ALIEN INVADERS!
Some plants and animals don’t belong in our natural areas.

WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IF SOME POLAR BEARS got loose in Texas?
Sounds silly, but they wouldn’t live long unless we rounded them up and sent them back to the North Pole. But what if ants from South America crawled off a cargo ship along the Texas coast and easily found what they needed to survive? Year after year, they would reproduce and multiply. They might even attack Texas ants and reduce their numbers, kill baby animals of all kinds and sting humans repeatedly. Believe it or not, all that has actually happened. Today, biologists list the imported red fire ant among the state’s many “invasive” animals and plants. As you’ll learn, invasives hurt our natural world so we need to do what we can to keep them out of Texas!
**HABITAT HARM**

Along a river or in the desert, certain insects, birds, reptiles and other animals live among the grasses, plants and trees. Together, those plants and animals are considered to be “native” because they’ve lived in the same place long before humans arrived. But what happens if an invasive plant takes root? In West Texas after 1900, people planted a European tree called saltcedar along the Rio Grande River. They hoped the trees would keep their riverbanks from washing away. Instead, the saltcedars — which thrive and gradually grow out of control — used so much water from the river that, in later years, it went dry in places. Their thick branches also blocked the sun, killing native plants that grew nearby. Now, no one likes saltcedar.

**MOST UNWANTED ANIMALS**

FERAL HOG

NUTRIA

EUROPEAN STARLING

RED IMPORTED FIRE ANT

AFRICANIZED HONEYBEE

**MOST UNWANTED PLANTS**

WATER HYACINTH

SALTcedAR (IN BLOOM)

HYDRILLA

**HOW DO INVASIVES GET TO TEXAS?**

Just a few ways...

- Released by humans (invasive pets and vehicles)
- Released for hunting (invasive pets)
- Planted by homeowners in yards (invasive pets)
- Ships empty their ballast water (invasive pets)
- Increasing public awareness
- Experts are researching the problems
- Some plants and animals are legally banned

**ACTION PLAN**

What’s being done to stop invasives?

The costs to prevent, monitor and control invasives across the U.S. are $13 billion a year!

How many invasives are in Texas?

- 79 plants (includes 12 aquatic/wetland plants)
- 10 mammals
- 6 birds
- 7 fishes
- 11 insects
- 11 mollusks and crustaceans

Did you know?
**MOST UNWANTED ANIMALS**

Feral Hog
Nutria
European Starling
Red Imported Fire Ant
Africanized Honeybee

**MOST UNWANTED PLANTS**

Hydrilla
Water Hyacinth
Chinese Tallow
Saltcedar (in bloom)

**Did you know?**

How many invasives are in Texas?
- 79 plants (includes 12 aquatic/wetland plants)
- 10 mammals
- 4 birds
- 7 fishes
- 11 mollusks
- 11 crustaceans

**HABITAT HARM**

Along a river or in the desert, certain insects, birds, reptiles and other animals live among the grasses, plants and trees. Together, these plants and animals are considered to be “native” because they’ve lived in the same place long before humans arrived. But what happens if an invasive plant takes root? In West Texas after 1900, people planted a European tree called saltcedar along the Rio Grande River. They hoped the trees would keep their riverbanks from washing away. Instead, the saltcedars — which thrive and gradually grow out of control — used so much water from the river that, in later years, it went dry in places. Their thick branches also blocked the sun, killing native plants that grew nearby. Now, no one likes saltcedar!

**HOW DO INVASIVES GET TO TEXAS?**

Just a few ways...

- Released by humans (introduced species)
- Released for hunting (introduced species)
- Planted by homeowners in yards (introduced species)
- Ships empty their ballast water
- Increasing public awareness

**ACTION PLAN**

What’s being done to stop invasives?

- Some plants and animals are legally banned.
- Experts are researching the problems.
AFTER LEARNING HOW HURTFUL INVASIVE PLANTS CAN BE, several Austin 10th
graders decided to take action in 2006. Instead of sleeping late or playing video games on
a Saturday, they put on heavy gloves and removed as much bamboo as they could from
Bright Leaf Preserve, a 200-acre natural area not far from downtown Austin. A year or so
later, the concerned teens – led by 17-year-old Jordan Sessler – formed their own organiza-
tion called EcoTexas as a way to continue their fight against invasives in Texas. “Today,
after lots of hard work at Bright Leaf, we’ve restored three acres of native forest,” says Sessler,
who’s now a student at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. “By this year, we
will also finish removing all invasive plants on 60 acres at Zilker Preserve. Plus, we’ve
cleared invasives at dozens of other parks, too.” As if all that’s not enough, EcoTexans volun-
teers work to stop the spread of invasive plants by educating people. “For instance, 85 per-
cent of invasive plants are planted by people in their yards,” Jordan explains. “If we can just
keep getting the word out, then hopefully they’ll buy native Texas plants instead. We have
to protect our natural environment for the sake of our children and grandchildren.”

IN EAST TEXAS, many people are working hard to remove an invasive aquatic plant
called giant salvinia from Caddo Lake. If not controlled soon, this floating fern from South America could cover the entire lake and endanger the lake’s native fish, birds and wildlife. Imagine that you’re a biologist who wants to know how long it
will take giant salvinia to fill the lake. The first week, you see 2 acres of the plant.
Each week, the area doubles. So, the sec-
ond week, there are 4 acres (2 X 2). How
many acres of giant salvinia will there be in Week 37? Week 47? How far can you go?
Can you figure out how many weeks it will
take to fill a 10,000-acre lake?

NOT ALL NON-NATIVE PLANTS
are invasive. For instance, your
parents may grow crape myrtles
for their colorful blooms. Although
they’re not Texas natives, those
crape myrtles aren’t invasive
because they just won’t grow well
outside a tended yard. However,
you may have some invasive
plants in your yard. Look to see if
you any of these common ones. If
you do, ask your parents about
replacing them with the suggested
Texas natives.

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