YISC Yukon Invasive Species Council

Yukon Invasive Species Council

Newsletter Fall 2010

Welcome to our First Newsletter

In April, YISC formed a council and became a non-profit organization. After years as an ad-hoc committee we are now able to pursue our own projects and develop a more focused future direction.

It has been a busy spring and summer, starting in April when YISC was represented at the Environment Fair with our own display. In July, YISC was involved in a gardening workshop in Whitehorse to raise awareness about invasive ornamentals.

Throughout the summer the council initiated and helped with several weed pulls in a number of communities. Weed pulls were organized with Friends of McIntyre, Wildlife Viewing, the Yukon Youth Conservation Corps (Y2C2), the Klondike Conservation Society, Friends of the Dempster and the Lorne Mt. Community Association just to name a few.

Sweetclover pull: Volunteers in action

In addition to these organized pulling efforts individuals got together spontaneously to pull sweetclover in their neighbourhood. Students of the Renewable Resource Management Program at Yukon College had a hands-on lesson in weed management by pulling sweetclover in Haines Junction.

Just recently 12 groups of high school students took part in the Envirothon in Whitehorse. Besides other environmental issues, the students reported on the spread of invasive plants and their effects on ecosystem health.

This summer YISC increased its profile by issuing news releases and advertisement to draw attention to YISC as a newly formed council, raise awareness through weed pulls and highlighting invasive species issues in home gardens and the backcountry. One step at a time, awareness of YISC and its work is building. One of our goals is to build awareness, provide information, engage the public and attract political attention.

YISC would like to thank all the involved weed warriors. Every hour spent weed pulling counts and will be rewarded in the long run by reducing impact of invasive plants in Yukon!

In this issue

Welcome	1
Coordinator's message	2
The battle on the weed front shows success	2
Aquatic Invasive Species	3
Clean-up and disposal of invasive plants	4
Weeds don't know any borders	5
National Invasive Species Working Group	6

Yukon Invasive Species Council mandate:

Prevent the introduction and manage the spread of invasive species in Yukon.

The Y2C2 crew has been pulling Altai wild rye in Carcross for several years.

Photo: M. Lamrock

Coordinator's Message

Originally my interest in nature and plants brought me to join YISC. Now, as the coordinator, I am supporting the council's work and looking at plants from a different perspective.

This summer my eyes were definitely more tuned to spotting invasives. During my drives back and forth to town I noticed not only sweetclover growing along the road but also a tall dandelion-looking plant. This is perennial sow-thistle which is found primarily along highway corridors. It has been spreading in the Whitehorse area. Perennial sow-thistle is mainly a concern for agricultural producers. Unfortunately its control can't be done easily by hand-pulling. Their root system can reach down to three meters and can easily break when pulled. A tiny fragment left in the ground is enough to start a new plant.

During my river trips this summer I was looking for excessive algae growth. It was Didymo (also known as "rock snot") I was looking for. I encountered a noticeable Didymo growth on the Yukon River where mats of it were floating in the water. It looked like tissue paper drifting down the river. Recently Didymo made some headlines in other jurisdictions. Didymo may be native and widespread. We just don't know enough yet.

Andrea Altherr

The Battle on the Weed Front Shows Success

For several years now YISC members and other volunteers have been working to control small invasive plant infestations throughout Yukon. The work typically involves pulling or cutting plants when plants are fully grown, but haven't set seed yet. We call it "early detection followed by rapid response".

Success in the battle against invasive plants is showing results thanks to the effort of dedicated volunteers. For several years leafy spurge at Henderson Corner (near Dawson) has been hand-pulled. The infestation appears to be losing vigour and hasn't been left to flower for two years. Leafy spurge has not been reported from anywhere else in Yukon.

Sweetclover growing along the Dempster Highway has been the focus for organized weed pulls since 2007. It was once widespread for the first 46 km. It can now only be found at the first few kilometers. This year's sweetclover pull along the Carcross Road was for most parts not a big task, though a large amount still remains for a few kilometers near the Alaska Highway. It looks like that repeated control efforts are starting to show success.

Perennial sow-thistle along the Alaska Highway in Whitehorse

Board of directors

Toos Omtzigt

Bruce Bennett

Matt Ball

Kirstie Simpson

Nathan Millar

Lloyd Freese

Randy Lewis

Staff

Andrea Altherr,

Coordinator

Contact

info@yukoninvasives.com

(867) 393-3394

www.yukoninvasives.com

PO Box 30111

Whitehorse, YT

Y1A 5M2

YISC Membership

Becoming a member is simple: Fill in the membership form and return it to the council. Membership is free. Download the form on the website www.yukoninvasives.com

Aquatic Invasive Species in Yukon

Most invasive species in Yukon are plant species. However, a few fish species and the alga Didymo are drawing some attention. When we look past our borders, we see our neighbours dealing with invasive plants such as purple loosestrife, Eurasian water-milfoil or yellow flag-iris, which are invading aquatic systems. Undesirable species such as New Zealand mud snail and zebra mussels, parasites and diseases can upset the delicate balance of ecosystems and cause irreversible damage to native fish populations and sport fisheries. Aquatic organisms often are moved accidentally from water body to water body on boats and gear such as wading boots.

A snapshot of introduced fish species in Yukon:

Goldfish have been released in to the Takhini hot springs. If these aquarium pets survive they could spread in to the nearby Yukon River system. Never dump the contents of aquaria into local water bodies!

Rainbow trout occur naturally in the Kathleen River system and elsewhere in the Alsek drainage, but in the 1950s they were stocked into an open system in the Upper Yukon River watershed near Whitehorse. They escaped and colonized McIntyre Creek. Since then, they have been captured downstream in the Yukon River, observed in the Whitehorse Rapids Fishway, and have established a self-sustaining population in Croucher Creek, a tributary to the Yukon River. Their presence may lead to competition with native species including juvenile chinook salmon and Arctic grayling. Their current range is not well understood, and the species appears to be spreading slowly.

In the 1970s, threespine sticklebacks were accidentally brought to Yukon with a shipment of rainbow trout destined for Gloria and Long lakes, two of the regularly stocked pothole lakes. Since then, the stickleback remains confined to these lakes.

On several occasions, Arctic char have escaped from a local aquaculture facility. Char are now found in both the McIntyre and Porter creek systems where they do not naturally occur.

Prevention

Prevention is the most cost efficient approach to avoid the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species. Basic steps every boater and angler can follow are: **check - clean – dry**.

What can we do to keep invaders out?

Everybody can help to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species. Here are some prevention tips:

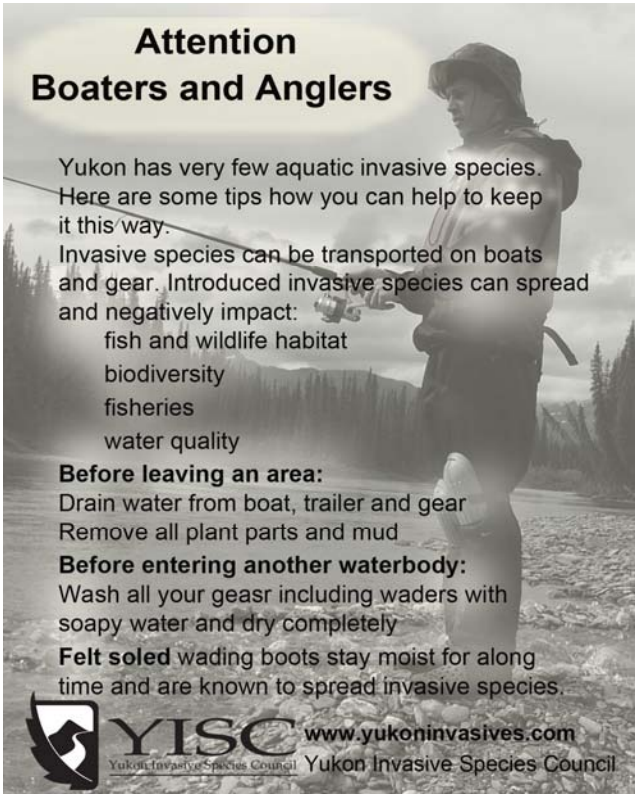
- Learn to recognize aquatic invasive plants and animals.
- Check: Before leaving the river or lake, drain all water, check your trailer, motor boat, canoe, kayak and other equipment carefully and remove all clumps of algae or vegetation.
- Clean: Soak and scrub all gear (including waders) for at least one minute in soapy water.
- Dry: If equipment cannot be cleaned adequately, dry it completely.
- Drain the water, bilge and bait containers before leaving the area.
- Use only cured (preserved) baits when fishing. In Yukon it is illegal to use live bait or to import live fish or other water creatures.
- Never release plants or animals into water bodies unless they came from that water body immediately before the release. Moving fish from one body of water to another is illegal.
- Do not dump the contents of aquaria into local water bodies.
- Do not clean fish from one water body in another water system.

Introduced aquatic species, that are invasive, pose a threat to aquatic ecosystems and can alter fish and wildlife habitat, reduce biodiversity, and negatively impact fisheries and water quality.

Of particular concern are felt-soled wading boots, favoured by anglers for their traction on slippery river bottoms. Because felt soles can remain cool, damp and dark for much longer than other fishing equipment, aquatic invasive species can remain alive for long periods of time (up to 40 days!). Anglers are encouraged to replace their felt-soled wading boots with rubber- or studded-sole boots.

Because of concerns over aquatic invasive species transfer, Alaska has banned the use of felt-soled wading boots, beginning in 2012.

If you have concerns or questions about aquatic invasive species in Yukon, please contact
Environment Yukon, Fisheries Section at (867) 667-5199



Clean-up and disposal of invasive plants

It is the time of the year to clean up gardens. Ox-eye daisy and greater butter-and-eggs are popular garden ornamentals but invasive! You may wonder what to do with these or any invasive plants.

Invasive plant disposal poses a tricky problem. If not properly done, some invasive plants will continue to grow and set seed despite being pulled out of the ground. It is important to know how persistent your plant is in order to figure out how to make sure you do not spread the infestation trough your disposal method.

There are a few rules of thumb:

- Pull the plant before it has flowered or gone to seed.
- All invasive plant parts should be placed in a clear plastic bag and left in the sun to kill the seed because many plants (e.g. thistles, knapweed and daisies) continue to produce seed even after pulling or deadheading.
- Bring the bags to the landfill, where they should be buried shortly after being dropped off.
- If you have flowers and/or seeds on the plant, you want to minimize the risk of dispersing seed as you remove or transport the plant. Put the flowers and seed heads into the bag head first. This will minimize the risk of dispersal. Removing in fall may not always be the best because of the potential of spreading the seeds. You may remove them next year when the plants are fully grown again.
- Burning in your garden is not the best solution: Some plant seeds (e.g. spotted knapweed) will only be killed in an incinerator.
- Do not “recycle” garden debris into a public park or natural area.
- Avoid composting invasive plants.

Pretty but invasive: Ox-eye daisy commonly spreads outside of gardens and has become a serious invader of pastures and natural areas.

.

Weeds Don't Know Any Borders

YISC is participating in Borders North, a platform for discussion and collaboration on invasive plant issues in Yukon, the Northwest Territories, British Columbia, and Alberta.

Especially important is a coordinated effort in early detection and rapid response along the highways with established infestations or where new infestations may occur. One example of a plant that is persisting and slowly starts to spread is spotted knapweed along the South Klondike Highway. Spotted knapweed is also found along the Alaska Highway where it is reported from southwest of Teslin and suspected in Whitehorse.

Spotted Knapweed crowds out native species and reduces forage for livestock and wildlife.
Photo: Michael Rasy

Other invasive plants of concern in our neighbouring jurisdictions that are travelling north along the highways include ox-eye daisy, wild caraway and garlic mustard.

Greater butter-and-eggs grows in gardens and is spreading onto roadsides. The plants in this picture have escaped the border of the garden and are spreading onto the adjacent gravel area.

What is an invasive species?

An invasive species is an organism (plant, animal, fungus, or bacterium) that is not native to an area and has negative effects on our economy, our environment, or our health.

A big thank you to our funding partners

YISC would like to thank the Environment Awareness Fund and the Community Development Fund Program for funding various YISC projects, including this newsletter and improvements to our website www.yukoninvasives.com .

Community Development Fund
Fonds de développement communautaire

Alaska Invasive Species Conference

Fairbanks,
October 25th – 27th, 2010
Bruce Bennett will speak on behalf of YISC about invasive species issues in Yukon.

http://alaskainvasivespeciesconference.wikispaces.com/CNIPM+Agenda

National Invasive Species Working Group

Giant Hogweed

The National Invasive Species Working Group, a partnership of Invasive Plants/Species Councils across Canada, launched a national awareness campaign on giant hogweed. In May a national media release caught the attention of newspapers and radio stations. This campaign raised invasive species awareness and the profiles of invasive species organizations. The National Working Group has issued a National Fact Sheet.

Giant hogweed is present in British Columbia, Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador. There are no confirmed sightings for giant hogweed in Yukon or northern British Columbia. Giant hogweed had not been reported from Alaska until this summer when an infestation was found in Kake (not too far from Sitka), Southeast Alaska. The hogweed originally was planted as an ornamental and now has spread to a ditch nearby.

Cow parsnip, native to Yukon, is a plant found in southern and central Yukon as well as along the South Klondike Highway at Tutshi Lake. It is easily mistaken for giant hogweed. Refer to the national factsheet for identification.

http://www.mun.ca/botgarden/Giant_Hogweed_NISWG_Factsheet.pdf

Cow parsnip on roadside at Tutshi Lake

Giant hogweed leaves are shiny and large, with leaf edges very coarse and serrated. Photo: R. Old

Giant hogweed flower and leaf stalks have purple streaks, blotches, lines or spots. Photo: R. Old