

Invasives can cost millions; new types moving into state

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Invasive species can dramatically change the landscape, rivers' hydrology, soil nutrient cycles and land use, said a University of Nebraska-Lincoln project coordinator.

"Overall, we see dramatic changes to many ecological processes," said Karie Decker, UNL invasive species project coordinator.

Examples of these changes include the encroachment of trees into grasslands, which we're seeing more and more everywhere in the Midwest, and hydrologic changes brought on by phragmites choking river channels.

Leafy spurge infests about 325,000 acres in Nebraska Decker said. While pastures, rangeland, and right-of-ways tend to carry the largest infestation levels, it can, and will grow anywhere.

Feral hogs have just begun to invade Nebraska, but in Texas it's costing up to \$50 million annually to control them and repair damage they cause.

Zebra and Quagga mussels haven't become a big problem here yet, but if they spread, they can work their way into our water systems. These mussels are notorious for clogging intake pipes, so anyone who uses water, for irrigation, recreation or drinking, could experience the bad effects of these mussels.

The emerald ash borer has devastated ash trees in the Upper Midwest. It has now been confirmed in Missouri, so it's moving closer.

People can reduce the damage from any of these invasives by staying alert, Decker said. Here are a few simple things individuals can do to help:

- Keep track of announcements about where these invasives have appeared in Nebraska. Learning and awareness are the first steps in preventing mass distribution of invasive species.

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The sooner we spot these pests, the better chance we have to control them.

- On the lawn and in the garden, consider planting native species only.
- If you're working with the water system, keep your eyes open for mussels or any new pockets of phragmites.
- Volunteer and get to know your local weed manager.
- Report any suspicious plants or animals.

For more information about spotting and controlling invasive plants and animals, go to: <http://snr.unl.edu/invasives>. Links on that site direct visitors to a whole range of resources for recognizing and reporting invasives.

“Even if you don't know, we can get someone out there to confirm it for you,” Decker said.