

For Immediate Release

Invasive Weeds Awareness Coalition (IWAC)

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**Land Management Professionals Take the Fight for
Native Ecosystems to the Nation's Capitol**

Group to meet in D.C. to raise public awareness of invasive weed problem

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Feb. XX, 2007 – A group from across the United States will congregate in Washington, D.C., Feb. 25-March 2, 2007, to spread awareness about the threat posed by invasive plants.

National Invasive Weed Awareness Week (NIWAW) is hosted by the Invasive Weed Awareness Coalition (IWAC) and is in its eighth year. Both Mike Johanns, Secretary of Agriculture, and Dirk Kempthorne, Secretary of the Interior, have been invited to address attendees at special briefings. Attendees come from varying backgrounds and professions, but share a common goal: to control invasive weeds in the United States and protect our native ecosystems. NIWAW focuses on sharing invasive weed information with federal officials at the highest levels and collaborating with experts to address what has become a national and global environmental concern.

Invasive [Non-native] plant infestations are spreading across the United States, costing billions of dollars for control and restoration initiatives each year. During the week, NIWAW participants, often experts in weed science who work to control them every day, will meet with members of Congress and congressional staff to increase understanding of the economic and environmental impacts of invasive and noxious weeds. Participants will showcase successful control strategies and tactics in an effort to expand opportunities for success in new locations that face similar challenges. They will also have the opportunity to meet with other experts from around the country to gain new insight into cutting-edge control programs.

“NIWAW is an opportunity for participants to learn from each other, as well as to share successes, challenges and opportunities with legislators,” said Nelroy Jackson, Chair of IWAC. “Our hope is not only to raise awareness about invasive weed issues, but also to find common ground in the battle to control existing weeds and prevent potential infestations.”

NIWAW officials expect more than 200 representatives from industry associations, professional societies, non-governmental organizations, and state and federal agencies at the event. Attendees will have the opportunity to attend briefings with the departments of Agriculture, Interior, and Defense as well as the National Invasive Species Council, on the problems caused by invasive vegetation. They will see examples of local, state and federal projects from all over the country designed to curb the spread of terrestrial and aquatic weeds.

Throughout the week of NIWAW, the U.S. Botanic Garden will showcase displays submitted by state and federal agency staff that demonstrate how to identify invasive plants and that highlight successful partnership projects. The public is invited and encouraged to view the displays, which will include informative exhibits on menacing invasive weeds, such as:

- **Eurasian watermilfoil:** This aquatic weed spreads when fragments are transported from one water body to another, usually by watercraft and their trailers, or by water currents. It grows quickly to form dense infestations that shade out and replace native plants, negatively affecting birds and fish. The weed has become pervasive throughout much of the country, and officials at all levels of government are working to curb the spread.
- **Cogongrass:** A perennial colony-forming grass that grows to 3 feet tall and forms dense mats that exclude all other vegetation. Cogongrass is an extremely aggressive invader capable of occupying a range of sites and is considered to be one of the world's worst weeds. Its range in the United States continues to expand each year, particularly in the Southeast.
- **Japanese knotweed:** This dense-growing shrub grows as tall as 10 feet, invading disturbed, sunny areas such as roadsides or stream banks. Shading and displacing other plant life, this weed reduces wildlife habitat and forms an impenetrable monoculture, eliminating all other plants near its colonies.
- **Tree of heaven:** This quick-growing tree can grow to 80 feet tall and 6 feet in diameter. It is extremely tolerant of poor soil conditions and is known to grow in cement cracks. Dense thickets displace native species and rapidly take over fields and meadows.
- **Scotch broom:** This shrub invades pastures and cultivated fields, dry scrubland, native grasslands, roadsides, dry riverbeds, and other waterways. Its rapid spread was aided by frequent planting in gardens as an ornamental shrub and as a soil binder along highway cuts and fills.

About IWAC

IWAC works to educate individuals and organizations on steps they can take to protect land, such as learning more about invasive weeds, recognizing plants that are out of place and alerting appropriate local agencies to their presence. IWAC raises public awareness of the importance of responsibly selecting noninvasive plants for landscaping and preventing inadvertent transportation of invasive plant species or their seeds to new areas.

IWAC works cooperatively with the Federal Interagency Committee for the Management of Noxious and Exotic Weeds (FICMNEW), a partnership of [the EPA and] 16[5] federal agencies from the Departments of Agriculture, Interior, Defense, Energy and Transportation, and the EPA.

IWAC also works closely with producer groups, industry, [other] federal and state agencies, and non-government organizations such as the Weed Science Society of America and the Ecological Society of America.

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