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Invasive Species: How They Get Here

This is the second article in a series by Grant Sork, Natural Resource Conservation Service

Invasive species are a pressing environmental and economic threat. To become invasive a species must: arrive, survive, and thrive.

Sometimes non-native species are introduced intentionally to provide benefits to ecosystems and society, but then expand beyond the original purpose. Examples of intentional introductions include:

- habitat restoration activities
- authorized fish stocking
- biological control of pests

Unintentional introductions often pose a more serious problem. The ways invading species are unintentionally introduced and spread include:

1. Imported goods packed in wood containers. The wood may contain insects and plant diseases harmful to trees in the U.S. This is probably the way that the Asian Long-horned Beetle (ALB) and the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) entered the U.S.
2. Foreign ships may release ballast water that has been carried to keep the ship at the maximum performance and safety level. A large ship may release millions of gallons of water along with species of plant and animal life not native to that port. Scientists estimate that 65% of the aquatic invasive species present in the Great Lakes – including the zebra mussel, round goby and the spiny water flea – have been brought in by ocean-vessels.
3. Some people smuggle items prohibited by U.S. laws and regulations. Smuggling of fruit has caused many outbreaks of the Mediterranean Fruit Fly. The smuggling of illegal species into the United States has increased in recent years by the use of the internet to help with these illegal actions.

The best way to limit impacts of non-native species is to prevent them from invading and becoming established in a new area.

In the next installment we will look at possible ways to prevent the spread of Invasive Species.

Further information:

An expanded list of how invasives arrive: http://www.epa.gov/owow/invasive_species/pathways.html

Ecological Society of America published a 4 page brochure about invasives:

<http://www.esa.org/education/edupdfs/invasion.pdf>

Weeds Gone Wild is a website full of information on invasive plants: <http://www.nps.gov/plants/ALIEN/index.htm>