

Background Information

An important distinction to be aware of is the difference between invasive plants, noxious weeds, weeds, and non-native plants. These terms are frequently used interchangeably, but they are not the same.

Non-native plants are plants that have been introduced, intentionally or unintentionally, into a habitat. They do not necessarily pose a threat to any other species or habitat nor do they need to proliferate and spread rapidly to fit this designation.

Weeds are any plant growing where they are unwanted. They can be native or non-native, invasive or non-invasive. An orchid planted in a garden is not a weed. If the same orchid grew in a corn field, it would be considered a weed simply because it is not desired in the field. Integrated weed management is a term used in this module to describe a method of controlling invasive plants. However, integrated weed management is used by managers to control any unwanted plant whether or not it is considered invasive.

Invasive plants are generally defined as non-native species whose introduction does or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human, animal, or plant health. Not all non-native plants or weeds are invasive plants.

According to the Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974, a *noxious weed* is “any living stage (including seeds and reproductive parts) of a parasitic or other plant of a kind which is of foreign origin, is new to or not widely prevalent in the U.S., and can directly or indirectly injure crops, other useful plants, livestock, poultry or other interests of agriculture, including irrigation, navigation, fish and wildlife resources, or the public health.” Though there is a federal definition and federal list of noxious weeds, each state has varying criteria for noxious weed designation. When a state declares a plant to be a noxious weed, regulations are put in place for the state to manage the species.

All noxious weeds are also invasive plants, but not all invasive plants are noxious weeds. Their definitions are very similar, but the term noxious weed was created for legal purposes and classifying a plant as a noxious weed is determined by state or federal regulatory agencies.

References

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