

Weeds

Plant pests



Any plant that grows where it is not wanted is a weed. In conservation terms, environmental weeds are plants that significantly and adversely affect the long-term survival of native species, or the integrity or sustainability of natural communities or ecosystems.

New Zealand has become home to around 25 000 introduced plants, compared to around 2,300 indigenous plants (not including plants like moss, lichen or algae). About 2,500 of these introduced species have naturalised in the wild, many of these invading native plant communities.

DOC targets invasive weed species, which threaten important ecosystems and the survival of native plant and animal species. Below are some examples.



Russell lupins – beautiful but deadly

Many postcards of Aoraki/Mt Cook feature multi-coloured Russell lupins in the foreground. Some people like them so much that they spread the seeds around. So, if lupins are considered beautiful, why don't we want them in our natural landscapes? Because Russell lupins negatively impact on the habitat of threatened braided riverbed birds such as wrybill/ngutu parore, black stilt/ kakī and banded dotterel/ tūturiwhatu. Dense stands of Russell lupin in braided riverbeds stabilise gravels, forming fast-flowing river channels that are unsuitable for wading birds to feed in. The dense vegetation stands also take over the open gravel habitat that these birds require for nesting.



Russell lupins - S. Timmins



Didymo – a threat to our waterways

Didymo is an introduced freshwater alga threatening the health of our waterways.

It can be spread from a single drop of water on wet clothing or equipment that is moved between waterways. In rivers it can bloom, forming thick mats that blanket riverbeds. These blooms can smother the habitats and reduce the food supply for freshwater animals and plants.

They can also spoil the enjoyment of waterways for users such as anglers and kayakers. Didymo can cause potential problems for hydro power stations and irrigation intakes.

Willow – the scourge of wetlands

More than 90% of New Zealand wetlands have been drained. Crack and grey willow are a scourge in most of those that remain, shading out native plant species, choking water bodies and even ‘pumping’ wetlands dry through their leaves. This leads to a loss of plant diversity, a lack of open waterways and the drying of wetlands that affects the birds, fish and insects that rely on them. Getting rid of willows is slow, difficult and expensive work.

How do weeds invade native plant communities?

- Vines, like honeysuckle and old man’s beard, smother forest canopies, eventually causing them to collapse.
- Weeds, like wild ginger and climbing asparagus, blanket the ground, preventing native plants from growing.
- Shade-tolerant species, like Darwin’s barberry and evergreen buckthorn, replace native forest under-storey plants.
- Wind-blown pine tree seeds can transform native tussock grassland and shrubland into pine forest and alter the landscape dramatically.
- Weeds, like pampas grass, hakea and boneseed, invade disturbed or burnt ground, stopping slower-growing native plants from growing back.
- Water weeds, like hornwort and alligator weed, form a floating mass over streams and lakes, choking out other plants and altering the ecosystem to the detriment of other species.
- Algae, such as didymo, can smother riverbeds, potentially threatening the habitat and food sources of freshwater plants and animals.



Wilding pines (top) N. Peat
Old man’s beard (right)

What are DOC’s priorities in the ‘war on weeds’?

1. Border-control; working with MAF Biosecurity New Zealand to keep new weeds out of New Zealand.
2. Quick action to eliminate new weeds or those that have recently spread to a new area. As the proverb says, ‘one year seeds, seven years weeds’.
3. Targeting weeds where they threaten sites with high conservation values.
4. Helping to control weeds that threaten natural areas on private land.
5. Working with iwi, landholders, councils, researchers and the public to manage weeds.

How you can help

- Many invasive weeds were originally garden plants. Do not grow invasive weeds in your garden or dump rubbish from your garden or fish tank into natural areas or waterways.
- Join a Weedbusters group to control weeds in a conservation area near you. Find out more about weeds and their management on the Weedbusters website at www.weedbusters.org.nz.
- Weedbusters is a nation-wide collaborative weed-awareness and education programme set up to:
- Ensure that people are aware of the threats that weeds pose.
- Get more people involved in combating the weed problem.
- Help all agencies involved in weeds work, including DOC and regional councils, to share resources and provide clear and consistent messages.
- If you see a plant in a conservation area that looks unusual or out of place, take a photo, note the exact location and tell local DOC or Regional Council weed staff.
- Weeds can hitch-hike on boots, clothes, vehicles, boats, kayaks and fishing gear. Please check and clean your gear before entering a conservation area—the more remote the area, the more careful you should be.
- To prevent the spread of didymo and other freshwater pests, Check, Clean, Dry all items and equipment before entering, and when moving between waterways.

Check, Clean, Dry cleaning methods can be found at the MAF Biosecurity New Zealand website www.biosecurity.govt.nz/didymo

If you see something you suspect is didymo in an unaffected river, report its location to MAF Biosecurity New Zealand on 0800 809 966



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