

Why we need a National Center for Biological Invasions

The current federal and state effort that deals with invasive species is largely a patchwork of laws, policies, and programs. There are eight specific federal initiatives along with approximately 176 federal agencies/institutions with authority, divisions, and/or programs pertaining to invasive species. At the state level, there are more than 500 state agencies/ institutions, CISMAs and CWMAs, and organizations with regulatory authority or interest in the prevention, research, and management of invasive species. There are eight Regional Centers and/or Institutes that provide online information regarding the management of invasive species. Online invasive species data bases number more than 250 worldwide.

Because of this multi-jurisdictional governmental and university response, several extensive studies have documented specific problems such as insufficient interaction between scientists, policy-makers, and resource and agricultural managers, little framework for rapid responses to new invasions, ineffective use of existing information, too many jurisdictional disputes and turf issues, and few direct means to reach the public about biological invasions. To address these issues, a Presidential Executive Order established the National Invasive Species Council in 1999 along with the release of the nation's first National Invasive Species Management plan in 2001. However, the council lacks the infrastructure, support, resources, and mechanisms to implement the plan and to help coordinate the thousands of prevention, management, outreach and education, and research programs that now exist nationwide.

The establishment of a National Center for Biological Invasions, loosely modeled after the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) or the National Interagency Fire Center, is proposed to provide leadership and oversight on multi-jurisdictional invasive species issues and to help coordinate federal, state, tribal, and local agency activities along with gathering invasive species information. This center is not proposed to replace existing legislatively mandated efforts at the federal and state levels, but rather to enhance them by providing a service to existing prevention, research, outreach and education, and management efforts throughout the United States.

A new National Center for Biological Invasions could serve several needed functions. The center could enhance management efforts by coordinating surveillance activities, coordinate the early detection of and rapid response to new invaders, track invasive species range expansions owing to global climate change, maintain a taxonomic expertise database, develop national standards and guidelines, coordinate and help broker cooperative agreements between agencies, enhance information exchange among scientists, government agencies, and private landowners through a comprehensive website and the merging of existing databases, track invasive species expenditures, especially at the state level, help produce economic impact studies, help integrate university-based research to optimize management and prevention programs, and the center could use diverse communication methods for wider and more effective delivery of public education about biological invasions.