

Tool 2: UVA Invasive Plant Assessment Methods

For years foresters have been gathering information on all types of vegetation while doing inventories for forest management plans (FMPs). Some foresters now include invasive plant information in their plans, especially those who work in heavily infested areas. If we want to keep invasive plants at bay and continue to grow commercial timber to support our economy, we must begin to focus more on this issue. The first step is to identify and locate invasive plant infestations. Armed with this knowledge you can:

- Improve your FMP with infestation locations and possible next steps for control.
- Educate your clients about invasive plants.
- Begin to track the spread of invasives.
- Help motivate your clients to undertake a treatment program.
- Coordinate control with silvicultural prescriptions.
- Pass along useful information to NRCS to help your clients get WHIP funding for control projects.
- Give invasive plant control specialists a head start on their field assessment.
- Enter the information into the new state-wide iMapInvasives database to help local, regional, and state officials track the spread and impact of invasive plants.

If you are doing field work to satisfy the new Use Value Appraisal requirements for invasive plant information, filling out the new Invasive Terrestrial Plant Assessment Summary Form for NRCS found at www.vtinvasives.org (Tool #8 under Plants/Prevention and Management/Tools & Resources) or doing some other form of land management plan, you will need to gather some basic information. Whether you use NED-1, NED-2, FOREX, Two Dogs, or an information gathering program of your own devising, collecting the necessary information shouldn't be a burden.

For Use Value plans – In the stand health section of your plan you will need to enter some pretty basic information (see pages 38, 50 and 62 of the UVA Manual) on invasive plants: are there invasives, which ones, and what level of infestation is present (light, moderate, heavy)?

While at your points:

- Record which invasive species you see
- Try to estimate the level of infestation (light, moderate, and heavy). If the stand is free of invasive plants, make sure to note that in the plan so the County Forester knows you looked.

2010 UVA Manual – Page 38 - Section I(13)(i) – Forest Health Conditions – Include insect, tree disease, browsing, abiotic or invasive exotic plant problems within the stand which may affect the silvicultural treatment recommended within the 10-year management period. Invasive plants should be listed by species and categorized as light, moderate, or heavy infestations.

Since you are only going to be taking one point for every 2-5 acres, if you only gathered invasives information at those points, you would miss much of the story. Gathering info as you walk your cruise lines is equally, if not more important.

When walking between points

- Observe the invasives occurrences and keep in mind the same things you noted at your point. Also keep an eye out for any new species and note how the plants are distributed across the landscape. Are there

single plants or clumps, or scattered plants or clumps, or is it a bit more advanced and there are scattered dense patches? Are they linearly scattered along a road or trail, wetland, or field edge? Or, is it really serious and the invasives are the dominant cover or perhaps even a monoculture? When you get back to the office and are working out your stand data, it should be simple to refer to your notes and begin to piece together a comprehensive picture of where on the property you do or do not have an invasive plant problem.

When putting together your UVA management plan, there is more information about the invasive plant occurrences that you could include to enhance the plan's usefulness. Adding invasive plant infestation data to your FMP will alert your clients to the problem and begin to educate them about the plants and how to control them.

- To provide clients with more information about invasive plants refer them to www.vtinvasives.org. The Gallery of Invaders and Prevention and Management sections are particularly helpful. You can also download fact sheets or other resources and information and insert that into your FMP.
- Include information in your FMP on how to prevent the spread of invasive plants. You can find this under *Best Management Practices for the Prevention and Treatment of Terrestrial Invasive Plants in Vermont Woodlands* on the www.vtinvasives.org website.
- Add information on what next steps you recommend. If you are uncomfortable making specific recommendations, you could simply suggest they contact an invasives control expert. Other suggestions could include taking a training on identifying invasive plants, doing a more in-depth invasive plant assessment, conducting an annual survey of the property to check on infested sites and see if there are any new problem areas, treating any small or isolated infestations (Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) candidates), entering information into iMap and updating it regularly (after annual monitoring), or consulting and following the invasive plant BMPs. *Examples of some invasive plant BMPs include:*
 - Conduct invasive control treatments before you do a timber harvest (BMP 17);
 - Check the source of any materials being imported to the site, especially gravel, and mulch, to be sure they will not bring invasives onto the property (BMP 22);
 - Whenever possible, use native seed mixes to stabilizing roads, skid trails, and landings (BMP 12);
 - Minimize soil disturbance and scarification, as it makes an ideal invasive plant seed bed (BMP 19);
 - Clean all equipment before moving it onto or off of the property (BMP 20).

Cost-share Funding - The best sources for cost-share funding are the EQIP and WHIP programs administered by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS). You can easily enhance the information you gathered for a UVA plan to make it useful to NRCS folks and any control experts who might be involved. All you need to do is record the size and maturity of the plants. Another tidbit that can help is noting anything unusual about the site such as, is it very steep, is it a wetland, or are there rare plants of natural communities in the area?

iMapInvasives - If you have the time, it would be REALLY helpful to have your information on invasive plant infestations entered into iMapInvasives. There are essentially two levels of information you can collect and enter: *observation* and *assessment*. You need to gather a bit more information for this and then go through just a few easy steps to enter information for each species in iMap. To learn more about how to do this, click the Report it! button on www.vtinvasives.org.