

# Staff Report for Decision

DATE OF MEETING JUNE 23, 2025

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**SUBJECT INVASIVE PLANT MANAGEMENT AND CONTROL**

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Purpose of Report**

To respond to Council's request and provide context regarding invasive plants at both the Provincial and local level and the availability of invasive plants at local retailers.

### **Recommendation**

That the Governance and Priorities Committee recommend that Council direct Staff to begin a phased process to draft a bylaw that prohibits the sale and distribution of specific species on the Invasive Plant Council of BC lists within City limits.

## **BACKGROUND**

At the Regular Council meeting 2025-MAR-03, Council directed staff to prepare a staff report to consider prohibiting the sale and spread of invasive plant species in Nanaimo:

*It was moved and seconded that Council direct Staff to bring forward a report to a future Governance and Priorities Committee Meeting on options to prohibit the sale and spread of invasive species in the City of Nanaimo and options for the recovery of the cost of abatement of such invasive species. The motion carried.*

Invasive plants are defined as those that are introduced to an area and can cause harm to the environment, economy or human health. They can thrive on land and in aquatic environments and can impact biodiversity and natural habitats. Since the plants are introduced, they have limited natural predators and tend to grow rapidly, out-compete native plants, and can be challenging to manage even with a long term approach. Impacts can be quite significant to natural areas. Invasive plants can alter water flows, erode banks, impact fire hazards, damage infrastructure, contain substances that threaten human health, and are overall detrimental to ecosystems.

Organizations such as the Invasive Species Council of BC (ISCBC), Coastal Species Invasive Committee, and Invasive Species Councils of Metro Vancouver and Sea to Sky, have been established to help manage and control the spread of invasive plants. They provide reputable information about plants of concern, control methods, and supports for plant control.

The Invasive Species Council of BC and numerous environmental organizations have long called for stronger regulatory action to prevent the spread of such species at the point of sale. Despite efforts by local governments and regional districts to manage invasive species, some are still

legally available for sale in nurseries, garden centres, and online marketplaces. The plants also continue to spread through natural areas largely due to actions from wind, wildlife and improper disposal by people.

The Invasive Species Council of British Columbia has identified numerous species of concern in our local climate, including but not limited to:

- Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*)
- Giant Hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*)
- Himalayan Blackberry (*Rubus armeniacus*)
- English Ivy (*Hedera helix*)
- Daphne (*Daphne laureola*)
- Scotch broom (*Cytisus scoparius*)

Today, each of the above listed plants are impacting our local parks, natural areas and private properties.

## **DISCUSSION**

Efforts to limit the spread and availability of invasive plants at both the provincial and local level have been endorsed by the Union of BC Municipalities.

### **Jurisdictional Examples of What Others are Doing---Provincial Level**

Current provincial legislations, including the *Weed Control Act* and the *Wildlife Act Control and Alien Species Regulations*, offer species lists that are outdated and have little effective means of enforcement. The Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development and its' Working Group have been reviewing current legislation and policy regarding the sale of invasive plants and their seeds in BC. Discussions with the federal government about the *Canada Seeds Act* and the sale of certain seeds e.g. wildflower mixes are ongoing. The Ministry is looking at opportunities to improve these provincial regulations.

The Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development has developed collaborative partnerships with the Invasive Species Council of British Columbia and regional invasive species organizations throughout the province. These organizations have taken positive steps to educate the horticulture industry and the general public about invasive species, which has resulted in a reduced number of potentially harmful species being offered for sale at retail outlets.

### **Jurisdictional Examples of What Others are Doing---Local Level**

Several municipalities in Canada, including those in Ontario and Alberta, have implemented bylaws that prohibit the sale of certain invasive species (both plants and seeds) at retail outlets. Preventing the introduction of invasive plants is a cost-effective method of controlling these species. Banning the sale of listed invasive plants, noxious weeds and their seeds is one of several options to help prevent new introductions of these species.

For example, the Regional District of Squamish-Lillooet (the District) banned the sale of invasive plants within the region as part of their Invasive Species Management Bylaw. This bylaw, implemented in 2020, prohibits the planting, cultivation, or release of invasive plants, and requires proper treatment and disposal methods according to the Sea to Sky Invasive Species Council or

the Invasive Species Council of BC. The bylaw defines invasive species as those recognized by provincial regulations. The bylaw aims to seek voluntary compliance through education, however, under the bylaw, the District may deliver a notice informing a property owner/occupier of the presence of invasive species, recommend steps to treat the species, and a reasonable timeline in which they are to comply. In cases of non-compliance, the bylaw enables the District to issue a fine ( $\leq \$10,000$ ) or ensure compliance by performing the works at the land owner's or occupier's expense.

A number of other municipalities in southern BC have implemented similar bylaws that also ban the sale of invasive plants, including Oak Bay.

Invasive species are also managed under development permits and Soils Management Bylaws, but these bylaws are limited to certain developments and tend to promote reactive (as opposed to proactive) treatment.

### **What Nanaimo is Already Doing to Curb the Spread of Invasive Species**

The City of Nanaimo (the City) is actively managing the spread of invasive plants in public spaces and controlling invasive plants that pose a health concern for the public. Efforts to date have focussed on controlling the spread of invasive plants through education, reporting and community involvement.

An Invasive Plant Management Strategy was adopted by the City in 2014 to help combat the spread of invasive plants. As part of this strategy, a number of action plans and partnerships with community organizations have been developed to remove existing invasive plants in public spaces. Staff partner with hundreds of volunteer organizations at specific locations to remove, invasive vegetation and replant with native plants. Much of this restoration work is carried out under operating budgets as well as through grants and the Partners in Park program (PIP). For each group, the City offers education, safety equipment, tools, and debris removal. Partnering organizations are varied but include Broombusters, high school students, businesses, and neighbourhood associations. The work also varies from site to site but includes "freeing trees" from English Ivy, pulling Daphne spurge, cutting Scotch broom and cutting Himalayan blackberry. A few community groups have also tackled aquatic vegetation such as Canary Reed Grass.

In addition, staff sponsor approximately twenty work parties each year. Staff choose the locations that they feel are important to manage and encourage the general public to participate. These work parties are advertised in the Parks, Recreation and Culture Activity Guides in tandem with educational material about invasive plants. Additionally, as part of Invasive Plant Month celebrations, the Parks Recreation and Culture department sponsors four community drop zones each May to encourage the public to safely dispose of invasive plant material at no cost at convenient bin locations around town.

Staff play a key role in educating the public about invasive plants. Staff provide information online, at community events, on social media, and through educational booklets and training sessions. Information is shared at many community events including Rivers Day, Oceans Day, Earth Day, and Family Fishing Day. Staff also present to elementary, high school and university students. A guidebook, *Controlling Invasive Plants—Methods and Processes for Nanaimo*, is also available on our website and is widely shared with community partners.

Each year work is also done to manage invasive plants that pose public safety risks and risks to municipal underground infrastructure. Japanese Knotweed and Giant Hogweed are typically managed by staff or contractors.

Technology advances are also assisting in the monitoring and tracking of invasive plants at the local level. Staff are now mapping restoration areas to help track successes over time as well as track the spread (or lack of spread) of invasive plants in parks. This work will continue in the field as staff transition to Cartegraph, the City's new Corporate Asset Management System (CAMS). Staff have also developed the Report-a-Weed app that allows the public to report noxious weeds such as Giant Hogweed. This app is actively promoted on our website and through social media promotional material.

### **Retail Availability of Invasive Plants in Nanaimo**

To better understand the local context, staff conducted a survey of six local garden centres during the month of June and learned that some centres are selling plants on the Invasive Plant Council of BC list such as *Buddleja Davidii* (Butterfly Bush, Summer Lilac), *Digitalis Purpurea* (Floxglove) and *Hypericum Calycinum* (St. Johns Wort) to name a few, however, availability was limited.

Additional information about available wildflower mixes and specific plants of concern for our local microclimate are available in Attachment A. Wildflower mixes often are formulated for other ecozones and include species of local concern. In recent months, staff have noticed new invasive plant species included in many wildflower mixes present in the park system.

### **Bylaw Development**

Development of a bylaw to ban the sale of invasive plants offers one tool in a box of many to continue to work through this long-term challenge. While public awareness of invasive plants is increasing, some species are still available for purchase. Bylaw development does not solve all the issues, but provides an effective method to halt the introduction of new invasive plants.

A bylaw could be developed over time with engagement from local retailers. Initially, retailers could be contacted directly or at the time of business license renewal. Additional steps could include further engagement around species to include in the bylaw, penalties, and proactive ways to partner with retailers as educators about invasive plants. A specific list could be developed, with partner input, as part of this process to target varieties of concern to our specific microclimate. A bylaw does not need to curb buyer or business options but to protect future generations and raise awareness.

Additionally, a Property Maintenance and Standards Bylaw (No. 7242) does already exist and does identify species noxious weeds. Implementation of this bylaw is typically on a complaint driven basis and the intent of this bylaw is not to limit the spread of invasive plants on private or public lands.

## **OPTIONS**

1. That Council direct staff to begin a phased process to draft a bylaw that prohibits the sale and distribution of specific species on the Invasive Plant Council of BC lists within City limits.
  - The advantages of this option: Preventing the sale of invasive plants is a proactive, cost-effective approach to environmental stewardship.
  - The disadvantages of this option: Bylaw development with stakeholder input will take time and require regular updating as best practices and species lists evolve.
  - Financial Implications: None.
2. That Council direct staff to:
  - a) Partner with local garden retailers and community organizations on a public awareness campaign to promote awareness about native and non-invasive alternatives and the proper disposal of plant waste.
  - b) Update Nanaimo's Invasive Plant Management Strategy and resource materials and continue to fund community and staff participation in the long-term reduction of invasive plants. Include updated action plans to strategically look at sites for removal and restoration plantings.
  - Advantages of this option: This supports other ongoing long term initiatives already underway to curb invasive plants in our community.
  - Disadvantages of this option: This approach takes time.
  - Financial Implications: None
3. That Council provide alternate direction |

### **SUMMARY POINTS**

- The control of invasive plants in our region is an ongoing, long term challenge.
- Invasive plants are available for purchase in our community and a bylaw prohibiting their sale could be part of a multi-pronged solution to reduce invasive plants in our community.
- Staff and community groups are actively working to reduce the spread of invasive plants in our area through a number of techniques and will continue to raise awareness and participation in solutions that improve our natural areas and local biodiversity.

## **ATTACHMENTS:**

ATTACHMENT A:                      ADDITIONAL PRODUCT INFORMATION |

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**Concurrence by:**

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