Scientists recommend proactive response to invasive plants

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Sherman Lake, Maine. Credit: 1778011 from Pixabay

Many invasive plants are expanding their growing range in response to climate change, making early detection and rapid response more critical than ever. Limited resources, though, can make it impossible to track and manage every range-shifting species.

To help invasive species managers bring focus their efforts, a team from the University of Massachusetts suggests prioritizing potential invaders based on the threat they represent.

In a research project featured in the journal *Invasive Plant Science and Management*, the team explored data on 87 plant species that are projected to shift into northern New England as the climate in the region changes. Using a widely accepted rating protocol, they evaluated and scored each species for its potential to cause harm.

The team found that 22 of the invaders were known to threaten native species common in New England. Sixteen of those species were also known to have a negative impact on agriculture, human health or the economy. Almost all were found to be readily available for purchase by home gardeners—a factor that could accelerate their introduction.

"Because these high-risk species are not yet widespread across the Northeast, state and local regulators have the unique opportunity to prohibit their introduction and to establish proactive best practices for monitoring and management," says William Coville, a member of the University of Massachusetts research team.

More information: William Coville et al, Identifying high-impact invasive plants likely to shift into northern New England with climate change, *Invasive Plant Science and Management* (2021). DOI: 10.1017/inp.2021.10

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