

3.C Exacerbating Circumstances

Factors such as lack of communication, legal loopholes and shortfalls, and unique geographical conditions complicate Louisiana's aquatic invasive species problems. These and other exacerbating circumstances are documented here.

Lack of Communication and/or Cooperation Among State Agencies — Task Force members recognize the lack of a single “point person” or agency for the public to contact with questions about invasive species. In addition, overlapping or unclear jurisdictions can create “turf wars” between state agencies, sometimes resulting in legal battles.

Lack of Education, Knowledge, and Concern or Ignorance of Existing Laws — This major problem is described by examples offered by Task Force members:

- “The vast majority of the boating and fishing public appear to be ignorant of the problem with invasive exotic species. Therefore, they do not exercise relatively easy measures to prevent the spread of these exotics.”
- “Many of those involved with the aquarium, landscaping, and garden pond hobbies do not appear to recognize the problems with invasive species. This includes both consumers and merchants. For example, I have witnessed at least two Baton Rouge area nurseries that specialize in native plants. One of these nurseries was selling Chinese tallow trees, and the other was selling parrot feather.”
- “Previous education efforts by USDA have not made enough of an impact, so international travelers continue to carry prohibited articles, which harbor exotic pests.”
- “This [invasive species issue] is still a ‘back burner’ issue for most of the general public and many people in related and affected industries.”
- “The public is generally aware of the negative impact of some invasives (i.e., Formosan termites, fire ants, hydrilla) but is not aware of how their actions could lead to the next problem.”

Lack of Laws or Enforcement of Existing Laws — Gaps and loopholes in existing laws weaken their effectiveness. For example, Louisiana maintains a list of 16 noxious plant species, including water hyacinth, hydrilla, all plants in the genus *Salvinia*, purple loosestrife, and Eurasian watermilfoil. Although the law states that “no person shall ... import or cause to be transported [into Louisiana], from any other state or country, without first obtaining a written permit from the commission, any of [these 16] noxious aquatic plants ... ,”¹ the law does not state that the plants cannot be sold commercially or privately once they are already in Louisiana. Another common problem is the lack of enforcement of laws governing the aquarium trade and sale of aquatic plants.

Lack of Funding — Funds shortfalls for education, prevention, and control projects also exacerbate Louisiana's invasive species problem. One Task Force member observed that “government funding for invasive species detection has been spotty, with high-profile species and certain geographical areas (e.g., exotic fruit flies in Florida and California) receiving the lion's share, while smaller states desiring to survey for lower-profile species receive minimal dollars, if any.”

Louisiana's Unique Geography and Subtropical Climate — Louisiana's rich soils and extensive waterways provide few barriers to the diffusion of species. Its wide salinity range offers habitat for a great variety of species. The wet, subtropical climate and long growing season allow numerous species to become established and proliferate. Tropical storms and hurricanes serve as natural dispersion mechanisms for invasive species, especially aquatic plants. Storms can also disturb habitats, making them more vulnerable to an invader. Winds and floodwaters, during the June 1-through-November 30 tropical storm season or at other times in the year, can transport seeds and plant fragments to new areas, potentially over long distances.

Other exacerbating circumstances and concerns raised by the Task Force members include:

¹ *Louisiana Revised Statutes* §328, Subsection B.

Competing Interests — Control of pests may require herbicides or pesticides, host removal, trapping, animal depopulation, etc., some of which are opposed by special interest groups.

Limited Detection Technology — Detecting the presence or absence of invasive species in an area usually relies on costly and time-consuming field surveys. Technologies to sense their presence remotely on a broader scale are available, but fail to consistently and directly detect target species in a variety of environments. For certain invasive plants (kudzu, water hyacinth, weed infestations in agricultural areas), multispectral and hyperspectral aerial and satellite imagery have proven useful in detection. Aerial surveys have been used to map marshland eat-outs to provide information on nutria distributions, and handheld thermal imagers have been used to find Formosan termite infestations inside structures. These approaches are mostly still in testing phases and have not been deployed operationally. Accurate and timely detection and mapping of invasive species remains a challenge.

Freshwater Diversions — Although freshwater diversions are critical to wetland restoration, they may create new habitat for invasives by freshening currently saline areas with Mississippi River water.

Lack of Data — Information on invasive species in Louisiana is difficult to find on the Internet, in scientific journals, and other sources, in large part because the research has not yet been done.

Fines Viewed as “Cost of Doing Business” — Economic gains in the smuggling and sale of species often outweigh monetary fines imposed by governments trying to prevent species introductions. Smugglers have little incentive to follow import regulations, and commercial smuggling of prohibited products in maritime containers is occurring more frequently. Some traders in invasive species view fines simply as a cost of doing business. USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) recently increased civil penalties for such violations from a maximum penalty of \$1,000 to \$50,000 per violation and \$250,000 for a business.

Globalized Economy — International trade continues to expand in terms of both volume and markets, and technological advances in transportation help facilitate species introductions. Globalization of the economy has, to date, led to extensive spread of species worldwide.

Uncoordinated Detection Efforts — Currently, each state and federal agency determines on its own which pests to survey, with only minimal input from other government agencies and stakeholders. In Louisiana, the “passive survey” (in which academic researchers or others notify agencies of new organisms) is the norm.

Task Force members also noted a need for more effective monitoring, an early detection and rapid response plan, and better decision-making processes.