



REDUCING THE
SALES OF INVASIVE
PLANTS IN CANADA:
TO SAFEGUARD BIODIVERSITY
AND HUMAN HEALTH

Tatarian honeysuckle (*Lonicera tatarica*) near Pinawa Dam Prov Park Manitoba. Photo by Séraphin Poudrier via iNaturalist CC BY-NC.

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On behalf of the Canadian Coalition for Invasive Plant Regulation - [CCIPR.ca](https://www.ccipr.ca)



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Invasive alien species pose a significant threat to **biodiversity, human health and well-being, as well as the economy** in Canada. To protect our natural ecosystems and ensure a sustainable future, it is imperative to reduce the introduction and establishment of invasive species by at least 50 percent by 2030.ⁱ

The Significance of Biodiversity

Biodiversity is the foundation of ecosystem health, providing essential services like food, medicine, and natural resources. It also enhances our cultural experiences and recreational activities. Recognizing its importance,ⁱⁱ Canada has committed to halt and reverse biodiversity loss for the benefit of all living things, including people.ⁱⁱⁱ To achieve this critical mission, Canada must address the challenges posed by invasive species.

Urgent Action Required

Invasive species are a major threat to public health and a relentless driver of biodiversity loss. In Canada, the spread of invasive plant species is escalating, a trend that is likely to intensify with ongoing climate change. Immediate action is imperative to mitigate severe environmental damage, significant public health risks, and soaring management costs^{iv}

Identifying Pathways

Target 11 of the *2020 Biodiversity Goals and Targets for Canada* stated, “By 2020, pathways of invasive alien species introductions are identified, and risk-based intervention or management plans are in place for priority pathways and species.”^v

The ornamental/horticultural industry has been identified as the primary pathway for the introduction of non-native invasive plants. Canada must now act on this knowledge and

ⁱ This is Target 6 in the Kunming-Montréal Global Biodiversity Framework – GBF (Convention on Biological Diversity – 15th Conference of the Parties [CBD COP-15.], [2022](#)).

ⁱⁱ Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Service (IPBES), “Summary for Policymakers of the Thematic Assessment Report on Invasive Alien Species and their Control of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services,” [2023](#); World Health Organization (WHO), “Biodiversity and Health,” [2015](#).

ⁱⁱⁱ Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), “Milestone document,” [2024](#).

^{iv} The rate of introduction and number of new invasive plants continues to increase with no signs of slowing, (IPBES, “Global assessment report on biodiversity and ecosystem services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services,” [2019](#), p. 126; Laginhas, Fertakos, & Bradley, “We don't know what we're missing: Evidence of a vastly under sampled invasive plant pool,” [2022](#)). Invasion increases with the rate at which propagules (plants and plant parts capable of reproducing) are introduced,” (Early et. al., “Global threats from invasive alien species in the twenty-first century and national response capacities,” [2016](#)). In Canada non-native species now represent more than a 26% of vascular plants in Canada. This increased by 120 species between 2010 and 2020, (Canadian Endangered Species Conservation Council, “Wild Species: The general status of species in Canada,” [n.d.](#)). Between 10 and 25% of these non-native plants have invasive potential (Spear et al., “The Invasion Ecology of Sleeper Populations: Prevalence, Persistence, and Abrupt Shifts,” [2021](#)).

^v Environment and Climate Change Canada, [2016](#).

develop a more comprehensive strategy to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species through nurseries, the pet/aquarium trade, and e-commerce channels.

Key Recommendations

Recognizing the urgent need to **safeguard biodiversity** and reduce the spread of invasive plants, the Canadian Coalition for Invasive Plant Regulation (CCIPR) proposes the following measures:

1. **Enhance Governance:** Canada's approach to managing invasive plants is disjointed and lacks unified oversight, leading to gaps in protection and response. **Action required:** Canada must establish a permanent body dedicated to overarching, inter-jurisdictional coordination for invasive species prevention and management.^{vi} This organization should aim to refine and extend Canada's regulatory framework to better protect biodiversity, ecosystem integrity, public health, and safety. Its mandate would include ensuring that the strategies for managing invasive species benefit all communities equitably, with special attention to the most vulnerable and Indigenous populations.
2. **Create a Virtual Information Hub:** Lack of information and resources hamper efforts to combat invasive species. **Action required:** Develop a central repository for sharing information on plants and their distribution, other technical information, decision-support tools, and best management practices related to invasive plants. Enhanced federal support for knowledge-building and centralized information sharing is essential for transparency, fairness, and equity.^{vii}
3. **Mandate Risk Assessments:** Currently, only a small number of both newly imported and existing non-native plants undergo screening for invasiveness. **Action required:** Require risk assessments for all new plant imports and screen existing non-native plants for potential environmental and socio-economic risks, as is required under the *Canadian Environmental Protection Act* (CEPA) for potentially harmful substances.^{viii} Early recognition and proactive prevention of invasive plants are crucial for saving costs and minimizing damages.
4. **Reform Legislation:** Canada's invasive plant regulatory tools are aimed at safeguarding Canada's food supply and plant resources but fall short of adequately protecting public health and the environment, especially with regard to plants in the horticultural trades. **Action required:** Ban the sale and movement of high-risk invasive plant species and introduce point-of-sale labeling for plants that pose potential risks. Establishing clear

^{vi} This key need was identified by the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Invasive Alien Species Task Force ("Recommendations to Improve INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES Prevention and Management in Canada," [2017](#), p. 12).

^{vii} Target 20 & 21 of the GBF require that Canada strengthens capacity-building, technology transfer, and scientific and technical cooperation for biodiversity conservation and ensure that knowledge is available and accessible to guide biodiversity action ([2022](#)).

^{viii} 23,000 substances have been examined for their impacts on the environment and human health by the Departments of the Environment and of Health under CEPA 1999 (Environment and Climate Change Canada (ECCC), "Fact sheet on human health and the Canadian Environmental Protection Act," [2017](#)). Only 36 of the 1,372 introduced plants in Canada have been assessed by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, of those 9 are regulated (Canadian Endangered Species Conservation Council, "Wild Species 2020: The general status of species in Canada," [2020](#), p. 19; CFIA, Weed Risk Analysis Documents, [2023](#)).

regulations ensures fairness within the marketplace, providing a level playing field for all participants in the horticultural industry.

5. **Develop a National Invasive Plant Accord:** Canada has not sufficiently engaged with industry leaders to reduce the spread of invasive plants through the nursery trade. **Action Required:** Establish a collaborative agreement among federal, provincial, and territorial governments, together with the garden and nursery industry and other concerned stakeholders.^{ix} The participants in this agreement will work together to create a definitive list of harmful plants to be prohibited from sale, propagation, and distribution nationwide. Additionally, they will develop a 'watch list' of species that, while not banned, require clear labeling to inform consumers of potential risks. This accord, informed by science, promises to ensure consistency across Canada while improving awareness among consumers and industry stakeholders and thereby improving regulatory compliance.
6. **Increase Public Education and Outreach:** Educational programs are crucial to the success of Canada's strategy against invasive plants, yet their effectiveness is compromised by inconsistent funding, infrequent revisions of educational materials, and uneven distribution across regions. **Action required:** Allocate and expand financial support for targeted educational campaigns that inform both the public and the nursery industry about invasive plants and necessary prevention and mitigation measures. Such investment will not only heighten the efficacy of these programs but also ensure a more equitable implementation of prevention measures across the country.

A Call to Action

CCIPR believes that improving legislation and oversight, building a knowledge base, and providing education and awareness programs can all form the basis of a successful strategy to safeguard living creatures and our natural world from the devastating damage caused by invasive plants.

By acknowledging the urgency of the invasive species issue and adopting these recommendations, Canada can take meaningful steps toward preserving its biodiversity and securing a healthier, more sustainable future.

^{ix} Modelled after New Zealand's *National Plant Pest Accord* (New Zealand Ministry for Primary Industries, "National Pest Plant Accord for preventing the sale of invasive weeds in NZ," [2021](#)).