



# Information Crossfile

## THE COSTS OF INVASION

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Resource managers face the difficult task of picking and choosing which ecological problems, among many, they can actively address. In a crisis-laden field, how can we prioritize resource needs? Where do invasive species rate among the myriad threats facing the National Park System? Two frequently cited articles provide justification for moving invasive species management near the top of the list. A 1998 study of threatened and endangered species in the United States found that alien species are second only to habitat destruction and degradation as a threat to imperiled species (Wilcove et al. 1998). The authors quantify threats to imperiled species in the United States. In summation, exotics affected 57% of plant species and 39% of animal species analyzed overall, and the figures jump to nearly 100% when considering only Hawaiian species. Investigators also found that invasive species affect aquatic systems in the West in particular.

In addition, Pimental and others (2000) tally the economic costs of biotic invasions at approximately \$137 billion annually in the United States alone. In the article “Environmental and Economic Costs of Nonindigenous Species in the United States,” the authors combine the losses and damages caused by alien invasive species with the costs of control for exotic plants, vertebrates, invertebrates, and microbes to obtain a rough estimate of the total cost. Often no data concerning the costs of an invasion were available; therefore, the true cost of invasive species almost certainly is underestimated in this study. However, information from these two studies shows that allocating funds to invasive species management projects has both high economic and ecological value. —R. Harms, graduate student, College of Environmental Science and Education, Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff.

### References

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