

Forest Management for Wildlife Habitat: **Invasive Species Management**

An *invasive species* is a non-native organism that has a damaging effect on an ecosystem. Invasive species tend to spread or reproduce aggressively and outcompete or feed on native species. They often have no natural predators and are difficult to control. Some invasive species were introduced to Maryland on purpose, including certain landscaping plants; many were introduced by accident, such as hitchhiking insects. This informational sheet will focus on how invasive species impact wildlife habitat and how forest management can help lessen the negative effects.

Impacts on Wildlife

Suitable habitat supports wildlife by providing food, water, shelter, and space. Invasive species affect wildlife by altering habitat conditions. For example:

- * The invasive shrubs like **multiflora rose** or **wineberry** grow in dense, spiny mats in the understory. This can make it difficult for wildlife to move through the forest and find shelter.
- * The invasive **callery pear** can outcompete native trees in a forest. As native species are pushed out, the food web changes. This can cause a chain reaction of displacement across the ecosystem.
- * Similarly, the invasive **Japanese stiltgrass** pushes out native species on the forest floor. Stiltgrass is an aggressive plant that spreads rapidly; its seeds can stay dormant in the soil for up to five years.
- * In large numbers, invasive **spongy moth** caterpillars are capable of *defoliating* a tree by eating all of its leaves. Spongy moth caterpillars tend to favor oaks. Hundreds of native pollinator species depend on oaks; they may not compete well for the shared food source against an invasive moth with no natural predators.



Multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*)



Callery pear (*Pyrus calleryana*)

The Role of Forest Management

Choosing the right [control method](#) depends on the invasive species present and the scope of invasion. Careful use of forest management practices may help reduce the spread of certain invasive species.

- * Prescribed fire can help control invasive species that are not as fire-adapted as our native plants. As long as the native vegetation is able to regrow quickly after fire, this can be an effective tool.
- * Cutting invasive trees before they produce seeds can help in slowing their spread. However, many invasive tree species are able to sprout from a stump or even roots. Herbicides are key to preventing sprouting.

Prevention is one of the easiest and most important ways to help slow the spread of invasive species: e.g. clean gear like boots and tires before leaving an invaded site, opt against non-native species in landscaping, and avoid transporting firewood.



Japanese stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*)



Female (top left) and male (bottom right) spongy moths (*Lymantria dispar dispar*)



Forest Pests

To learn more about the invasive plants and insects impacting Maryland's forests and natural areas, visit our Forest Pests page.

<https://dnr.maryland.gov/forests/pages/programapps/pests.aspx>



Forest Management for Wildlife Habitat

To learn more about how forest management can benefit wildlife habitat, refer to the Links & Resources tab on our home page.

<https://dnr.maryland.gov/forests/Pages/default.aspx>