Pam Meachem

Aquatic Nuisance Species Issues in Washington State

Biography

Pam Meachem was born and raised in the state of Washington. She received a bachelor's degree in Marine Science and a Masters in Environmental Studies from The Evergreen State College in Olympia. She is currently the Assistant Aquatic Nuisance Species Coordinator for the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, a position she has occupied for two years.

Presentation Abstract

Nonnative species are introduced into the marine, freshwater or terrestrial environment, either intentionally or unintentionally, each year. Most intentional introductions are of species, such as food fish, shellfish, which are ecologically or economically valuable. Other species are imported as pets or nursery plants, and many of them are unable to form self-sustaining populations if introduced into the natural environment. However, some species become established and thrive. These species may out-compete, prey upon or infect economically and ecologically valuable species with diseases or parasites.

A variety of nonnative aquatic nuisance species have become established in Washington through both intentional and unintentional releases. Examples marine species include cordgrasses, Japanese eelgrass, oyster drill, varnish or dark mahogany clam, and the European Green crab. Freshwater species include New Zealand mud snail, Asian clam (*corbicula*), parrot feather milfoil, Eurasian milfoil, purple loosestrife and reed canary grass. Other species like mitten crab, zebra mussel, various water fleas and aquatic plants like giant salvinia are rapidly spreading throughout the country and pose a threat to Washington.

Invasive species are the number two cause of extirpation of species in North American; it is estimated they are responsible for 40 % of endangered species. Even the smallest organisms can tip the ecological scales of a seemingly vast natural system and impose heavy economic costs that, ultimately, are borne by consumers and taxpayers. The economic impacts of invasive species in the U.S. have been estimated at $122 billion a year. Unlike chemical pollution, biological pollution reproduces. If nothing is done the problem grows exponentially – as do the costs of management and control. This is one arena in which an ounce of prevention is worth a ton of cure.