

Management of Invasive Species

I'd like to talk to you about our audit of the **Management of Invasive Species**.

Invasive species are non-native plants, animals or micro-organisms:

- that have been introduced to new environments from other regions or ecosystems; and,
- that cause significant harm to the local environment, economy and/or society, including human health.

The *Invasive Species Act* regulates invasive species prevention and management, and prohibits or restricts the possession, transfer, sale, release and propagation of listed invasive species.

The 2012 Ontario Invasive Species Strategic Plan aims to:

- prevent new invasive species from arriving and surviving in Ontario;
- slow or reverse the spread of existing invasive species; and
- reduce the harmful impacts of existing invasive species.

Our audit assessed whether the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, and the work of the Invasive Species Centre, have detected, reduced the spread and prevented introductions of harmful invasive species.

We found that the Ministry does not have sufficient information about potentially harmful invasive species for decision-making, and lacks sufficient financial and human resources to stop their introduction and spread.

The Ministry has not regulated some invasive species or pathways that threaten Ontario's environment, and does not assess and regulate threats in a timely manner.

High-risk invasive species were identified by the Ministry but left unregulated for years.

The regulated list of invasive species under the *Invasive Species Act* was only updated once in 2022.

Conservation Officers are responsible for administering the *Invasive Species Act* but are not well trained to do so.

Many officers have not been trained to identify regulated invasive species. These officers have issued only 11 warnings, zero warrants, and laid no charges.

Our audit also noted that the Ministry is not collaborating effectively with federal partners. Failure to do so pushes the costs and impacts of invasive species to land managers.

Our audit confirmed that the Invasive Species Centre is using funds received from the Province for their intended purposes.

According to a survey by the Invasive Species Centre, 91% of Ontario municipalities report having insufficient resources to respond to invasive species.

This report contains 12 recommendations, including that the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry:

- develop a plan that includes specific action items, responsible parties, required human and financial resources, outcome measures and implementation timelines;
- establish a timely and consistent schedule for regulatory updates to the list of regulated invasive species.
- where no suitable data exists, develop and implement programs to detect and monitor potentially harmful invasive species; and,
- assess and ensure the sufficiency of enforcement resources, including training requirements, the availability of specialist support and the number of field conservation officers.

To read this report, you can visit our website at www.auditor.on.ca