

# Seeking new relationships with invasive species

June 13 2018

---

With summer nearly here in North America, we often hear about invasive plants popping up in undesirable locations, "colonizing" different areas. But what if we shifted how "non-native" species are perceived? A Dartmouth study with two indigenous nations provides new insight into how the concept of "native" species is associated with colonialism, and how such framing runs counter to the lenses through which many indigenous peoples view their relationship with the world. Published in *Sustainability Science*, the study presents alternatives that challenge the native-non-native framework found in scientific discourse.

The ethnographic study was conducted in Michigan with 22 Anishnaabe tradition bearers, who are citizens of the Sault Ste Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians and Bay Mills Indian Community. Researchers spent two years conducting informal interviews and listening to the various perspectives of tribal citizens. Discussions focused on regional environmental change and on changes regarding two, non-native [plants](#) in the region: common reed (*Phragmites australis*) and hybrid cattail (*Typha x glauca*). Anishnaabe tradition bearers, who took part in the study, explained the concept of "aki": the idea that the land and all living and non-living things are considered sacred, where every single being has their own special gift and has something to offer the rest of creation. According to this study, the Anishnaabe teachings of aki could apply in invasive species situations as well.

The research revealed three findings, which can help inform how invasive species are viewed:

- According to Anishnaabe teachings, plants and animals alike assemble in nations, each with their own creation stories, kinship networks and responsibilities. The arrival of new species is to be expected and is considered by some Anishnaabe to be a form of natural migration, whether assisted by humans or not.
- In Anishnaabe traditions, humans have a responsibility to actively maintain appropriate and respectful relationships with plants used for food or medicine; otherwise, it is taught, the plants may go away. For thousands of years, naaknaashgook (*Typha latifolia*), the broadleaf cattail, has been found in the Great Lakes region, where various parts of the plant, such as the new shoots, have been used for recipes. Fewer Anishnaabe actively use the gifts of naaknaashgook today than in the past, but Anishnaabe are trying to rekindle these practices and relationships. They are also working with universities to determine if similar or new uses can be found for hybrid cattail (*Typha x glauca*), a prolific [species](#) that has outcompeted native vegetation in wetlands in the Eastern Upper Peninsula of Michigan.
- Anishnaabe tradition bearers explained that [invasive species](#) are less of a threat than environmental management practices that attempt to re-engineer, command and control natural processes and places, for example via the dredging, damming and hardening of rivers. Anishnaabe quoted in the study refer to these environmental management practices, as well as Euro-American property rights regimes as "invasive land ethics," which begin with the thought that land can be dominated, a view introduced by settler Americans that is inconsistent with an Anishnaabe worldview of aki. One such example shared in the study was how chlorophenoxy herbicides (which contain dioxins similar to those found in "Agent Orange") were used by US federal authorities to clear vegetation in Bay Mills Indian Community.

**More information:** Nicholas J. Reo et al. Anishnaabe Aki: an

indigenous perspective on the global threat of invasive species,  
*Sustainability Science* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s11625-018-0571-4](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-018-0571-4)

Provided by Dartmouth College

Citation: Seeking new relationships with invasive species (2018, June 13) retrieved 23 May 2024  
from <https://phys.org/news/2018-06-relationships-invasive-species.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--