

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL COALITION ON INVASIVE SPECIES
American Lands Alliance, Center for International Environmental Law,
Defenders of Wildlife, Environmental Defense, Environmental Law Institute, Great
Lakes United, International Center for Technology Assessment, National Wildlife
Federation, The Nature Conservancy, Union of Concerned Scientists

Position Statement: Decreasing Ecological Risks Related to International Trade

The Problem: Trade Serves as a Pathway for Introductions of Damaging Species

Many of the most important pathways by which invasive species enter the country result from the movement of goods in trade. As the largest economy in the world, the U.S. has over 20 of the world's 30 busiest airports, receives nearly half of all ocean-going vessels each year and admits over 57,000 trucks and 1.1 million visitors daily. Thus, there are ample opportunities for invasive species to enter into the U.S. by land, air or water.

The environmental and health rules incorporated into international trade agreements are generally oriented towards increasing commerce and reducing trade barriers. Little consideration is given to the economic and ecological costs of invasive species, especially in natural ecosystems. Some existing agreements focus solely upon those species already known to cause damage and fail to anticipate and regulate pathways of introduction or to consider the likelihood that introduced species can hybridize with close relatives and evolve into more virulent bioinvaders. Additionally, many regional and bilateral trade agreements rely upon the WTO's Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, which provides deference to specific international standards and standard setting bodies. These international standards should therefore be strengthened within current as well as future institutions and agreements to prevent the movement of invasive species via global trade.

Recommendations:

The U.S. should take a leading role in managing the pathways that allow exotic species to invade coastal, aquatic, and terrestrial ecosystems. The U.S. should ensure that international standards adopted by the International Plant Protection Convention, the International Office for Epizootics, and the International Maritime Organization are strengthened in order to effectively curtail introductions of invasive species via such major pathways as ballast water in ships, packaging material made of wood, and movement of living animals and plants. Further, these international standard-setting bodies should better incorporate precaution into their procedures.

The U.S. should recognize the expertise and authority of multilateral environmental agreements addressing trade-related aspects of invasive species. A number of environmental agreements, including the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance and the Montreal Protocol on Ozone-Depleting Chemicals, relate directly or indirectly to the movement or management of invasive species and should be referred to when developing relevant national measures and regulations.

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The U.S. should consider invasive species' movements, impacts, and standards for their regulation within the negotiation and implementation of bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements. The environmental reviews of trade negotiations conducted by the U.S. Trade Representative and other U.S. government agencies should address the most likely pathways for invasive species movement and consider potential cooperative mechanisms to regulate those pathways and to eradicate incipient invasions resulting from trade. Free trade agreements should also allow for precautionary action to prevent introductions and to protect the environment and public health.

The U.S. should ensure that international agreements do not compromise or lower environmental standards that relate to invasive species either in the U.S. or other countries. International agreements related to invasive species and trade should support improvements in and harmonization of national regulatory systems and of border requirements. The U.S. should support the efforts of both developed and developing nations to enforce and advance domestic invasive species standards in coordination with international standards.

The U.S. should undertake the steps set forth above in a manner that will take into account the needs and concerns of developing countries, to build support among those countries to address problems related to invasive species and trade. As part of this effort, the U.S. should work to establish a multilateral program of cooperation and capacity building on invasives and trade, including support for research and analysis, information exchange, education and training, and financial and technical assistance.