Stopping Invading Species at the Gate

Why Was the Council Created?
The Washington Invasive Species Council was established by the Legislature in 2006 to improve coordination among state agencies so the state could be more strategic overall in how invasive species are addressed in Washington. The council helps ensure that the investments the state makes today are the right investments, are effective, and will prevent Washington from paying a steep price in the future.

Invading species are able to out-compete and overwhelm local species, disrupting entire ecosystems.

Economic Cost
The economic consequences of invasive species can be devastating.

In Washington:
- The Puget Sound Partnership rates invasive species as a high threat to the recovery of Puget Sound.
- The invasion of Spartina in coastal estuaries jeopardized the state’s $77 million annual sales in shellfish, and an industry that provides thousands of jobs.
- An infestation of spotted fruit fly—a species that attacks unripened fruit still on the vine—in eastern Washington is growing. This threatens the billion dollar fruit industry.

- The Northwest Power and Conservation Council’s Independent Economic Advisory Board estimates the cost of dealing with an invasion of zebra and quagga mussels in the Columbia River basin would be in the hundreds of millions of dollars annually.
- State agencies and universities currently spend more than $25 million a biennium on invasive species control.

Origin of Infestations
Invasive species arrive in Washington in numerous ways. They are spread easily by wind, water, animals, people, equipment, and imported goods. For example, they can be garden plants gone wild, aquatic plants and animals that hitchhike on ships and boats, insects that arrive on imported fruit, or pets that are released into the wild by their owners.
In 2008, the council developed its first 20-year strategic plan, which contains 22 recommendations. Using a federal grant, the council has begun implementing the following actions that focus on prevention and quick, early responses to new infestations:

### Identifying Priorities
The council developed a tool to prioritize which of the more than 700 invasive species in and near Washington should be addressed first. The council identified 50 species from six categories – aquatic plants, terrestrial plants, aquatic animals, terrestrial animals, insects, and diseases of plants and wildlife. Other agencies and states are using the tool today.

### Baseline Assessment
State agencies lack a comprehensive understanding of the status and trends of invasive species in Washington. To strategically use limited resources, the council evaluated existing data, most of which was scattered among agencies, to complete a baseline assessment of priority invasive species in the Puget Sound area. The baseline provides information on where species are, how quickly they are spreading, how they arrived, what they are damaging, and what programs are in place to address them. The assessment is being used to identify gaps in data and programs and guide policy recommendations to improve prevention, detection, and rapid response strategies. A second baseline assessment project, to address additional priority invasive species, is nearly complete.

### Focus on Prevention
To prevent the introduction of new species, the council is working on several fronts: with educators in the classroom, a Web site designed for the public (wise.wa.gov), advocacy for stricter boat inspection efforts, guidelines in the State Environmental Policy Act and salmon recovery efforts, and much more.

### Public Education
Education of the public is one of the most cost-effective ways to protect Washington from invasive species. The council developed an outreach plan, a reporting hotline and smartphone app, educational materials, and a council Web site (InvasiveSpecies.wa.gov) to help inform the public about invasive species.

### Improved Coordination
The council continues to be a forum for facilitating communication, accessibility of tools, and coordination of approaches across organizations. Member agencies now are using common messages when talking about invasive species, using the same education materials, prioritizing species the same way, and collaborating in response to citizen reporting via the council’s new hotline.

### Early Detection
The council is working to expand capacity for early detection of invasive species. Working with the Puget Sound Partnership, the council has identified existing monitoring efforts that can and are willing to incorporate invasive species detection.