

Biologists warn of peril from biological invasions as White House proposes to halve funding

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As the Trump Administration prepares to cut in half the budget for the National Invasive Species Council, a group of invasive species experts led by a University of Rhode Island professor has issued a warning about the growing peril of biological invasions and the increasing threat they pose to the economy, environment, public health and national security.

"Defunding [invasion](#) policy and management at the federal level at a time when the rate of invasions into the U.S. are increasing and is exacerbated by climate change is reckless and puts the economic well-being, health and natural capital of U.S. citizens at risk," said Laura Meyerson, URI professor of natural resources science.

Along with colleagues James Carlton, professor of marine sciences emeritus at Williams College, David Lodge, professor of ecology and evolutionary biology at Cornell University, and Daniel Simberloff, the Nancy Gore Hunger professor at the University of Tennessee, Meyerson published [an editorial](#) in this week's edition of the journal *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment*. In it they note that biological invasions in the United States "remain an unrelenting environmental and economic calamity impacting all segments of society."

Invasive species costs in the United States are estimated at more than \$100 billion annually. The scientists note that the rapid movement of plants, animals, disease agents and pathogens into the country has the potential to trigger epidemics that sweep through human populations, crops and fisheries. In addition, climate change is facilitating the arrival of new invaders and the expansion of established ones.

"Simply watching the spinning of the multiple

roulette wheels of globalization, climate change and [habitat degradation](#) to see what the next invasion will be is a game we simply can't afford," Carlton said.

Executive orders over the last 40 years from Presidents Carter, Clinton and Obama have acknowledged the impact of invasive species and highlighted the necessity of interagency cooperation, public education and technology to prevent and manage invasions. The establishment of the National Invasive Species Council (NISC) and the volunteer non-federal Invasive Species Advisory Council (ISAC), as well as a regularly-updated National Invasive Species Management Plan, have helped to address the issue proactively.

The Trump Administration has proposed to cut the National Invasive Species Council budget by 50 percent for [fiscal year](#) 2020, even as damage from invasive species grows. In addition, the Advisory Council has been placed on "administratively inactive status" due to "financial constraints."

"Insufficient coordinated attention to invasive species is an especially important example of policy often lagging behind emerging problems," said Lodge. "The importance and urgency of preventing harm from invasions has only increased in the last 20 years, and the current renegotiations of trade practices and policies present a perfect opportunity to prevent future invasions."

"It is depressing that, just as Europe belatedly begins a long overdue coordinated approach to stemming the massive, increasing damage caused by invasions, the United States is emasculating its only national governmental entity attempting to grapple with this calamity," added Simberloff.

In advocating for restoration of the council's budget

and a renewed effort to tackle the invasive [species](#) threat, Meyerson and her co-authors argue that the nation "cannot wait for [climate change](#) and environmental degradation, facilitated by the weakening of federal laws and rules, to result in waves of new invasions that could drain billions of dollars from the economy. Reactive management is far costlier than proactive planning," they wrote.

More information: *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* (2019). [esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/fee.2036](https://doi.org/10.1002/fee.2036)

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