

# Invasive Plants: Addressing a Critical Concern

## HB979/SB915 “Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act”

### What are Invasive Plant Species?

Terrestrial or aquatic plants, introduced intentionally or accidentally, that cause damage to biodiversity by outcompeting and directly harming native plants, animals, and ecosystems.

### Why are Invasives a Problem?

- Invasives can monopolize natural resources by outcompeting our native plants, put toxins into the soil to suppress or kill native plants, smother and girdle trunks with vines like English ivy, alter hydrology and increase fire frequency.
- In many cases, these plants also directly or indirectly harm humans by providing habitat that increases the spread of diseases like Lyme and even contributing to wildfires.
- Invasive plants rob our native wildlife, including necessary pollinators, of the food and shelter necessary for survival.
- Invasive plant species are one of the major drivers of biodiversity loss, thereby altering Maryland’s ecosystems and threatening human welfare. About 42% of American species on the “Threatened or Endangered” species lists are at risk primarily because of alien-invasive species.<sup>1</sup>



English ivy strangling trees



### And this costs everyone a LOT of money and effort!

- Invasive species were estimated to cost Americans \$137 billion annually in 2000,<sup>2</sup> which is approximately \$239 billion in today’s dollars.
- Invasive plants reduce U.S. crop yields 12%,<sup>3</sup> despite \$6.6 billion spent on herbicides each year.<sup>4</sup> Over ¾ of crop weeds are invasives,<sup>5</sup> and 95% of corn and soybeans are grown with herbicides.<sup>6</sup>
- Controlling only a few of our invasives requires incalculable labor hours for property owners, local government employees, and thousands of trained volunteers across the state.

Courtesy of Montgomery Parks, M-NCPPC

- Management of invasives frequently requires the use of costly and harmful pesticides that impact our drinking water, watersheds, and ecosystems, and that expose us to dangerous toxins.
- ***No cost estimate on biodiversity loss is possible; it’s priceless.***

<sup>1</sup> David Pimentel, Lori Lach, Rodolfo Zuniga, Doug Morrison, Environmental and Economic Costs of Nonindigenous Species in the United States, *BioScience*, Volume 50, Issue 1, January 2000, Pages 53–65

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p.53

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p.58

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.farmprogress.com/farm-business/herbicides-save-farmers-21-billion>

<sup>5</sup> Pimental, Zuniga, Morrison, 2000, p.58

<sup>6</sup> ERS.USDA.GOV, Charts of Note, May 2, 2016.



## **Invasive Plants: Biodiversity and Agriculture Protection Act**

**HB979/SB915 Sponsors: Delegate Linda Foley and Senator Ben Brooks**

***Maryland has almost 300 known invasive plant species in our state per the Maryland Invasive Species Council.***

### **Maryland Invasive Plant Legislation History**

- In 2011, Maryland enacted its first law regulating commercially sold terrestrial invasive plants. This legislation established a two-tier system, with some plants being prohibited (Tier 1) and others requiring warning signage at point of sale (Tier 2).
- In 2022, additional legislation was enacted requiring the assessment of over 60 plants listed in the guide *Plant Invaders of the Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas*. However, no plants have been assessed since 2019 due to lack of staffing.
- **In the 12 years since the original legislation was enacted only 6 plants have been prohibited** and listed under Tier 1, and 13 listed under Tier 2, despite the growing impact on Maryland ecosystems and biodiversity, park land, private property, and agriculture.

### **Goals of 2024 Legislation**

- Prohibit harmful invasive plants from being propagated, purchased, or sold in Maryland.
- Include aquatic invaders that are impacting our waterways and the Chesapeake Bay in the assessment process and plants previously considered non-commercial that are increasingly being sold online.
- Adopt a professionally recognized status assessment protocol that is more rapid to replace the current approach used in Maryland. The state must address invasive plants more quickly to minimize eradication/management costs later.
- Move Tier 2 plants, which are often more established and equally as harmful as Tier 1 prohibited species, into a single Prohibited List, with a reasonable transition period to minimize impact to the trade. The current assessment process does not keep nurseries from selling plants that have been here at least 50 years or have become widely established, effectively giving up on destructive species, like running bamboo.
- Provide MDA with staff for regular assessment and inspection of invasive plants so our state can respond appropriately to known ecological threats on land and water.