

**REPORT TO ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE
MEETING OF WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15, 2026**

SUBJECT **Board Advocacy for a New Invasive Species Legislative Framework**

ISSUE SUMMARY

To outline the current legislative framework for invasive species management in BC and to seek a letter advocating that the provincial government review and update the regulatory framework.

BACKGROUND

The Capital Regional District (CRD) has supported regional coordination of invasive species management since 2017. In 2024, the CRD Board expanded the service to cover the entire region through the establishment of the new regional Biodiversity and Environmental Stewardship Service. A recent Environmental Services Committee report (February 18, 2026) highlighted the accomplishments of the Regional Invasive Species Program; provided an updated 2025 Capital Region Invasive Species list; and signaled a need for CRD Board advocacy to the Province for improvements to the legislative framework for managing invasive species.

Legislation on invasive species in British Columbia is complex with multiple authorities having jurisdiction over invasive plant management. These include the Spheres of Concurrent Jurisdiction – Environment and Wildlife Regulation (SCJ-EWR), the *BC Weed Control Act* (WCA), the BC Weed Control Regulation (WCR), and other legislation. The WCA and WCR, developed in 1985, are outdated and focused primarily on agricultural weeds that are noxious to livestock. The authority for the import and sale of plants and their seeds, including banning their sale, lies with the provincial and federal governments. Appendix A provides a summary of the current provincial and federal regulatory framework.

Local governments and stewardship groups across BC have long advocated for improved invasive species legislative framework, including banning the sale, trade, barter, gifting and transport of invasive species (Appendix A. Table 2. UBCM Resolutions). In 2019, the CRD Board sent a letter requesting the province update the WCR Schedule A with additional invasive plants (Part 1) and include the Capital Region District in the regional list (Part 2).

ALTERNATIVES

Alternative 1

The Environmental Services Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board: That the CRD Board Chair write a letter to the Province of BC (Ministry of Forests) requesting a review and update to the existing invasive species management regulatory framework in BC, including a ban on the sale, barter, gifting and transport of priority invasive species in British Columbia.

Alternative 2

That this report be referred back to staff for additional information.

IMPLICATIONS

Environmental, Climate and Social Implications

The Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) program in BC is a proactive, province-wide approach to managing invasive species that strives to prevent the establishment and subsequent impacts through targeted risk assessment, verification, containment, and eradication. As part of a regional EDRR program, CRD staff, in collaboration with the inter-municipal working group and provincial and local invasive plant experts, updated the regional list of invasive species for the Capital Region. This list classifies invasive plants into four categories (prevent, eradicate, contain, and strategic control), helps local land managers prioritize management of existing invasive plants, and supports awareness of new invasive plants adjacent to the region.

The 2025 Capital Region Invasive Species list includes 152 species with 58 new invasive plants added since 2019. Schedule A of the WCR lists 39 province-wide noxious weeds (Part 1) and 27 additional noxious weeds specific to regional districts in British Columbia (Part 2). Neither the Capital Regional District nor any other regional district on Vancouver Island are mentioned in Schedule A, Part 2. Furthermore, the Invasive Plant Regulation of the Forest and Range Practices Act lists 42 invasive plants and the SCJ-EWR lists 78 alien invasive species adding to the confusing and complex legislative framework.

With adjusted climate projections, an increasing number of species are deemed as “possible invasives” in the capital region. Furthermore, many known invasive plants are still available for sale online or at nurseries throughout the region and BC, putting more onus and economic pressure on local governments to manage invasive plants in their jurisdiction, without the ability to eliminate an obvious source of introductions. Jurisdiction to ban the import and sale of plants lies with the federal and provincial governments.

Economic Implications

Invasive species represent a significant environmental and economic risk to local ecosystems. They have the potential to overwhelm healthy watersheds and ecosystems, displace native species, negatively impact regional and municipal parks, disrupt infrastructure and impact service delivery. Climate change will likely accelerate these risks over the coming decades. While the extent of economic costs of invasive species in BC require further research, they are significant. The Invasive Species Council of BC estimated the combined damage of six important invasive plants at \$139 million in 2020. Crop loss estimates in the BC agricultural industry are over \$50 million annually.

Intergovernmental and First Nations Implications

Local governments do not have the authority to ban the sale of invasive plants. Staff have taken an educational approach with local nurseries to share best practices, including National Voluntary Code of Conduct for the Ornamental Horticulture Industry, which promotes best practices to avoid the introduction of high-risk invasive plants.

The network of jurisdictions responsible for managing invasive species is confusing with multiple agencies and governments involved in controlling invasive plants on adjoining land parcels. Furthermore, there are numerous pieces of legislation, regulation and policy that govern invasive plant management in BC. The WCA requires landowners to control listed noxious weeds, but its primarily agricultural focus no longer reflects the broader environmental impacts invasive species

now have on parks and natural areas. Additionally, many harmful new species that have arrived or been detected recently, are not listed in the *WCR*, nor are they prohibited to buy, sell or grow. For example, poison hemlock (*Conium maculatum*), a toxic and potentially fatal invasive plant with significant human health impacts, is now proliferating in our region, but is not listed in the *WCR*. This out-of-date legislation allows the damage of invasive species to persist, impacting ecosystems, economies, and human and livestock health.

Local governments and stewardship groups across BC have long advocated for improved invasive species legislative framework. Over the past ten years, numerous resolutions regarding invasive species have been put forward at the Union of BC Municipalities conferences, including at the 2023 UBCM where Resolution ED35, Ban on the Sale of Invasive Plant Species was endorsed. (Appendix A, Table 1). In 2019, the CRD Board sent a letter requesting the Province update Schedule A of the *WCR* with additional invasive plants in Part 1 (Species of Provincial Concern) and include the Capital Region District in Part 2 (Species of Regional Concern).

Beyond a ban on the sale of invasive species, the Inter-Ministry Invasive Species Working group, in 2023, reviewed existing invasive species legislation and policy and determined that the best approach to adequately address all high-risk invasive species and their pathways of introduction and spread was through the development of a new and comprehensive Invasive Species Act with supporting regulations. The Invasive Species Council of BC's Invasive Species Strategy for BC (2024-2028) identified an urgent need for "co-developed legislation to address invasive species".

Creating new legislation is a large undertaking, therefore the Province committed to pursue improved policy solutions to address invasive plant species in the interim. However, a new legislative framework for British Columbia, that includes banning the sale of invasive plants, is urgently required. The lack of a consolidated and comprehensive invasive species legislation coupled with the lack of funds and staff capacity to support such legislation remains an ongoing challenge for land managers.

Alignment with Board and Corporate Priorities

In alignment with Board Initiative 5a – "*Influence regional issues and advocate in consistent, focused way that aligns with Board strategic priorities*" - advocating for an updated provincial regulatory framework, could result in new legislation that reduces the burden on regional invasive species program staff, and local land managers, enabling them to more effectively perform their roles. New tools, guidance, and information would also provide needed support for many other land managing agencies in BC that are striving to prevent the harm of invasive species.

In alignment with Board Initiative 3b - "*Explore options for a regional approach to biodiversity and the protection of ecological assets*" – the development of a comprehensive and consolidated *Invasive Species Act* would decrease the sales, distribution and spread of invasives in the region, and with significant ecological benefit protecting waterways and natural areas.

CONCLUSION

Invasive species are a significant stressor on regional biodiversity and environmental sustainability. Climate change is exacerbating the issues and will lead to more challenges in the future. The Regional Invasive Species Program has demonstrated success through collaboration, capacity building and staff training, education and outreach, EDRR, disposal, inventory and mapping, and restoration and research. However, local government efforts at controlling invasive species spread are hampered when many invasive plants remain available for sale and with

outdated provincial legislation and regulation. Advocating to the Province for an updated regulatory framework for invasive species management in BC would support and compliment efforts at the regional and local government level.

RECOMMENDATION

The Environmental Services Committee recommends to the Capital Regional District Board: That the CRD Board Chair write a letter to the Province of BC (Ministry of Forests) requesting a review and update to the existing invasive species management regulatory framework in BC, including a ban on the sale, barter, gifting and transport of priority invasive species in British Columbia.

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ATTACHMENT

Appendix A: Existing Provincial Invasive Species Legislative Framework and UBCM resolutions related to invasive species (2010 – 2025)