

Invasive Species Working Group
Wednesday, January 3, 2024
Patrick Henry Building, Richmond, Virginia

Working Group Members Present

The Honorable Travis A. Voyles, Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources, Chair
The Honorable Matthew Lohr, Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry, Vice-Chair
Dr. Jacob Barney, Virginia Polytechnic and State University
Ryan Brown, Director, Department of Wildlife Resources
Joseph Guthrie, Commission, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Jamie Green, Commissioner, Virginia Marine Resources Commission
Mike Rolband, Director, Department of Environmental Quality
Matthew S. Wells, Director, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Lori Chamberlain, Virginia Department of Forestry
Martin Krebs, Virginia Department of Transportation

Agency Staff Present

Corey Scott, Assistant Secretary of Natural and Historic Resources
Andrew Smith, Chief Deputy Director, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Frank Stovall, Deputy Director for Operations, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Jason Bulluck, Natural Heritage Director, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Lesley Starke, Natural Heritage Stewardship Chief, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Derrick Bolen, Special Assistant for Policy, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Kevin Heffernan, Stewardship Biologist, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Michael Fletcher, Board and Constituent Services Liaison, Department of Conservation and Recreation
David Davis, Department of Environmental Quality
David Gianino, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Travis Rickman, Deputy Secretary of Agriculture and Forestry
Larry Nichols, Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Angel Deem, Chief of Policy, Virginia Department of Transportation

Online Participants

Roger Mann, Virginia Institute of Marine Science

Others Present

Tom Smith, Virginia Native Plants Society
Jim Hurley, Blue Ridge PRISM
Rod Walker, Blue Ridge PRISM

WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER

Secretary Voyles called the meeting to order at 1:02. He welcomed attendees and asked working group members for introductions.

Report on the Request of the Virginia General Assembly for “industry resources and recommendations...for the full implementation of the existing Virginia Invasive Species Management Plan.”

Secretary Voyles reported that legislation passed by the General Assembly and signed by the Governor in 2023 contained the following amendment clause:

§ 10.1-104.6:2. Invasive plant species.

2. That the department of conservation and recreation shall convene the Virginia Species Working Group to develop industry resources and recommendations to be sent to the Chairmen of the Senate Committees on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources and Finance and Appropriations and the House Committees on Agriculture, Chesapeake and Natural Resources and Appropriations for the 2024 regular session of the General Assembly to support full implementation of the Virginia Invasive Species Working Group's existing [2018] Virginia Invasive Species Management Plan.

Secretary Voyles called on Secretary Lohr for a review of the key goals outlined in the 2018 management plan.

Secretary Lohr thanked attendees for their interest in the topic. He noted that it was very important to the Virginia economy. He noted:

- Invasive Species have a significant impact on Virginia. These species are non-native or introduced to an ecosystem and can cause economic or environmental harm. They are costly to control, reduce productivity within forests, can grow faster than native species, and spread quickly. (SN11)
- In a 2005 study, referenced in the management plan, economic losses due to invasive species in the U.S. were estimated at more than \$120 billion, and Virginia’s losses due to invasive species were estimated to be as high as \$1 billion in that same study.

Addressing an issue of this magnitude is a long-term effort that must be implemented over a period of time, therefore we are considering today a phased approach providing support to four state agencies with seven positions and an annual cost of \$2.45 million.

First, the plan calls for increased cooperation among state, local, federal and non-governmental organizations to improve communication, provide for an efficient legal framework, and improve species monitoring and reporting. (SN4)

Secondly, the plan calls for VDACS and DWR to lead the state’s prevention efforts by conducting assessments, management planning, and increasing situational awareness among stakeholders. (SN5)

Goal three, early detection, challenges us to enhance the likelihood of early detection and reporting of suspected new species by supporting volunteers and professionals with information and tools designed to detect and report invasive species of high concern. (SN6)

Responding quickly is critical to the successful management and prevention of invasive species and enhancing rapid response capabilities is Goal 4. (SN7)

Goal 5 centers around management strategies and directs the development and implementation of management and restoration plans, encourages use of native plants for vegetation projects; provides assistance for private landowners; and establishes and supports PRISMs. (SN8)

The sixth goal is to identify and fund research and risk assessment needs and directs us to partner with higher education to provide current science to guide ecologically sound and economically feasible actions and to educate and train future invasive species managers by equipping them with best practices. (SN9)

Lastly, education and outreach strategies are needed to allow us to develop and implement coordinated public-awareness campaigns using trained staff and volunteers, social media, community groups, workshops, and on-site events. (SN10)

Secretary Lohr called on Kevin Heffernan to speak to the specific implementation strategies that this recommendation represents. (SN12 – 26)

Mr. Heffernan reviewed key strategies for the seven goals with attention to their importance in relation to several invasive species of high concern.

Secretary Voyles commented that addressing the issue of invasive species is a long-term effort that must be implemented over a long period of time. He noted that the working group would consider a phased approach for providing support to four key stage agencies. He also noted that the 2018 Management Plan is due for revision in 2024.

Secretary Voyles asked Mr. Heffernan to address the specific implementation strategies.

Mr. Heffernan noted that there had been an increase in public interest in the last few years as landowners were concerned about what was growing in parks and back yards.

**Invasive Species Management Plan
Implementation Recommendations**

	Eradication/ Slow the Spread	Statewide Coordinated Response	Personnel	FTEs	Total
DOF	\$325,000	\$365,000	\$250,000	2	\$940,000
VDACS	\$350,000		\$135,000	1	\$485,000
DCR			\$250,000	2	\$250,000
DWR	\$525,000		\$250,000	2	\$775,000
Total	\$1,200,000	\$365,000	\$885,000	7	\$2,450,000



Mr. Heffernan reviewed a list of species that were of high concern for each of the agencies involved.

Secretary Voyles thanked Mr. Heffernan for the review. He noted that what was before the working group was the list of funding recommendations for the initial step of implementation. He noted that the agencies needed to prioritize slowing the spread of these species.

Secretary Voyles noted that, with approval of the working group, the funding recommendations would be forwarded to the General Assembly.

Mr. Rolband asked if there were proposed metrics for success. He noted that this level of funding was a good start but would not eliminate invasive species.

It was noted that the Invasive Species Management Plan includes metrics and funding recommendations to implement the plan.

Mr. Wells noted that this was a strong beginning.

Secretary Voyles advised that the agencies involved would coordinate the response.

ACTION

Secretary Voyles moved that the working group endorse the recommended levels of funding with the addition of metrics to address progress.

Mr. Rolband seconded, and the motion carried with a voice vote.

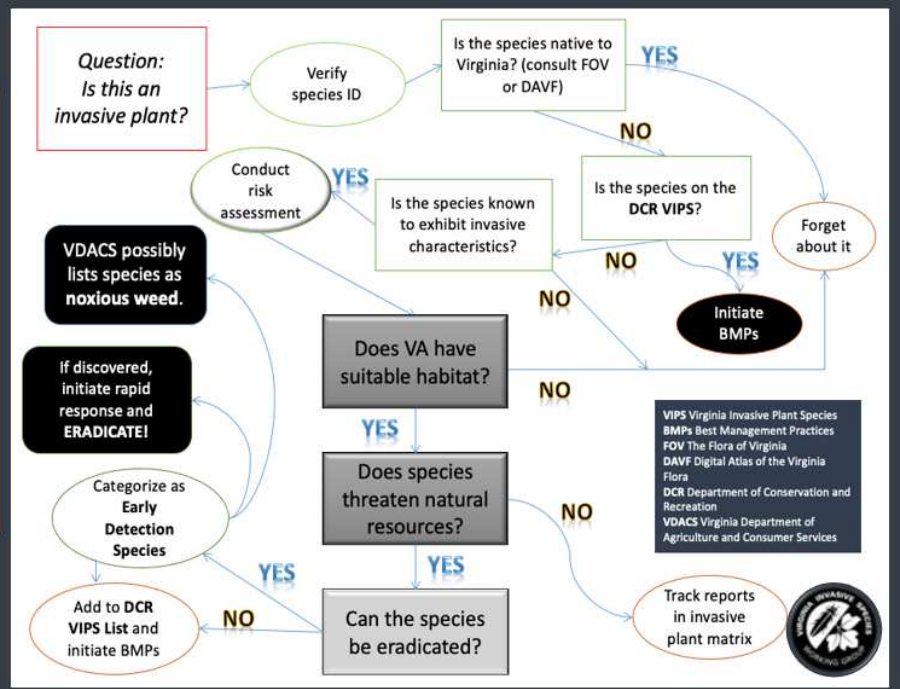
Invasive Species Plant Assessment Process

Mr. Heffernan reviewed the DCR process for assessing plant species.

Components of the assessment process include:

- Ecological Impacts
- Current Distribution and Abundance
- Trends in Distribution and Abundance
- Management Difficulty

Invasive Plant Risk Assessment



Mr. Heffernan noted that it was critical to get a professional ID of the species. Further, if a plant is commercially viable, it cannot be listed as a noxious weed.

Mr. Heffernan noted that the DCR list of invasive species is available on the DCR website.

VIRGINIA INVASIVE PLANT SPECIES LIST

EFFECTIVE DATE: JANUARY 1, 2024

The list is for educational purposes only and has no regulatory authority. Per Virginia Code §10.1-104.6:2, the Virginia Invasive Plant Species List is periodically reviewed and updated. List updates require adherence to a specific invasives species risk assessment protocol developed by DCR. DCR routinely conducts data analysis and assessments for existing species and reviews potential list additions.

Scientific Name	Common Name	Virginia Invasiveness Rank	REGION		
			Mountain	Piedmont	Coastal
<i>Ailanthus altissima</i>	Tree-of-heaven	High	•	•	•
<i>Alfilaria petiolata</i>	Garlic Mustard	High	•	•	•
<i>Alternanthera philoxeroides</i>	Alligator-weed	High	•	•	•
<i>Ampelopsis brevipedunculata</i>	Porcelain-berry	High	•	•	•
<i>Carex kobomugi</i>	Japanese Sand Sedge	High	•	•	•
<i>Celastrus orbiculatus</i>	Oriental Bittersweet	High	•	•	•
<i>Centaurea stoebe ssp. micranthos</i>	Spotted Knapweed	High	•	•	•
<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	Canada Thistle	High	•	•	•
<i>Dioscorea polystachya</i>	Cinnamon Vine	High	•	•	•
<i>Elaeagnus umbellata</i>	Autumn Olive	High	•	•	•

Mr. Heffernan noted that DCR:

- Reviewed local, state, and federal invasive species lists and built a matrix of listed species
- Updated assessment protocol
- Reviewed crowdsourced invasive species data (EDDMapS, iNaturalist)
- Built a database to cross with Flora of Virginia

- Begun preliminary reviews of species not on the current list
- Completed 8 new assessments, with at least 12 more in queue
 - In 2024
 - complete 15 – 20 new assessments
 - Review all 90 species on the current list to determine need to update assessments

Secretary Voyles noted that it was important for the working group to offer support to DCR for the assessment process.

ACTION

Secretary Voyles moved that the working group endorse the DCR Invasive Plant Assessment Process as presented.

Secretary Lohr seconded, and the motion carried by voice vote.

Report on Applicable Legislation Passed in 2023.

Mr. Heffernan noted that the following legislative changes were made in 2023.

- Notification of proposed use of invasive plant species
- Permit process for transport of noxious weed species

Installers must notify the landowner or customer that there are invasive species.

Mr. Rolband asked what incentive would be needed to encourage solar site developers to adopt the Pollinator-Smart Program and make better use of the native plant finder.

A smaller working group may be established to address the use of the native plant finder by consumers.

Rolband asked what incentive would be needed to get solar site developers to apply to the Pollinator-Smart Program and use native plant finder more often.

May help to have a smaller group work together to figure out how to integrate process.

Reports and Comments from Members of the Working Group

Dr. Barney reported that Virginia Tech has an on campus invasive species working group. He noted that the university is also hiring new faculty who will work on invasive species and commented that Virginia Tech will likely have the greatest concentration of expertise regarding invasive species in the country.

Mr. Krebs noted that the VDOT research council recently completed a research study regarding invasive species.

Mr. Wells commented that the meeting of the working group was a step in the right direction. He thanked the group and Mr. Heffernan for his presentations.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Tom Smith with the Virginia Native Plant Society made the following comments:

I want to thank you all for making the time to attend today to help in addressing invasive species, an issue which confronts thousands of private landowners, small and large, and our local and state public land holding and managing agencies.

My 31 years at DCR as the Natural Heritage Director, and the last five as DCR Deputy Director of Operations, provided me with 31 years of invasive species hands-on experience, from treating in the field, to helping craft the list, to building partnerships. Twenty-one years at my current residence has provided me with the frustration of a homeowner trying to keep English Ivy and Japanese Stiltgrass in check at home.

Your state employee public servants need more resources in the form of technical expertise and cost share dollars to help private landowners deal with this invasion, and more resources to protect our valuable public outdoor recreation lands. It is also critical to give citizens the information they need to make good decisions at the point of sale when they are buying plants.

As outlined in Section 2.2-220.2 of the Code of Virginia, you play an important part in the development of strategic actions to address invasive species and the use of native plant species. I ask that, as the Code states, you begin meeting twice per year to hear from the general public and agencies about status and needs and provide your input and support to the process.

Mr. Hurley from Blue Ridge PRISM noted that two weeks ago a group of 80 people worked together for three days to arrive at a list of recommendations for dealing with the eradication of invasive species. Over 78 organizations were represented. He advised that the workforce addressing invasives needs to grow in addition to the need for contractors to do the work. Mr. Hurley also stated that cost-share programs were needed to further support invasive species control efforts.

Mr. Walker of Blue Ridge PRISM noted that it would take a great deal of work to make progress. There is a need for education, funding, and assistance. He expressed appreciation for the work at Virginia Tech.

Additional Business and Adjournment.

Secretary Voyles thanked members, staff, and public for attending. He expressed appreciation to DCR for organizing the meeting.

There was no further business and the meeting adjourned.