

# Invasive Plants In Alaska: A Growing Problem



## Defining the Enemy

**R**ecently, Alaska has witnessed something the rest of the nation has struggled with for decades, an influx of invasive plants. Land managers once believed the remote nature of Alaska would help prevent these unwanted “infestations.” However, the invaders are here and establishing themselves in both urban and wild settings across the state.



Thousands of non-native plants such as corn, wheat, rice, and soybeans have been introduced into regions of the U.S. where they were not originally found. These plants are beneficial to society and pose no serious threat of becoming invasive.



Fireweed (pictured at left) is just one of the many native species in Alaska whose livelihood is being threatened by invasive plants, such as Perennial Sowthistle (pictured above).

### So just what is the difference between native, exotic, and invasive plants?

**Native** - Plants that, with respect to a particular ecosystem, historically occurred there and co-evolved over time with all of its neighboring native organisms.

**Exotic** - Plants that have been introduced to locations beyond their historical range.

**Invasive** - Exotic plants that have special adaptations that allow them to grow aggressively in their new environment and displace native species. Their introduction can cause environmental damage, economic loss, or harm to human health.

**I**n the United States, invasive plants have caused billions of dollars in damage to agriculture, forestry, recreation, and tourism industries. These plants can quickly displace native vegetation, disrupting surrounding communities and ecosystems on many levels. The result is that birds, fish, insects, and mammals lose critical food and shelter, which can impact their future stability. Other large scale effects include: changes in fire regimes, altered hydrology, increased rate of erosion, disrupted recreational experiences, and the overall reduction of biological diversity.

“A weed is a plant that is not only in the wrong place, but intends to stay.”

– Sara Stein