

Invasive Species Working Group
Monday, October 7, 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
Ryan Brown, Executive Director, Department of Wildlife Resources
Jason Ericson, Director, Dominion Energy
Rob Ferrell, State Forester, Department of Forestry
Joseph Guthrie, Commissioner, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Jamie Green, Commissioner, Marine Resources Commission
Katie Hellebush, Executive Director, Virginia Nursery & Landscape Association
Nicole Rovner, Associate Director, The Nature Conservancy

Agency Staff Present

Derrick Bolen, Special Policy Assistant, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Jason Bulluck, Director for Natural Heritage, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Lori Chamberlin, Forest Health Program Manager, Department of Forestry
Whitten Cluff, Executive Assistant, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Dave Davis, Office of Wetlands & Stream Protection Manager, Department of Environmental Quality
Angel Deem, Chief of Policy, Department of Transportation
Emi Endo, Senior Public Relations and Marketing Specialist, Department of Conservation and Recreation
David Gianino, Plant Industry Services Program Manager, Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
Kevin Heffernan, Stewardship Biologist, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Jim Hurley, Board of Directors Member, Blue Ridge Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management
Paul Saunders, Senior Policy Analyst, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Lesley Starke, Chief of Stewardship, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Frank Stovall, Deputy Director for Operations, Department of Conservation and Recreation
Stephanie Taillon, Deputy Secretary, Secretariat of Natural and Historic Resources
Lauren Taylor, Associate Director, Blue Ridge Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management
Rod Walker, Board of Directors President, Blue Ridge Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management

Online Participants

Dr. Jacob Barney, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Pat Calvert – Director of Clean Water & Land Conservation Programs, Virginia Conservation Network
Carolyn Caywood
William E. Lewis
Charles Paullin

Working Group Members Absent

Dr. Derek Aday, Director, Virginia Institute of Marine Science
Representative for the United States Forest Service

WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER

Secretary Voyles called the meeting to order at 11:05 AM. He welcomed attendees and asked working group members and support staff to introduce themselves.

AGENCY UPDATES ON FY2025 FUNDING AND POSITIONS

Secretary Voyles called on Commissioner Joseph Guthrie to provide an update for the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS).

Commissioner Guthrie provided the funding and position update for VDACS:

- In FY2024, VDACS received \$275,000 in appropriated funds for the management of invasive species. This became the baseline for VDACS' invasive species management program.
- In FY2025, VDACS received an additional \$485,000 in appropriated funds and one new full-time position, an Invasive Species Specialist, to manage invasive species.
- This new position has been filled, with an anticipated start-date of October 25, 2024. Their duties will include:
 - Performing quality control inspections for contracted work by VDACS contractors performing invasive species management.
 - Performing rapid response actions if a new pest of concern is found in Virginia.
 - Assisting the development of additional programs.
 - Tracking and reporting on invasive species progress and metrics.

Commissioner Guthrie provided an overview of the Invasive Species Management Programs at VDACS:

- The Office of Plant Industry Services meets at least once annually to review a list of invasive species, within its authority to control.
- Currently there is a list of twenty--one invasive species, which is comprised of insect plant pests and Tier 1 & 2 noxious weeds.
- A decision matrix is implemented to decide which species is the most critical to manage. This matrix consists of seven unique criteria including but not limited to: impacts to agriculture, availability of control options, population distribution, and impact to human health.
- VDACS has approximately \$660,000 to dedicate to control programs.
- VDACS currently administers two programs:
 - Imported Fire Ants – Approximately 3,500 mounds treated in FY2024.
 - Two-horned Trapa – Approximately 62 privately owned ponds managed.
- VDACS plans to expand their programs to control more invasive species, including Beach Vitex in coastal areas.

Secretary Voyles called on State Forester, Rob Farrell, to provide an update for the Virginia Department of Forestry (DOF).

Mr. Farrell thanked the Invasive Species Advisory Committee for their work and contributions to the Commonwealth's efforts in combatting invasive species. He expressed DOF's appreciation for being selected as the lead agency for coordinating the statewide invasive species strategy.

Mr. Farrell called on DOF's Forest Health Manager, Lori Chamberlin, to report on DOF's funding and positions update for FY2025.

Ms. Chamberlin provided DOF's funding and positions update:

- DOF received additional funding and two new full-time positions for FY2025.
- Invasive Species Coordinator will begin in November, and recruitment is currently underway for an Invasive Species Specialist. Both positions will focus on the following priorities:
 - Multi-agency coordination to which invasive species are a priority in Virginia. DCR's invasive plant list and Virginia's Noxious Weed List will help guide these decisions.
 - Two examples of priority species that DOF is currently focusing on are wavyleaf grass, a Tier 2 Noxious Weed, and spongy moth, an invasive insect that causes damage to hardwood forests.
 - Assist landowners through invasive species identification, treatment recommendations and guidance, and cost-share programs that provide financial assistance to landowners for invasive control on their property.
 - Support Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM) organizations in Virginia. Support may take the form of financial assistance through sub-awards, steering committee participation, or assistance with PRISM implementation.
 - Providing landowners with knowledge to identify and treat invasive species on their property will expand invasive species work across the state.

Secretary Voyles called on Matthew Wells, Director of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to provide their update.

Director Wells expressed DCR's gratitude for the additional support and positions provided by the General Assembly in FY2025.

Director Wells reported that DCR received two new positions to address invasive species, support agency partners and communities, and provide support to the Working Group.

Director Wells called on Director for Natural Heritage, Jason Bulluck, to provide more details on these positions.

Mr. Bulluck reported on DCR's position and funding update:

- DCR received two full-time positions and \$250,000 in allocated funds to focus on invasive species management.
- DCR is currently working to adjust current staff roles, budget in-hand funding for invasive species management, and modify physical office space.
- DCR plans to begin recruiting for these positions before the end of October 2024.

UPDATES TO THE INVASIVE PLANT LIST

Secretary Voyles stated that DCR is tasked with updating and maintaining the state-wide Invasive Species Plant List.

Secretary Voyles called on Kevin Heffernan, Stewardship Biologist for the Department of Conservation and Recreation, to report on the updates.

Mr. Heffernan thanked the members of the Invasive Species Advisory Committee and nonprofit partners for their continued efforts and support.

Mr. Heffernan provided an overview of the Invasive Plant List:

- The Invasive Plant List was founded through a collaboration with DCR and the Virginia Native Plant Society to provide information on invasive plants in Virginia.
- The Invasive Plant Lists ranks species as “high”, “medium”, and “low” priority based on their threat level to native species, natural communities, or the economy.
- Regulation requires the list to be evaluated and updated once every four years.
- DCR conducts assessments to evaluate potential additions to the list – the assessment focuses on ecological impacts of the introduced species, its abundance, its distribution, and how difficult it is to manage.

Mr. Heffernan reviewed the thirteen proposed additions to the Invasive Plant List and their priority status:

- Italian arum (high priority)
- Trifoliolate orange (high priority)
- Floating primrose-willow (high priority)
- Two-horned trapa (high priority)
- Chinese tallow-tree (high priority)
- Ravenna-grass (high priority)
- Fountain grass (medium priority)
- Sweet autumn clematis (medium priority)
- Incised fumewort (medium priority)
- Leatherleaf mahonia (medium priority)
- Curled pondweed (medium priority)
- Orange-eyed butterfly bush (low priority)
- Nandina (low priority)

Once officially added to the list, DCR will release resources on how to identify the species, why the species is listed as invasive, and how to control or eradicate the species.

Mr. Heffernan noted that of these thirteen species, most of them are considered “early detection” species. Early detection species are not yet widely established in Virginia.

Secretary Voyles asked which species are not considered to be early detection species.

Mr. Heffernan answered that the established (or non-early detection) species are: Trifoliolate orange, Sweet autumn clematis, Curled pondweed, and Nandina.

Mr. Hurley asked for clarification regarding the “medium priority” ranking for Fountain grass. He recalled several stories of agricultural lands being destroyed due to this species.

Mr. Heffernan stated that while there are anecdotal reports all over the state for the impact of Fountain grass, there is no documentary evidence of its impacts. Without the documentary evidence, it cannot be listed at a higher propriety.

UPDATES TO THE NOXIOUS WEEDS LIST

Secretary Voyles called on Commissioner Joseph Guthrie to provide VDACS' update to the Noxious Weeds List.

Commissioner Guthrie called on David Gianino, Plant Industry Services Program Manager for VDACS, to update the Working Group.

Mr. Gianino provided an overview of the process used by VDACS to update and maintain the Noxious Weeds List:

- The Noxious Weeds List was established through the Noxious Weeds Law.
- Board of Agriculture serves as a policy board which can pass regulations for noxious weeds.
- VDACS and the Board of Agriculture works with an advisory committee, comprised of sixteen unique stakeholders throughout Virginia.
 - The sixteen stakeholders are a combination of state agencies, universities, and other non-governmental organizations such as Blue Ridge PRISM and the Virginia Native Plant Society.
- Constituents or members of the committee can submit requests for species to be added to the Noxious Weed List, and those submissions are placed through an assessment process.
- The assessment process evaluates submitted species on twenty-three different scientific criteria including: ecological impact, seed dispersal rate, and impacts to other flora and fauna in the area.
- The advisory committee meets annually to review the assessments, selects those species which meet the criteria of a “noxious weed,” and rank the species on a tiered list.
 - Tier 1 noxious weeds are any weed that is not known to be present in the Commonwealth.
 - Tier 2 noxious weeds are any weed that is present in the Commonwealth and for which successful eradication or suppression is feasible.
 - Tier 3 noxious weeds are any weed that is present in the Commonwealth, whose spread may be slowed by restrictions on its movement, and for which successful eradication or suppression is not feasible.
- Once reviewed and ranked, the advisory council makes recommendations to the Board of Agriculture for additions to the Noxious Weeds List.

Mr. Gianino reported on the regulatory update to the Noxious Weeds List which became final and effective on July 4, 2024:

- A total of eleven species were added to the Noxious Weeds List.
- One species was added to the Tier 2 category: Two-horned trapa.
- Ten species were added to the Tier 3 category:
 - Garlic mustard
 - Chinese yams
 - Autumn olive
 - Lesser celandine
 - Bicolor lespedeza

- Amur honeysuckle
- Japanese honeysuckle
- Common reed (phragmites)
- Kudzu
- Japanese knotweed
- Siberian elm
- The advisory committee has identified seven additional assessments that they will bring to the Board of Agriculture for consideration:
 - Japanese stilt grass
 - Canadian thistle
 - Mimosa
 - Alligator weed
 - Two species of water primrose
 - Lespedeza cuneata

Mr. Gianino noted that funding appropriated to VDACS for invasive species management will be focused on control and eradication of Tier 1 and Tier 2 species. This is because Tier 1 and Tier 2 classifications are outlined in the Noxious Weeds Law as species where eradication and suppression are feasible. Tier 3 species will not receive funding because the Noxious Weeds Law lists Tier 3 species suppression as “not feasible”.

FORMATION OF THE INVASIVE PLANT COALITION

Secretary Voyles called on Mr. Rod Walker, founder of Blue Ridge Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM), to report on the formation of the Virginia Invasive Plant Coalition (VIPC).

Mr. Walker provided a background on the formation of VIPC.

- Resulted from a three-day workshop in December 2023.
- The workshop included eighty representatives from conservation organization, various industry groups, state agencies, universities, and other interested organizations.

Mr. Walker reported on what VIPC has accomplished since its formation.

- VIPC and Blue Ridge PRISM have launched a new website, virginiainvasives.org, as well as a new application which can help identify invasive species and control efforts in the field.
- VIPC has created a three-year policy strategy for actions to be taken by the General Assembly including:
 - Removing invasive species from the trade.
 - Offering cost-share incentives to landowners to act on suppressing and eradicating invasive species.
 - Providing additional funding to state agencies involved in invasive species management.

- The Virginia Conservation Network (VCN) has included a focus on invasive plants in their 2024 common agenda.
- The Department of Forestry has partnered with VIPC and Blue Ridge PRISM to focus on forming new PRISMs.
- VIPC is supporting a new organization called the Loudon Invasive Removal Alliance which is a partnership between fifty different Homeowners Associations undertaking invasive plant suppression and eradication efforts.
- Fairfax County is in the process of organizing a similar program.
- VIPC is conducting a statewide retail garden center survey to understand which retailers are selling invasive plants.
- Helping to provide updated lists of contractors for invasive species removal.
- Seeking funding for three proposals that include estimating the dollar impact of invasive plants across the state of Virginia, projecting the impact if invasive plant management efforts stay stagnant, and a drone-based study to map and treat specific invasive plants.

Mr. Walker asked the Working Group to focus on two action items:

- Implementing the Commonwealth's Invasive Species Management Plan
- Creating a pilot program that would focus on the suppression of established invasive plants.
 - This program would consist of one highly visible species in a specific county.
 - The focus would be to eradicate the species from that county to provide proof of concept for its eradication or suppression.

UPDATES TO THE INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT PLAN

Secretary Voyles called on Mr. Kevin Heffernan to provide an overview of the updates to the Invasive Species Management Plan (Management Plan).

Mr. Heffernan presented the proposed changes to the Management Plan for the Working Group's consideration. The entire Management Plan, with changes, can be viewed by referring to Attachment A.

Mr. Heffernan provided a background on the Management Plan:

- The Management Plan is a blueprint for state agencies and the Virginia Invasive Species Advisory Committee (VISAC) to use when updating goals, strategies, and actions to address invasive species.
- The VISAC is comprised of state agencies, non-governmental organizations, federal partners, and other stakeholders.
- The VISAC met in September 2024 to revise the Management Plan.

Mr. Heffernan presented the proposed updates to the Management Plan.

- Updating language to clarify who would be responsible for completing the goals and actions.
 - While the Working Group is the decision-making body, the ISAC will be completing a majority of the work required in the Management Plan.
- Creating a requirement for state agencies to provide an annual report, including benchmarks and outcomes, regarding invasive species management.

- Creating a central repository for educational and marketing materials for the VISAC and its members to utilize.
- Creating an early response plan for new invasive species that have limited range within the state or the potential to spread into the state.
- Creating an implementation table for agencies to ensure the actions of the Management Plan are implemented in a timely manner.
- Updating the table of assignments to ensure all agency names are correct and providing assignments that correlate with the organisms each agency historically works with.
- Updating all flow charts to be more aesthetically pleasing.
- Expanding the language within the Management Plan to create more actionable items.
- Adding new language in the following goals, strategies, and actions:
 - Goal 4, Strategy 4.2: VISAC will coordinate available funds or funding sources for rapid response implementation and assess needs for more funding authority.
 - Action 4.2.1: State agencies with rapid response funding will coordinate deployment of funds to support priority response actions.
 - Goal 4, Strategy 4.5: VISAC will facilitate media coverage and reporting of rapid-response actions.
 - Action 4.5.1: Prepare and provide press kits and expert contacts for stories and interviews.
 - Action 4.5.2: VISAC will coordinate social media posts on priority response events.

Director Wells asked how the annual reports will be completed by each agency and what is expected to go into these reports.

Mr. Heffernan responded that the reports will be comprised of a brief overview of the initiatives that each agency is completing on an annual basis. He does not expect the reports to be lengthy, rather they should highlight the big picture for the agencies. The reports would then be used as a communication tool for the General Assembly, the administration, and the public.

Director Wells asked Mr. Heffernan to re-phrase Goal 4, Strategy 4.2 to read: VISAC will *assist in coordinating* available funds or funding sources for rapid response implementation and assess needs for more funding authority. He stated that VIAC does not have the authority to appropriate funds and the phrasing needs to reflect that.

Secretary Voyles agreed with Director Wells' rephrasing and asked Mr. Heffernan to update accordingly.

Mr. Hurley pointed out that DCR was not included in the table of assignments and that he feels DCR needs funding and support for their Natural Heritage program.

Mr. Heffernan stated that he agrees that dedicated funding for invasive species control, particularly funding to do a cost-share program with neighbors of Natural Area Preserves, would be beneficial to the agency in preventing a reoccurrence of invasive species in the Natural Area Preserves.

Mr. Hurley stated that Blue Ridge PRISM is looking for a state agency to take on similar cost-share programs and would like to have the conversation with conservation districts housed within DCR.

Director Wells shared that DCR would be happy to have that conversation.

Commissioner Guthrie added that when working with landowners, a valuable resource for outreach is through the Virginia Cooperative Extension. They are currently working on their long-term plan, so it may be advantageous for agencies to coordinate with them to have invasive species management included in their plans.

With no further questions on the Management Plan, Secretary Voyles called for a motion to approve the Management Plan as presented with the changes as discussed.

Director Wells motioned; Commissioner Jamie Green seconded. The motion carried.

REPORTS AND COMMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE WORKING GROUP

Secretary Voyles called on Dr. Jacob Barney from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) to provide his update.

Dr. Barney stated that Virginia Tech's Invasive Species Collaborative has added seven new full-time, tenure tract faculty working across four different colleges.

- Two positions have been filled – one for environmental communication and policy, the other for invasive species extension.
- There are three positions currently in open recruitment – one for an economist, one to focus on global change interactions, and one for a geneticist who will focus on early detection.
- Two positions will be in recruitment next year – one for invasive plant genomics and one for modelling for prediction and forecasting.

Dr. Barney shared that the Invasive Species Collaborative at Virginia Tech also launched a new website, invasivespeciesvt.org, which houses resources on invasive species across the state. The website will also contain new fact sheets and incorporate information from state agencies.

Secretary Voyles called on Executive Director Ryan Brown to provide his update on behalf of the Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR).

Director Brown shared that DWR did not receive funding or positions for invasive species management from the General Assembly this fiscal year. However, they have received outside (mostly federal) funding to support their work. DWR continues to focus on invasive species suppression in their Wildlife Management Areas.

Secretary Voyles called on State Forester Rob Farrel to provide his update on behalf of the Department of Forestry (DOF).

Mr. Farrell called on Lori Chamberlin to provide DOF's update.

Ms. Chamberlin shared DOF's forest health update:

- A spongy moth outbreak occurred in the Shenandoah Valley this spring. DOF Forest Health staff mapped over 85,000 acres of defoliation. This is the third year of defoliation in some areas, which will probably lead to long-term tree damage, especially to Virginia's oak resource. However, signs of biological control were also observed, which may reduce spongy moth populations next year. DOF is discussing suppression treatments in priority areas for next spring.
- DOF Forest Health staff continue to survey the state for emerging tree diseases such as Laurel Wilt Disease and Beech Leaf Disease. Laurel Wilt Disease has only been detected in Scott County and Beech Leaf Disease has been confirmed in 6 counties (Clarke and New Kent were just confirmed this year).

- In 2024, DOF hosted the first Virginia Callery Pear Exchange. This outreach campaign was designed to educate the public about invasive species and the benefits of planting native tree species.

Secretary Voyles called on Director Matthew Wells to provide his update on behalf of the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR).

Director Wells shared that DCR highlighted native plants at the state fair. Along with the highlight of native plants, DCR provided education on several invasive species such as the Spotted Lantern Fly.

Secretary Voyles called on the representative from the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) to provide the agency's update.

Ms. Julia Murphy, State Public Health Veterinarian, shared that VDH has not been actively involved in invasive species management. In the past, VDH would assist with feral swine. VDH is interested in joining the VISAC and would like to focus on freshwater algae. Ms. Murphy added that she will coordinate with VDH to see how they can be involved.

Secretary Voyles called on Commissioner Joseph Guthrie to provide his update on behalf of the Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (VDACS).

Commissioner Guthrie reported that VDACS has focused on suppression of fire ants in southeast Virginia. Additionally, VDACS is taking action to combat a new hybrid, black fire ant, which is present in Lee County.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Hurley expressed gratitude to DOF for their assistance in removing mulberry from production.

NEXT MEETING

Secretary Voyles stated that DCR staff will schedule the next meeting of the Working Group and will communicate the details with the members as they become available.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 12:36 PM.