

EXOTIC PLANTS AND RESTORATION

The differing impacts of exotics can be confusing because exotic species pose both problems and solutions. For example, exotic species can colonize disturbed lands and alter sites targeted for restoration. On the other hand, exotic species can catalyze the restoration process and be used to reestablish site functions if native species are not available or cannot tolerate current conditions. Because of this ambiguity, researchers and practitioners should look to both the scientific literature and previous restoration projects when determining the best approach for restoring a particular site.

Before beginning a restoration project, managers should identify likely plant invaders and devise strategies to minimize their impacts. The method of removing exotics also should be considered carefully because sensitive species may affect what managers can and cannot do at a site. In addition, some sites will require continuous maintenance, so long-term management costs should be evaluated. Moreover, various exotic species continue to affect sites after their removal; the reversibility of these conditions and the impacts on restoration warrant further study. In some cases, intermediate plantings of species assemblages may be needed to move the site toward con-

ditions that support the desired flora. These intermediate assemblages may need to include certain exotic species if native species cannot survive the current conditions at the

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restoration site. These exotics should be selected with an emphasis on their inability to persist in the system after they have served their primary function in the restoration process. Projects also should include long-term monitoring to determine whether management goals are being achieved.

Managers must be broad-thinking about exotic plants as both friend and foe. Nevertheless, when considering possible responses to their planned activities, resource managers must be prepared to react quickly to surprises from ambiguous exotic plants. —R. Harms

Reference

D'Antonio, C., and L. A. Meyerson. 2002. Exotic plant species as problems and solutions in ecological restoration: a synthesis. *Restoration Ecology* 10(4):703–713.