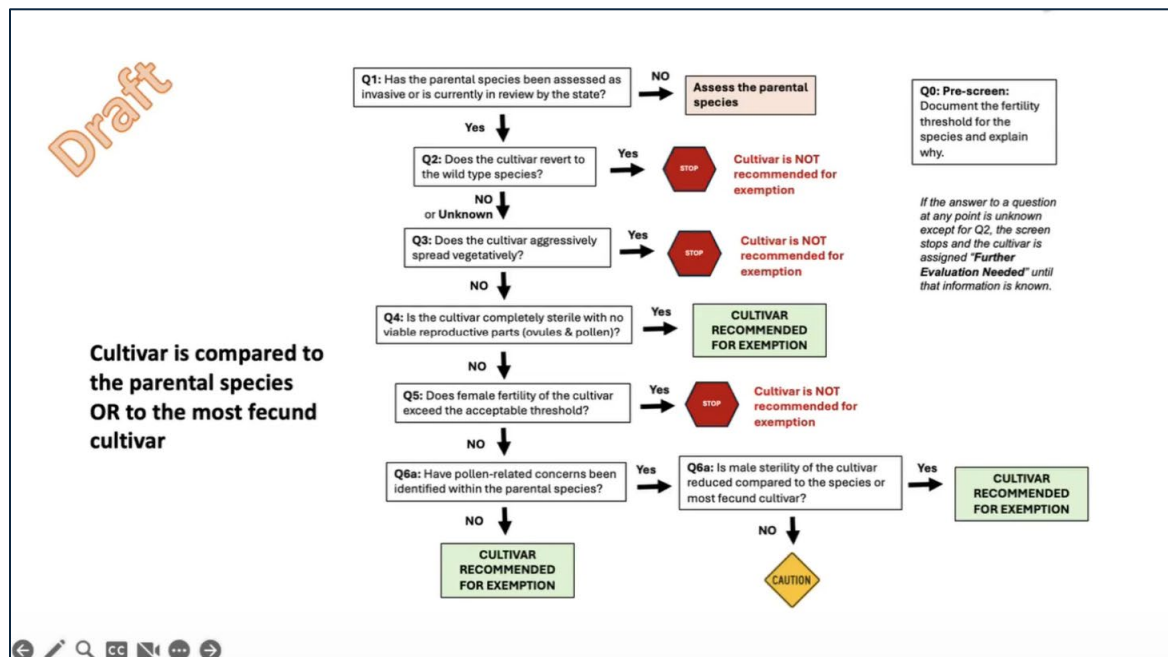
We've been working on this project for 10 months and getting close to completion. In addition to academics, natural resource professionals and land managers, and nursery folks, we've also invited several of the main plant breeders of low fecundity plants to meet with the project team. Amid the team's many conversations, things come down to two main sticking points.

The first main “sticking point” is a threshold (e.g., 1-2% fertility).

Threshold is relative to the assessed wild type, parental species, or most fecund cultivar that’s tested under the same conditions. Theresa credited Minnesota for developing a pre-screen question (i.e., flow chart) that sets the threshold for a given species (see *first and second screenshots below*).

The second “sticking point” is the role of pollen (male fertility).

- Ability of cultivars of the same species to cross
- Hybridization with any native species
- Hybridization with native, rare species
- Hybridization with other introduced species



Draft

Q5: Does female fertility of the cultivar exceed the acceptable threshold?

In order to be considered exempt, ideally a cultivar should not produce any seeds either on its own, in monoculture, or in an open growing field. But in reality, some seeds may be produced. The gold standard for determining female fertility (sometimes referred to as female fecundity) would be testing in the presence of other cultivars (e.g., Knight et al. 2011) or related species. Contreras et al. (2025) also suggests including controls for comparison that "represent the industry standards found in commerce and are known to be male and female fertile". If fruits are abundant on the plant, subsampling will be necessary, such as selecting a given number of branches on a plant (often three) on which to count fruits, and then multiplying this number by the overall number of branches on the same plant to estimate the total number of fruits on the plant. In a similar subsampling approach, seeds should be extracted from at least 100-300 fruits per plant (but fewer if fruit numbers are naturally less than 100) to determine the number of seeds per fruit (Brand et al. 2012; Contreras et al. 2025). Seeds should then be examined for germination potential under laboratory or greenhouse conditions, taking into account any required dormancy treatments, or testing viability with tetrazolium staining as an alternative. This approach recognizes that germination under field conditions will likely be even lower. Seedlings of the cultivar should be grown along with the wild type in a greenhouse or under environmental conditions in which the wild type parent invades. Any observations of similarity of seedling traits to the wild type invasive parent should be noted. The number and percent of seedlings that survive within 4-6 weeks should also be reported.

TOTAL SEED PRODUCTION:

To calculate the total number of seeds per plant in the case of fruit production on a large plant, a subsample of branches will need to be examined. The table below if provided to calculate the number of seeds per plant.

Plant	# Sampled branches	# Fruits / branch	x	Total # branches	x	# Seeds / fruit	=	# Seeds / plant
Cultivar								
Parent or Most Fecund Cultivar								

RELATIVE FEMALE FERTILITY CALCULATION:

Female fertility is based on the number of offspring produced per plant (total fertility). That can be defined as the product of (seed number) x (% seed germination) x (% early seedling survival, measured at 4-6 weeks). In lieu of seedling survival, seedlings that are shown to be triploid may be considered less likely to be fertile. Measuring % seedling survival is optional for the breeder, especially if there is a reason why the seedlings might not survive (such as triploidy); if % survival not included, it is assumed to be 100%. A value of zero or near-zero at any of these life history stages will substantially lower the estimate of fertility for the cultivar.

Plant	# Seeds / plant	x	% Germin	x	% Seedling survival ²	=	Total fertility	% Relative fertility
Cultivar								
Parent or Most Fecund Cultivar								

²Optional if the breeder desires.

Pollen in Plant Invasions



Pyrus calleryana
(Callery pear)



Bradford



Aristocrat



Cleveland Select



Chanticleer



Faurie



Autumn Blaze



Capital



Redspire



Whitehouse



New Bradford

Spread of Callery pear can occur from cross-pollination of cultivars and rootstock.

Theresa recommended the following paper published in September 2025, "[Development and Evaluation of Landscape Plant Cultivars with Reduced Fertility to Minimize Potential Invasiveness](#)". The paper emphasizes that for breeders, female fertility (seed production) is viewed as the most important and critical aspect of plant escape (spread), which Theresa agrees with. However, she also notes that pollen is a problem too (in relation to escape). For breeders, pollen contribution is considered negligible, especially if the

parental species is already invasive and has its pollen being distributed. There is also the question of if pollen really matters in the landscape (which has made their group want to do a review paper to explore and show examples of how pollen “matters”).

The Pollen Dilemma

Working Draft

Q6b: Is male fertility (pollen viability) of the cultivar reduced compared to the species or the most fecund cultivar?

The pollen of the cultivar should first be tested for viability using standard methods such as tetrazolium staining or pollen tube growth in a sucrose solution. Pollen should exhibit reduced viability relative to the wild type (such as 98% reduction in pollen viability compared to the wild type). Pollen from triploid plants typically experiences chromosomal issues so that viability is low, if not negligible. If pollen has higher viability, it should be tested for cross-compatibility via hand-pollinations with the wild type, related cultivars, and/or other native species typically found in the local area.

Plant	# Pollen grains sampled	% Pollen viability	% Relative Fertility
Cultivar			
Parent or Most Fecund Cultivar			

Provide the Relative Male Fertility of the cultivar:

Relative Male Fertility = [(% Pollen Viability of Cultivar)/(% Pollen Viability of Parent)] * 100

☐ **YES:** Male fertility is reduced enough not to be problematic within the landscape or ideally, the pollen is inviable in the cultivar. The cultivar is recommended as **EXEMPT**

☐ **NO:** The cultivar does not have reduced pollen viability compared to the parent or most fecund cultivar. **CAUTION** is recommended, depending on the level of viability or the percent relative male fertility. The state could determine that exemption is warranted or not, based on (1) the extent of invasive behavior and current distribution of the parental species, and (2) factors such as the possibility of the parental species cross-fertilizing native species. If the cultivar is exempted, revisiting it after several years is advisable.

Where at we at now?

- [Midwest Invasive Plant Network \(MIPN\)](#): Focus on Midwest cultivar exemption tool for regulation (state-based)
- [Plant Risk Evaluator \(PRE\)](#) tool from California: Interest in this tool; determining if they can add a cultivar portion to their tool
- [Horticultural Research Institute](#) (The AmericanHort Foundation): Forming their own taskforce with national focus (National Plant Board)

All of these groups would prefer to have the same tool used across multiple states or the country.

End of presentation _____

After Theresa's presentation finished, Deah Lieurance (PSU) commented that she also believes pollen to be an important component for why cultivars can spread (escape to new areas).

Gregg Robertson (PLNA) remarked that Pennsylvania does exempt cultivars if evidence shows that a cultivar is not invasive. Gregg was not sure of the protocol or process used for this, but in Pennsylvania, several cultivars have been exempted.

Gregg also mentioned that if states would adopt a common protocol for exempting cultivars, doesn't that imply that they should adopt a common way of identifying species that are invasive and should be listed? Theresa agreed with this suggestion, but said the challenge is that many states are already entrenched in their own protocols, so starting something new with a cultivar protocol that needs to be very simple was an easier lift. Despite this challenge, the goal remains of trying to get multiple states (ideally) participating since everyone is "stuck" at the same point in relation to this overall issue.

Theresa appreciated having Gregg remind her that Pennsylvania does exempt cultivars. She mentioned that Ohio's Department of Agriculture (ODA) has been looking at Pennsylvania's list of exempted cultivars and trying to determine their protocol.

Deah Lieurance (PSU) also commented that throughout her career, she has tried to get everybody to use the same process to do some of this work, and it's just not going to happen, as much as she's tried. Deah also pushed back on the suggestion of having a common protocol used for identifying invasive species in all states. She's done reviews of how different states have listed species, and in each case, they tend to use the same traits to make a determination about a species, even if using different types of evaluations. For example, if one state is using a screening tool (i.e., status/risk assessment) and another state is using a petition (like what is used in Florida), the same (or similar) criteria is included in both the status/risk assessment and the petition. In both cases, the conclusion at the end shows a species to be invasive, predicted to be invasive, or not invasive. With that in mind, Deah felt the cultivar screening tool (*that Theresa presented on today*) is almost like a secondary screening tool for this situation.

Ryan Reed (DCNR) commented via the meeting chat: "I don't like any carve-outs for cultivars, full stop. By the very nature of genetic recombination during gametogenesis, plus human nature of being error-prone in terms of our own accounting of what plant was planted and sold where, there is just inherently too much risk in intentionally letting new cultivars out. Just because a cultivar shows low fertility now does not mean they always will. Their reproductive potential can change over their lifetimes. The only exception in my mind is the case of "the already spilled milk". There's not much harm at this point from letting out cultivars of barberry and Callery pear; the damage has already been done.

Chris Davis thanked Theresa for her presentation, remarking that there are always changes happening in the plant world.

Agency and Organization Updates, Activities, & Events

Speaker: **Chris Davis**, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture

Chris invited Council members to share updates on recent and upcoming events/activities. The following individuals shared remarks: Sean Hartzell (PFBC), Amy Jewitt (WPC), and Deah Lieurance (PSU).

Summary: Sean Hartzell (PFBC) remarked on a recent report of an illegally stocked northern snakehead in a township-owned pond near Harrisburg, PA.

Sean updated the Council on an invasive species incident that occurred which the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) responded to. Last week, PFBC received a report that an angler was fishing with his son and caught an invasive northern snakehead (fish) at Boyd Park Pond in Dauphin County (located close to Harrisburg). This is a range-extension for this species in the Susquehanna Basin. The PFBC is trying to keep northern snakeheads out of the Susquehanna River, so obviously this was a fish that someone illegally stocked. PFBC responded by coordinating with Susquehanna Township, which owns and manages the 3-4 acre pond located at a small park. PFBC electrofished the pond and did not catch any additional specimens.

This seems like an isolated fish that was stocked. The township plans to post signage for angler awareness if any other northern snakeheads are caught there. This is an incident that's occurred at a few other places in Pennsylvania too.

Illegal stocking of northern snakehead is unfortunately an emerging problem.

Summary: Amy Jewitt (WPC) highlighted an upcoming survey event, the Basketgrass Bonanza, that will invite participants to search for and report findings of wavyleaf basketgrass in Pennsylvania.

Amy provided information on an upcoming event being hosted in August by the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy's Pennsylvania iMapInvasives Program. The program typically hosts survey events throughout the year that invite people to search for specific invasive species. A new event being hosted this year will focus specifically on wavyleaf basketgrass, which is a noxious weed in Pennsylvania. The name of the event is called the Basketgrass Bonanza. *(We try to come up with catchy names to make the events memorable for participants.)* A webinar training for the event is scheduled for July 29, 2026 and will introduce the event, discuss the species, and demonstrate to participants how to report data to iMapInvasives.

To note, wavyleaf basketgrass is currently one of a few species that the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA) is trying to eradicate from the state; therefore, all known occurrences are very important to know about. Any data that comes from this event will be shared with PDA to ensure we can contribute to that eradication effort.

The webinar on July 29 will include both Amy Jewitt and Corinne Garda (of the iMapInvasives program) along with three guest speakers – Ben Mummert (DCNR), Trilby Libhart (PDA), and Dr. Carrie Wu (University of Richmond) – each of which have experience with wavyleaf basketgrass.

Andrew Rohrbaugh (DCNR) commented via the meeting chat: “I know folks from PDA have already been working on WLBG this summer; DCNR is mobilizing our staff starting next week (both our own Forestry and Park sites, as well as other municipal properties).”

Summary: Deah Lieurance (PSU) commented on a grant she applied for that would fund an invasive species horizon scan for the state. She also received grant dollars to form a new interdisciplinary group that will determine new research and extension priorities for Penn State related to invasive species.

Deah commented that she submitted a grant to fund a horizon scan for Pennsylvania as well as follow-up risk assessments on high priority species. The grant was written to specifically address two of the points in the Pennsylvania Invasive Species Management Plan. If funded, this work could fill an information gap for the state.

Also, last year Deah received a small grant from the university to establish an invasive species working group. This interdisciplinary group has 30-40 people. A 3-day workshop scheduled for August will set up research and extension priorities, with the goal of bringing in voices of all stakeholders. A [survey](#) will help to prioritize ideas and set the direction of research being done at Penn State (i.e., fill gaps related to aquatic species, surveillance, etc.).

Jim Grazio (DEP) asked Deah if the invasive species working group she mentioned is parochial to Penn State, or would that apply to other universities as well? Could that inform other research? Deah remarked that the goal of the group would be to create a report outlining identified research priorities. It could serve to network across the university system outside of just Penn State, allowing labs from multiple universities to take part in new research priorities.

Upcoming Council Meetings (September & December)

Speaker: **Kris Abell**, Coordinator of the Pennsylvania Governor's Invasive Species Council, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (krabell@pa.gov)



Kris shared information about the next Council meeting date which is scheduled to take place on **September 16, 2026**. That meeting will be **in-person** and occur as part of the [Keystone Invasive Species Forum](#) (KISF) in Boalsburg, PA. All Council members as well as individuals from the public are encouraged to attend the event. We plan to have a panel comprised of Council members so KISF attendees can better engage with and learn more about the PGISC. Committee reports will also occur as well as an abbreviated business meeting.

For those who are speakers at the KISF or will be giving a committee report, they can register for free. Amy Jewitt (WPC) noted that hotel reservations for the KISF are not included with registration and need to be made separately (and include an additional charge).

The **Council's winter meeting** will take place virtually on **Thursday, December 10, 2026**.

Council Membership

Speaker: **Kris Abell**, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture

Kris remarked that he's recently received comments regarding Council membership, which was a reminder to him that it's best practice to review membership on a regular basis, look at who's attending, and how often. Kris noted that about five years ago, two new member groups were added to the Council – Temple University and the Allegheny Plateau Invasive Plant Management Area. Since that time, membership has not been reviewed, so it's time again to do that and determine if any replacements or changes need to occur.

Moving forward, it will be helpful to develop new as they pertain to Council membership. To do so, Kris suggested the creation of an ad hoc committee. Council members who volunteered or were suggested to take part in the ad hoc committee include Ray Boronyak (PennDOT), Amy Jewitt (WPC), and Brian Harris (PSATS).

Biennial Report to Governor

Speaker: **Kris Abell**, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture

Kris asked if Council members have any comments in regard to the biennial report that's been prepared for the Governor from the Council. *No comments were received at the meeting today.* Kris requested that any comments be submitted to him by tomorrow - June 12, 2026. After that time, the next steps will be taken to continue preparing the report to be delivered to the Governor.

Invasive Species Brochure

Speaker: **Kris Abell**, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture

The Communications Committee has been developing a new brochure that raises awareness of invasive species with residents of Pennsylvania. Once published, copies of the brochure will be placed in Pennsylvania welcome centers. Kris asked if any Council members have feedback to give on the brochure. *No comments were received at the meeting today.*

Kris thanked everyone who has been part of developing this new resource. Once finalized, it will be printed, shipped, and distributed to various locations across the state.

PA Native Species Day at the Capitol Report

Speaker: **Kris Abell**, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture

Kris remarked that the [PA Native Species Day event at the Capitol](#) on June 1, 2026 (in the Capitol's East Wing Rotunda) was a big success and thanked all individuals who were involved, including those that helped to plan the event and participate in person by setting up and hosting an outreach table (12 tables in total). It all came together nicely and created opportunities to interact with legislators, staffers, and the public – a great opportunity for networking! Senator Malone spoke at the event's press conference and interacted with attendees, which was a pleasant surprise and a perk of the day.

Some notable parts of the event included a table hosted by the PA Fish and Boat Commission which showcased several live specimens for display, all of which drew a lot of attention from attendees. Also, Claire Zuidervliet, owner of Octoraro Native Plant Nursery, donated 300 native oak tree seedlings, and in partnership with Gregg Roberston (PLNA) and the Pennsylvania FFA Association, the seedlings were tagged with a PA Native Species Day label and distributed by the PA FFA State Officers to legislators in the House chamber. This unique form of outreach served as another great connection point with legislators, thanks to Claire, Gregg, and the PA FFA.

Photos shown below of PA Native Species Day at the Capitol are provided by Commonwealth Media Services and available at [PAcast.com](#). Additional photos taken of trees given away at the Capitol were taken by PA FFA.









Ryan Reed (DCNR) remarked that DCNR felt the event was a great collaboration among stakeholders and agencies. It also provided a good opportunity for public interaction (i.e., people passing through the Capitol); folks stopped by the DCNR table to pick up native seed kits, discuss native plants, and other species and concerns. Ryan also noted seeing a 6-7 minute news clip on ABC27 that evening from the event, which provided good publicity. Ryan thanks Kris Abell for coordinating this event; a job well done!

Andrew Rohrbaugh (DCNR) mentioned in the meeting chat that WITF did a news clip on PA Native Species Day also.

Amy Jewitt (WPC) remarked that representatives from the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy were also appreciative for the opportunity to be present at the Capitol for the event. She remarked that the event provided great interaction with legislators, the public, and allowed WPC and other Council members to reach an audience that we wouldn't have

otherwise with messages related to native and invasive species. Amy hoped this event could happen again in 2027, perhaps in conjunction with an invasive species hearing.

PA Invasive Replace-ive Program Report

Speaker: **Meagan Hopkins-Doerr**, Master Watershed Steward Coordinator (Chester & Delaware Counties), Penn State Extension (mxh1135@psu.edu)



Meagan gave a brief update on the [2026 PA Invasive Replace-ive \(PAIR\) Program](#), an initiative led by Celine Colbert (DCNR) and was originally an idea that came from the Council. The PAIR program aims to educate and incentivize public participation by encouraging residents to remove invasive trees and shrubs from their yards, or with permission from a landowner. They can then receive up to three free native trees if they travel to one of the eight distribution sites.



Sponsors and contributors for the 2026 PAIR program included:

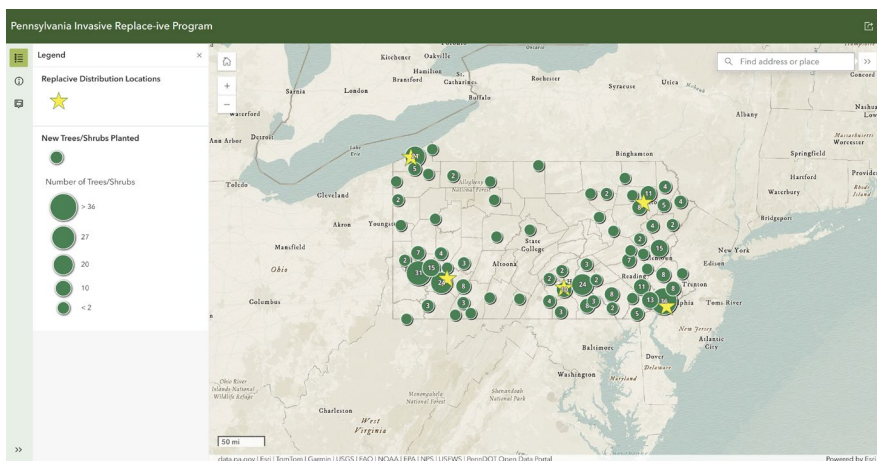
- Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay
- PA Department of Conservation and Natural Resources
- PA Governor's Invasive Species Council
- Penn State Extension's Master Watershed Steward Program
- PA Sea Grant
- Western PA Conservancy

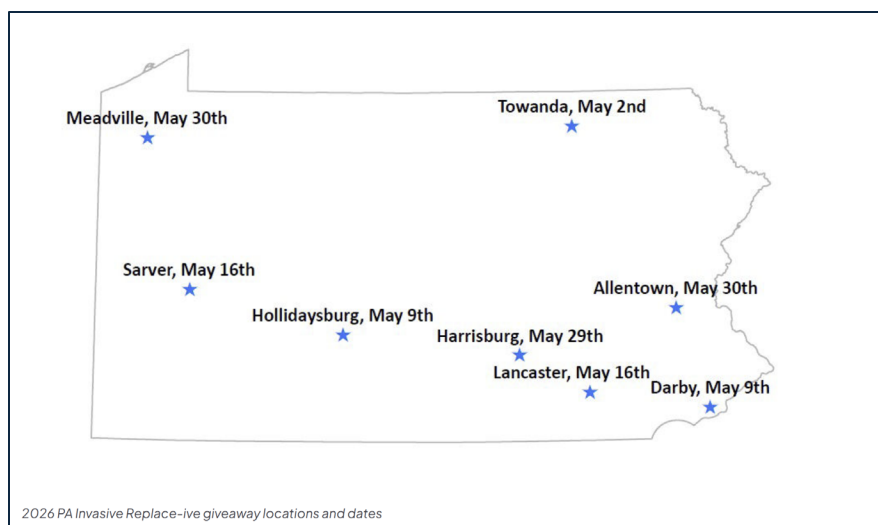
Tree tags were given to participants at distribution sites which allowed individuals to continue talking about PAIR after receiving their tree and posting content on social media. (See screenshot below.) There was also a photo content this year that anyone could participate in, not just PAIR participants. Winners from different categories will receive native plants (plugs).



This year, a map was made showing locations of where invasive species were removed from as well as places where native trees were planted. The first map shown below is from the 2025 PAIR program, for which there were five distribution sites. A StoryMap is currently being developed which will help showcase and tell the story of the 2025 program.

At each of this year's eight distribution sites (second map), approximately 250 trees and shrubs were given away as well as 75 trees/shrubs at the Native Species Day event on June 1 in Harrisburg. Each distribution site was capped at approximately 88 registrants with the option of being added to a waiting list (capped at 50 people). **In total, 2,000+ native trees and shrubs were distributed to over 650 recipients.** Note: A total of 2,747 people tried to register for the 2026 PAIR program, meaning several of the distribution sites filled their registrations AND waiting lists, with additional people still hoping to participate. **According to Celine, that's twice the level of interest that was captured from survey responses in 2025.**

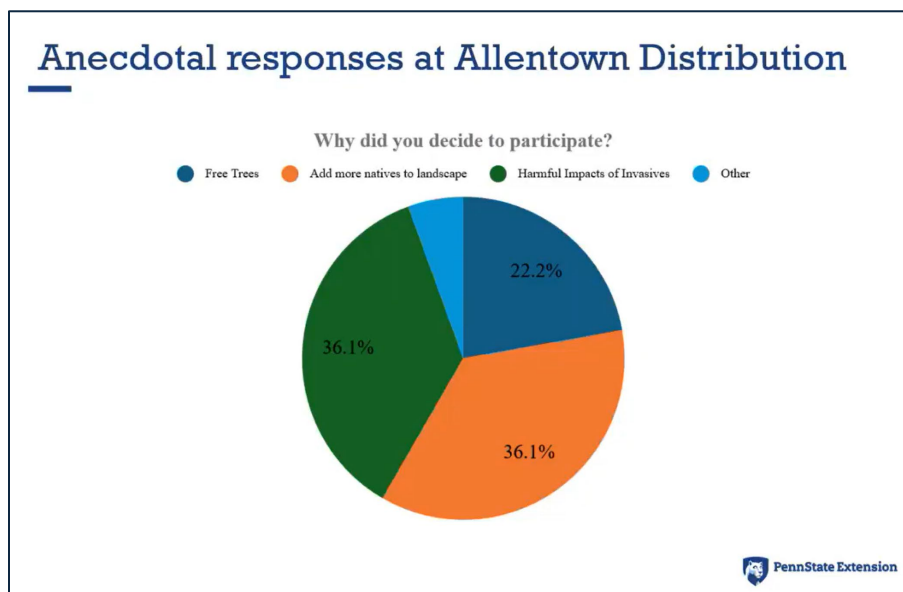




Anecdotal information from the distribution site in Allentown, PA gathered information on why individuals wanted to participate in the 2026 PAIR program (with some respondents choosing more than one answer). Their responses were as follows:

- Receive free trees (22.2%)
- Add more native species to landscape (36.1%)
- Harmful impacts of invasive species (36.1%)
- Other (5.6%)

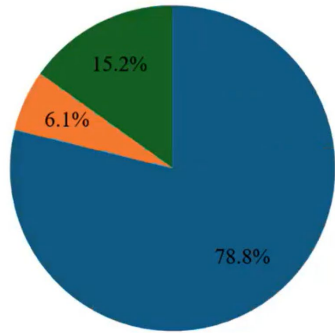
According to another survey question posed to Allentown participants, 78% of participants say they plan to remove more invasive species, even after the 2026 PAIR program concludes (see second pie chart below).



Allentown participants will keep at it!

Do you plan to remove more invasives?

Yes No Maybe



PennState Extension

The following photo taken at the Allentown distribution event shows how happy participants were to take part in the 2026 PAIR program.



Remarks from one PAIR participant who emailed the Forestry account listed on the PAIR website:

“I just wanted to write and say how grateful I am for the Invasive Replace-ive Program. I’m glad to see it continue this year. These kinds of efforts are so encouraging to see as someone fighting invasive plants in my own local community. Not to be overly corny, but I am proud to be a Pennsylvanian in light of our state government’s initiatives to protect our land.” -Kivi S.



Chris Davis (PDA) thanked Meagan for her report and the work she invested in the 2026 PAIR program. He remarked that this program is like a drop of water in a pond, with the ripples expanding out (and positively impacting so many people).

Legislative Committee Report

Speaker: **Kris Abell**, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture

Legislative Committee Members	
Committee Chair	Eve Adrian, PA Department of Agriculture
State Agencies	
PA Department of Agriculture	Stephen Rudman, Sarah Hammond
PA Dept of Conservation & Natural Resources	Andrew Rohrbaugh, Ben Mummert, Ali Bowling
PA Fish and Boat Commission	Kailee Glock
PA Game Commission	Krisinda Corbin
PA Department of Transportation	Jeff Young, David Lapadat
Non-Governmental Organizations	
Appalachian Mountains Joint Venture & American Bird Conservatory	Amanda Duren
Audubon Mid-Atlantic	Jim Brown
PA Association of Conservation Districts	Piper Sherburne
PA Sea Grant	Sarah Whitney
PA Landscape & Nursery Association	Gregg Robertson
Western PA Conservancy	Amy Jewitt, Brian Gallagher, Mary Walsh
Are you interested in joining the Legislative Committee? Council members and non-members are welcome. If yes, contact Eve Adrian at eadrian@pa.gov .	

Kris mentioned that Eve Adrian (PDA) was unable to be present at today's Council meeting, so he provided an update on her behalf.

The same priorities remain for the Legislative Committee which include the Invasive Species Act, the development of a Center of Excellence for Invasive Species Management, and planning for a Native Species Day event at the Capitol in 2027.

Communications Committee Report

Speaker: **Patricia Prade**, Extension Entomologist, Horticulture, Penn State Extension
(prade@psu.edu)



<u>Communications Committee Members</u>	
Committee Chair	Patricia Prade, Penn State Extension
<u>State Agencies</u>	
PA Department of Agriculture	Kris Abell, Daniel Blottenberger, Sarah Shiflett, Shayna Seeley
PA Dept of Conservation & Natural Resources	Andrew Rohrbaugh, Ryan Reed
PA Fish and Boat Commission	Michael Parker
PA Department of Transportation	Zachary Appleby
<u>Non-Governmental Organizations</u>	
PA Sea Grant	Amber Stilwell
Western PA Conservancy	Amy Jewitt
Are you interested in joining the Communications Committee? Council members and non-members are welcome. If yes, contact Patricia Prade at prade@psu.edu .	

E-Newsletter

Patricia reminded Council members about the PGISC e-newsletter and encouraged folks to send her or Kris Abell (PDA) items that can be included in the upcoming issue. Items to share include upcoming events, articles, or anything related to invasive species that would allow readers to learn more about this topic. The Committee decided to change the timing for when Council e-newsletters are released to be right after Council meetings.

Council Website Re-Design

The Committee recently finished redesigning the [Council's website](#) to make it more user-friendly and help stakeholders find information and resources more easily. Please check it out!



Invasive Species Brochure

As was mentioned earlier in the meeting, an invasive species brochure is receiving final edits before being printed and put on display at Pennsylvania rest stops. The main goal for this brochure is to share information with the public about invasive species, especially people coming into Pennsylvania from other places, and to educate them on stopping the spread of unwanted invaders. *(The screenshot below shows the brochure in draft form.)*



Keystone Invasive Species Forum

An upcoming event in September is the inaugural Keystone Invasive Species Forum (KISF) dedicated to the topic of invasive species in Pennsylvania. The goal of this event is to create an opportunity for people involved in invasive species education, management, research, industry, and state agencies to come together and share experiences, discuss current challenges, and consider future opportunities for collaboration.

The KISF will be a full-day event scheduled to take place on Wed, September 16 beginning at 8:30am at the Wyndham in Boalsburg (State College). During the event, the Council will be given an hour to provide updates, so will be like these meetings, but hopefully with more public involvement.

We're excited to have an opportunity for the public to interact more with the Council and raise awareness about PGISC with KISF attendees. This in-person event should be helpful in creating opportunities for collaboration.

WORKSHOPS

WSP-G-3719

Keystone Invasive Species Forum

Connect with researchers, educators, land managers, and industry professionals to explore invasive species challenges, innovative solutions, and collaborative action across Pennsylvania.

[Save for later](#) [Share](#) [Facebook](#) [Twitter](#) [LinkedIn](#) | [Be the first to review this product](#)



Keystone Invasive Species Forum

Length

8 hours, 30 minutes

Language

English

Event Format

In-Person

Where and When

Boalsburg | September 16, 2026 | 8:30am ET

\$110.00 [See event fee details](#)

Register

<https://extension.psu.edu/keystone-invasive-species-forum>

Invasive Species Listing Committee Report

Speaker: **Andrew Rohrbaugh**, Section Chief, Applied Science & Technology Section, Division of Forest Health, Bureau of Forestry, Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (anrohrbaugh@pa.gov)

<u>Invasive Species Listing Committee Members</u>	
Committee Chair	Andrew Rohrbaugh, PA DCNR
<u>State Agencies</u>	
PA Department of Agriculture	Kris Abell, Lawrence Barringer, Ekaterina (Katya) Nikolaeva
PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources	Jill Rose, Houping Liu, Ben Mummert, Hannah Huber
PA Fish and Boat Commission	Sean Hartzell
PA Game Commission	Scott Bearer
<u>Non-Governmental Organizations</u>	
Ernst Conservation Seeds	Andrew Ernst
PA Landscape and Nursery Association	Gregg Robertson
Penn State University	Deah Lieurance
Penn Ag Industries	Harold Brecht
Western PA Conservancy	Brian Daggs, Mary Walsh, Jeff Wagner
Are you interested in joining the Invasive Species Listing Committee? Council members and non-members are welcome. If yes, contact Andrew Rohrbaugh at anrohrbaugh@pa.gov .	

Regional tiering is ongoing as it pertains to invasive species in/nearby Pennsylvania. For more information about the tiering process, please contact any of the following individuals from the Western PA Conservancy: Mary Walsh, Brian Daggs, Amy Jewitt.

Examples of species tiers are as follows:

- **Tier 1:**
 - Early detection/prevention priority (i.e., no records in PA, but species is found within a 100-mile buffer around Pennsylvania)
 - 30 species (e.g., giant salvinia, Japanese chaff flower, Asian longhorned beetle)

- **Tier 2:**
 - Eradication/full containment may be feasible (i.e., lowest occurrence records)
 - 66 species (e.g., round goby, black swallow-wort, goatsrue, giant hogweed)
- **Tier 3:**
 - Containment/strategic management
 - 56 species (e.g., porcelain berry, hydrilla, European privet, zebra mussels)
- **Tier 4:**
 - Established/widespread/strategic local management for common occurrence species
 - 49 species (e.g., tree-of-heaven, phragmites, spongy moth, Japanese barberry)
- **Monitor:**
 - Species that need more research, mapping, and monitoring
 - 14 species

Invasive Plant Species

- Regional tiering is ongoing

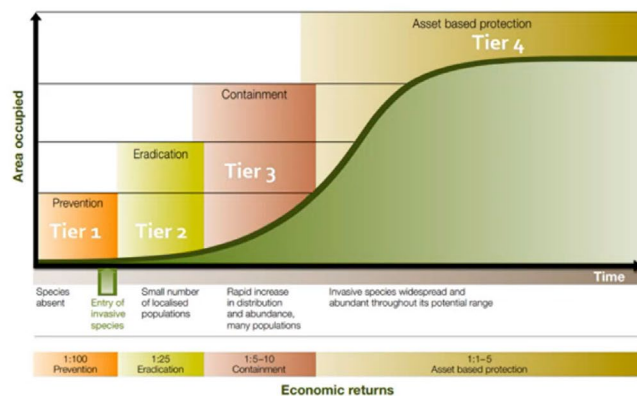
Tier 1 - Early detection/prevention priority (No records in PA, but species is found within 100 mi around PA),

Tier 2 - Eradication/ full containment may be feasible (lowest occurrence records)

Tier 3 - Containment/strategic management

Tier 4 - Established/ widespread/ strategic local management for common occurrence species

Monitor – Species that need more research, mapping, and monitoring



Recently, the PA Dept of Agriculture updated the Committee’s “Pennsylvania Invasive Plant Species List” on the Council’s website. Now included is a description of the tiering structures at the top; also, each species has its own rank as it pertains to each region in PA (e.g., Northeast, Southwest, South central). A statewide rank is also provided. This information can be exported into Excel and used as needed.

Species recently added to the Plant List include:

- Japanese chaff-flower (*Achyranthes japonica*) (high)
- Incised fumewort (*Corydalis incisa*) (moderate)
- Floating seedbox (*Ludwigia peploides* ssp. *glabrescens*) (very high)
- Yellow loosestrife (*Lysimachia vulgaris*) (high)
- Leatherleaf mahonia (*Mahonia bealei*) (high)
- Cutleaf blackberry (*Rubus laciniatus*) (moderate)
- Ragged robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*) (high)

Pennsylvania Invasive Species Council | **Pennsylvania Invasive Plant Species List** | **5/14/2026 10:16:39 AM**
Last Refresh Date

This list of invasive plants was compiled by the Pennsylvania Invasive Species Council and is recognized as the authoritative species list of greatest concern for Pennsylvania by all Council member agencies and organizations. This list has no regulatory authority, but is provided as a reference for policy and regulation development and other educational purposes. Descriptions of column headings are provided below.

PA Noxious Weed Rank Indicates species designated as a controlled plant or Class A, B, or C noxious weed on the Pennsylvania Controlled Plant and Noxious Weed List under authority of the Agricultural Code Title 3 Chapter 15.

PLNA Economic Importance Score Scale 0-10, from no value to high value for the nursery and landscape industry based on a survey of Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Association members.

Tier 1 | Early Detection/Prevention: Species in this category are absent from target regions and should receive the highest level of early detection survey efforts. Natural resource professionals should conduct delineation surveys for Tier 1 species and assign species detected to the appropriate tier.

Tier 2 | Eradication: Species in this category occur in small localized populations and should receive the highest level of early detection response efforts. High impact species with low enough abundance and suitable treatment method(s) should make eradication feasible in a given area.

Tier 3 | Containment: Species in this category are spreading and increasing in number, and should receive targeted and strategic management to slow their spread as they are likely too widespread to eradicate. Surrounding regions could be left at risk if Tier 3 species are left unattended.

Tier 4 | Local Control: Species in this category are established throughout the state or target region and cannot be feasibly eradicated. Land managers should instead focus efforts on localized management over time to contain, exclude, or suppress to protect high-priority resources like rare native species or recreational assets. Managers are advised to be strategic when deciding if/when to control Tier 4 species.

Region	Scientific Name	Common Name	PA Noxious Weed Rank	PLNA Economic Importance Score	North east Region Tier	North west Region Tier	North central Region Tier	South east Region Tier	South west Region Tier	South central Region Tier	State wide Tier
Northeast Region Tier	All	All	All	All							
Northwest Region Tier	All										
Northcentral Region Tier	All										
Southcentral Region Tier	All										
Southwest Region Tier	All										
Southcentral Region Tier	All										
Statewide Tier											
	<i>Achyranthes japonica</i>	Japanese Chaff-flower									
	<i>Corydalis incisa</i>	Incised Fumewort									
	<i>Ludwigia peploides</i> ssp. <i>glabrescens</i>	Floating Seedbox									
	<i>Lysimachia vulgaris</i>	Yellow Loosestrife									
	<i>Mahonia bealei</i>	Leatherleaf Mahonia									
	<i>Rubus laciniatus</i>	Cutleaf Blackberry									
	<i>Silene flos-cuculi</i>	Ragged Robin									
	<i>Actinidia arguta</i>	Hardy kiwi vine			2	1	1	2	1	2	2
	<i>Alternanthera philoxeroides</i>	Alligatorweed			1	1	1	1	1	1	1
	<i>Amaranthus rudis</i>	Waterhemp	A		1	1	1	1	1	1	3
	<i>Amaranthus tuberculatus</i>	Tall Waterhemp	A		1	1	1	1	1	1	3

Tiers for invasive plants will need to be updated every few years. Assessment scores are currently not included on the website for invasive plants, however, these scores are being used as evidence for why certain species are included on the list. Also, spotted-wing drosophila needs to be downgraded (typo).

Aquatic Invasive Species Rapid Response Committee Report

Speaker: **Sara Stahlman**, Extension Leader, Pennsylvania Sea Grant (sng121@psu.edu)

Aquatic Invasive Species Education & Outreach Committee Members	
Committee Chair	Sara Stahlman, PA Sea Grant
State Agencies	
PA Department of Agriculture	Kris Abell
PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources	Nick Decker, Angie Spagnoli
PA Department of Environmental Protection	Jim Grazio
PA Fish and Boat Commission	Sean Hartzell
Non-Governmental Organizations	
Crawford County Conservation District	Brian Pilarcik
Are you interested in joining the Aquatic Invasive Species Rapid Response Committee? Council members and non-members are welcome. If yes, contact Sara Stahlman at sng121@psu.edu .	

The Rapid Response Committee took a hiatus while waiting for some funding to come through from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI). This funding is being used to develop 4-6 rapid response case studies, of which 3-4 have already been created and are included in the Pennsylvania Rapid Response Plan for Aquatic Invasive Species. These case studies have been very valuable, and requests are being received for more to be made.

Rapid Response Case Study:

INVASIVE CARP

Lead Organization: Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC) (Somerset Office)
Main Contact: Mike Depew, Fisheries Biologist II/Asian Carp Coordinator
Response Cost: All materials used for this response were purchased/rented by the owner of 84 Lakes

Overview
In 2010, a seasonal biologist from the PFBC noticed a grainy photograph posted on the 84 Pay Lakes Facebook page of what looked like an invasive carp; however, it was difficult to identify the species. In 2014, on the same Facebook page, another clearer picture of a large bighead carp was posted. Concerned citizens had also called to report the species there. Law enforcement conducted an undercover investigation by fishing the lake and confirmed the carp posted on social media was caught in the lower lake. This species may have been introduced from a load of common carp and channel catfish stocked in the lakes from a midwestern commercial fisherman. Invasive carp include species of Bighead, Silver, Grass, and Black carp. These carp are large with a voracious appetite. The bighead carp can consume 40 percent of its body weight per day in plankton and detritus, threatening the food web and trophic structure of infested water bodies.

Case Study Location: 84 Pay Lakes, Washington County
The 84 pay lakes consist of three small, interconnected lakes, all under 2 acres in size, in a rural area east of the City of Washington. It is a popular fishing location with easy access, plenty of parking, benches for seating, and a little restaurant nearby. Fishing tournaments have been held here in the past. The lakes are fed by a feeder creek that comes into the Lake and the receiving waterways eventually run into the Ohio River.

Response Objectives Implementation
• Eradication to ensure they could not be transported or spread to other waters in the Commonwealth

Implementation
Once identification of the bighead carp was confirmed, PFBC law enforcement and fish management staff worked with the lake owner to conduct electrofishing surveys on the lakes for additional injurious species. Two additional bighead carp and a triploid grass carp were captured, and a third bighead carp was spotted but unable to be captured. Upon further investigation it was found the owner did not carry a permit for the grass carp, so that became an additional illegal species possessed. They also did not carry a valid license to operate a pay fishing lake, causing law enforcement to shut down the lakes while legal proceedings commenced. In 2016, all three lakes were completely drained, non-native injurious species were removed, and hydrated lime was spread on fish unable to be recovered. No additional invasive carp were confiscated during the drawdowns and the removal was considered complete.

LESSONS LEARNED
To further reduce the risk of spread within the pay lakes, it would have been better to confirm the species earlier and have the ponds drained within 7 days of the second photo posted on social media; however, the law enforcement aspect was the sticking point as it took a while for the legal process to move through.

Rapid Response Case Study:

EUROPEAN WATERCHESTNUT (TRAPA NATANS)

Lead Organization: Mercer County Conservation District
Main Contact: Nick Trivelli, Agricultural Resource Conservationist
Response Cost: \$13,365.00

Overview
In June 2018 during routine maintenance, an unusual plant species was discovered covering about 6 acres of the water body. A specimen was later identified as European water chestnut by contacts at the Crawford County Conservation District. While it's unclear how this plant entered the impoundment, healthy osprey and duck populations may have introduced water chestnut seeds that were stuck to their feathers. Water chestnut is a rooted aquatic plant, very different from the one you find in Chinese take out. It can dominate ponds, shallow lakes, and rivers because it grows in thick, dense colonies and can grow as much as 4.8 m (16 ft) in length.

Case Study Location: Pine Run Impoundment, Mercer County
Pine Run is an isolated flood control impoundment located within central Mercer County. It is located 4-10 miles from other water bodies including Lake Wilhelm, Sandy Lake, Lake Latsoka, and the Shenango River. While there is limited access, Pine Run Reservoir is open to the public for fishing, and hunting takes place in the surrounding area.

Response Objectives Implementation
• Eradication
• Education and Outreach

Implementation
Three possible control strategies were identified: hand pulling, aquatic plant harvest, and chemical control. Hand pulling was the initial strategy chosen for being the easiest and quickest response. In July 2018, MCCC staff Pymatuning State Park staff and public volunteers organized a 2-day hand pulling event with kayaks and canoes. The event cleared less than a quarter of an acre of the six-acre infestation and it was deemed that hand pulling wasn't a viable option. Next, the use of an aquatic plant harvester was considered; however, this option was not financially feasible and there were no access areas to launch the harvester. MCCC decided the best possible option was chemical control. They began by reaching out to the Crawford County Conservation District, the PA Lake Management Society (PALS), and other individuals to get recommendations on aquatic herbicide control within the state and obtaining the necessary permits. The treatment consisted of one gallon of Reward and one pound of Clipper per acre. While the infestation has decreased significantly from 2018 to 2020, this is an ongoing effort. Education and outreach efforts included news and media blasts about the infestation to inform the public about the infestation, the process, and the response. An article was published in the iMaginavives newsletter and presentations were given at local meetings. Educational signage will also be posted at the location.

LESSONS LEARNED
Partnership with other organizations who have previously dealt with water chestnut such as other conservation districts, Sea Grant, DCR and PALS, was integral for obtaining information and resources. Without the use of these resources and partnerships, this process would have been much more difficult.

A PA Sea Grant intern, Sophia, is currently tasked with contacting individuals to help compile these case studies. She'll be visiting sites, conducting interviews, and creating the case studies. Species to be highlighted in the new 4-6 case studies will include:

- Fanwort (Whipple Dam, Huntingdon County)
- Water primrose (Delaware Canal, Bucks County)
- Quagga mussels (Billmeyer Quarry, Lancaster County)
- Northern snakehead (Grantham Park, Cumberland County)
- Hydrilla (Conneaut Lake, Shenango River, Crawford County)
- Common carp (Tamarack Lake, Crawford County)

Below is an image of what the completed case studies look like. Each are single page documents that can be used to reference information like:

- Cost(s) to manage a species at a particular location
- Who were the partners involved?
- What was the management strategy that was used?
- What were lessons learned (so if others find these same species in other locations, they have someone to reach out to and learn from how the rapid response went)

Sophia's internship with PA Sea Grant goes till August 2026, so the case studies should be completed from now till then.

Another collaborative project that PA Sea Grant is working on (which also uses GLRI funds) is an effort to monitor the Lake Erie shoreline for invasive water primrose (*Lugwigia peploides*). This project is being done in conjunction with other states including Michigan, New York, and Ohio. Several priority sites for monitoring have been identified along Presque Isle, Walnut Creek Marina, and North East marinas along the Lake Erie shoreline. This monitoring is planned to occur through summer/fall of 2027-2028. Funding for rapid response can be applied for if water primrose is found.

Currently, water primrose is not found in Erie County (PA) and we don't anticipate finding it, but if we do, we will be able to respond to it.

As the Committee continues to meet moving forward, the group is discussing developing a rapid response communications protocol. A draft is currently under review by the Committee. This protocol frames the question of how and when information should be shared with the public (e.g., should information be released to the public; if yes, who is the appropriate entity to share a press release, etc.). This protocol is intended to provide transparency, consistency, and awareness for the public while preventing misinformation,

panic, and having people react too quickly with uncoordinated messaging. This protocol will align directly with what is already in the PA Rapid Response Plan.

Amy Jewitt (WPC) requested that the up-and-coming 4-6 case studies include information on the cost to respond to an infestation. This is valuable information to share, especially when speaking with people in leadership (e.g., legislators) about the cost of invasive species to the state. Having concrete data helps to back up those conversations. Sara Stahlman remarked that this is one of the questions that will be asked during the interviews as part of this project, and if information on response costs is provided, it will be included in the case studies.

Aquatic Invasive Species Education and Outreach Committee Report

Speaker: **Amber Stilwell**, Coastal Outreach Specialist, Lake Erie Office, Pennsylvania Sea Grant | Master Watershed Steward Coordinator, Erie, Crawford, and Warren Counties, Penn State Extension (ars26@psu.edu)



<u>Aquatic Invasive Species Education & Outreach Committee Members</u>	
Committee Chair	Amber Stilwell, PA Sea Grant & Penn State Extension
State Agencies	
PA Department of Agriculture	Kris Abell
PA Department of Conservation & Natural Resources	John Laskos
PA Fish and Boat Commission	Sean Hartzell
Non-Governmental Organizations	
PA Lake Management Society	Kate Harms
PA Sea Grant	Sara Stahlman, Sarah Whitney
Penn State Extension	Brad Kunsman, Faith Kibuye, Glen Bupp, Jenn Fetter, Megan Luke, Patricia Prade, Susan Boser
Western PA Conservancy	Mary Walsh
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers	Tony Honick, John Chopp
Are you interested in joining the Aquatic Invasive Species Education & Outreach Committee? Council members and non-members are welcome. If yes, contact Amber Stilwell at ars26@psu.edu .	

A guest speaker recently gave a presentation to the Committee and some guests – Tim Campbell from Wisconsin Sea Grant. He previously presented to the entire Council, so the Committee asked him to return and give a talk about updated research.

Tim Campbell (pictured below) discussed the importance of framing aquatic invasive species messaging in a neutral tone and has data-driven information to back up why this is important to do. Tim's data shows that militaristic and nativist tones (that have been used in the past) don't perform any better than neutral language. So, the question is, why use them at all?



Tim also has updated information from surveys he conducted that looked at messaging and tones which can alienate certain audiences. One specific example relates to students entering the field of invasion biology and perhaps not feeling welcome if they are of a different nationality. In a case like this, it's critical to be as inclusive as possible without alienating certain audiences when we're talking about aquatic invasive species. Throughout his presentation to the Committee, the group discussed tools for communicating about invasive species and ways to work as a team to welcome all audiences into these conversations.

Aside from the Committee, Kris Abell (PDA) hosts the Round Goby working group which currently meets twice a year, but has been meeting more frequently to build upon the angler engagement session that was spearheaded by this Committee. One of the main topics of discussion focuses on how to prevent the spread of round goby. The next meeting is scheduled for June 17, 2026. At that next meeting, the working group will be using the Strategic Doing framework to determine the "Big Easy". This framework essentially takes information from the angler engagement session (i.e., info developed by anglers for anglers) to provide messaging to effectively prevent the spread of round goby. This information helps to determine what projects will have the highest impacts with the lowest amount of effort.

Another effort currently being planned is an Aquatic Invasive Species workshop in Harrisburg, PA on August 14, 2026. The agenda for this event currently includes:

- Early Detection and Rapid Response (Sara Stahlman, PA Sea Grant)
- Vertebrates and Invertebrates (Sean Hartzell, PA Fish and Boat Commission)
- Plants (Owen Schneider, Temple University)

- Outdoor field trip to practice ID and reporting (Amber Stilwell, PA Sea Grant)

Other upcoming events and efforts include the following:

- Summer invasive species removals with Penn State Extension Master Watershed Stewards
 - Frogbit removals (Mercer, Crawford, Venango counties)
 - Water lettuce removal/monitoring (Crawford Co)
 - Ludwigia, flowering rush, and mile-a-minute vine removals (Venango Co)
 - English ivy removals (Philadelphia, PA)
 - Knotweed removals (Lehigh and Northampton counties)
 - Knotweed, garlic mustard, multiflora rose (Adams Co)
 - Keystone Invasive Species Forum (September 16, 2026)
-

Breakout Group Summary Reports

Speaker: **Kris Abell**, Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture

During today's Council meeting, breakout groups will meet for 25 minutes. At the end of today's meeting, we can reassess the direction we want to go at future Council meetings with these breakout groups and with implementing the Pennsylvania Invasive Species Management Plan.

Note: Only three of the four breakout groups will be meeting today. One of the breakout group leaders, Jocelyn Behm, wasn't able to be at today's meeting. (This means the Containment and Eradication break out group will not meet today.)

The three breakout groups that will meet today include those highlighting the following topics:

- Prevention (Leader = Deah Lieurance, Penn State University)
- Early Detection & Rapid Response (Leaders = Amy Jewitt & Mary Walsh, Western PA Conservancy)
- Long-term Management (Leader = Andrew Rohrbaugh, PA DCNR)

Prevention Break Out Group

Speaker: **Deah Lieurance**, Pennsylvania State University (dzl5661@psu.edu)

The Prevention Group has worked through two of its recommendations (from the statewide management plan) in good detail. Deah feels the group could get through the third recommendation via email.

The Prevention Group is taking the approach of using logic models for each of the recommendations in the prevention section of the statewide management plan. Essentially, our group is identifying relevant inputs, outputs, resources, and activities for each recommendation, as well as short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes, with long-term outcomes resulting in instituting a permanent behavior change (or something similar).

So far, our group has completed work on the recommendation to “develop resources to improve prevention of invasive species introductions and monitor invasion pathways.” Deah also has to do some additional “clean up” work on the recommendation for “improving public outreach and education for prevention of high-risk invasive species threats.” During today's Council meeting, the group discussed public outreach and

addressed an oversight of including NGOs in that work. In terms of activities, the group discussed the value of public outreach, targeted communications, educational events, deploying resources at recreational points, and training partners in effective messaging.

The group discussed in detail an idea related to community-based prevention efforts and doing something like a Bioblitz to get records of invasive or non-native species.

Another recommendation in the prevention section of the plan is about horizon scanning, for which we would have a list of species to be on the lookout for. In relation to a horizon scan, the results of a Bioblitz could be analyzed, specifically for species identified as high risk, and take rapid action to manage/eradicate those species before they become established.

The group also recognized the value of educational materials so that people are being on the lookout for species that we do not want to enter into our state.

Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR)

Speaker: **Mary Walsh**, Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (mwalsh@paconserve.org)

So far, the Early Detection and Rapid Response group has done a lot of brainstorming and placed various ideas and opportunities into a category framework which is helping the group to determine next steps for the recommendations being discussed.

Today, the group discussed communications and how this group can perhaps work with PA Sea Grant on their efforts related to aquatic invasive species and rapid response. We also discussed funding opportunities. We looked at examples of great communication, with an example given of the Center for Dairy Excellence and their ability to bring together people about issues regarding dairy.

Overall, conversations today focused on communication and where/how to go forward in relation to invasive species issues related to EDRR.

Long-term Management

Speaker: **Andrew Rohrbaugh**, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (anrohrbaug@pa.gov)

The Long-term Management group had one last recommendation to discuss, which was to develop outreach programs to assist land owners with restoration. The action item was for

jurisdictional agencies and PRISM to provide grants to landowners to restore private lands using ecological principles. The group got “stuck” on this because the implementation (of giving grants) requires funding, so discussion was had on options for how to set up those grants and ensuring resources are available for private landowners to learn about invasive species and current priorities.

The group also discussed a previous recommendation in the plan that was gone over last time - “Apply ecological restoration at sites with well-managed or eradicated invasive species to improve biological diversity, natural processes, and habitats.” One of the suggestions related to this recommendation was to look at climate change as a priority for working with ecological restoration and ensuring we are targeting species that are not yet widespread in Pennsylvania but are likely to become so with climate change.

Andrew felt that more in depth work could be done on these and other recommendations, but perhaps these breakout sessions aren’t the best way to do so.

After the breakout summary reports concluded, Kris Abell (PDA) asked Council members for their thoughts on if the breakout groups should continue, or if future PGISC meetings should use this time for another purpose?

Deah Lieurance (PSU) commented that she felt most of the groups were close to completing their discussions and at the December PGISC meeting, each could present their plan for moving forward.

Amy Jewitt (WPC) remarked that she sees benefit in having the breakout groups meet, but many of the conversations are coming to a point where we need to start talking with individual agencies or NGOs on specific recommendations. We need to begin by asking what the agencies/NGOs are interested in and capable of doing. Everything we’re talking about in these breakout groups is based on the existing structure of how things work in Pennsylvania (as they relate to invasive species), and obviously we’re trying to change some of that. For change to come about, we need to start having some of these conversations in a more strategic way that we can’t really have here in Council meetings only.

Amy also questioned whether it should be the role of the breakout group leaders to begin having these types of strategic conversations, or if an ad hoc committee of the Council should be formed for this purpose. These breakout groups have been phenomenal at idea generation and getting the “wheels turning” for a lot of people who have participated, and that alone has been incredibly beneficial.

Andrew Rohrbaugh (DCNR) commented that he intended to start having his breakout group meet outside of Council meetings, but has not had the time to do so. He also mentioned that continuing to have the breakout groups meet may not be the best way to move forward. Instead, setting up more intentioned meetings that are focused on each of the breakout groups and their respective topics (or specific actions) would help in making continued progress.

Both Kris Abell (PDA) and Jim Grazio (DEP) remarked that based on this feedback, there seems to be a consensus that the Council should discontinue hosting breakout groups at PGISC meetings and instead shift our focus to having separate, more intentioned meetings (outside of Council meetings) where we focus on accomplishing specific goals as outlined in the statewide management plan.

Public Comment Period

None.

Concluding Remarks and Adjourn

Motion: Amy Jewitt (WPC) moved to adjourn the meeting. Deah Lieurance (PSU) seconded the motion. **Meeting adjourned.**

Meeting minutes respectfully submitted by Amy Jewitt, Senior Coordinator of the Pennsylvania iMapInvasives Program at the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program.

Questions or comments regarding these minutes should be submitted via email to Kris Abell, Council Coordinator, at krabell@pa.gov. If you are a member of the public and wish to attend the next PGISC meeting, please contact Kris for more information on the meeting date, time, and location.
