

DRAFT

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA INVASIVE SPECIES COORDINATING COUNCIL

Coordinators

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Background

Introduced species provide significant benefits to society; however, some introduced species can become invasive. Recent estimates show that invasive species cost the United States nearly \$120 billion per year and put significant pressure on about 42% of threatened and endangered species (Pimental, et al. 2004¹). The costs and problems associated with invasive species impact almost all aspects of our society, including agriculture, horticulture, forestry, aquaculture, recreation, natural habitats and the environment. Invasive species represent a critical concern for Florida because this state "...rivals Hawaii,... in the magnitude of the threat from exotic species..." (Wilson 1997²).

Management of invasive species is increasing around the world, and most management plans list research, education and outreach, the three functions of a Land Grant and Sea Grant university, as key elements for success. In April 2005, an Invasive Species Summit explored the roles of the University of Florida in dealing with the invasive species issue. At the summit, it became evident that the University of Florida, especially IFAS and the Florida Sea Grant College Program, can contribute significantly to management of invasive species, but the university lacks the organization needed to address issues in a coordinated manner. The university has recently funded an institute dealing with emerging pathogens of animals, humans and plants in addition to programs or "centers" focusing on invasive plants, and high-profile pests of citrus. However, it is unlikely that these groups will address all of the significant issues surrounding invasive species. For example, there are no programs dealing specifically with invasive arthropods or vertebrates. In order to gather and apply the university's resources efficiently and effectively, we need improved communication, coordination, cooperation and collaboration.

Potential improvements

¹ Pimental, D., R. Zuniga and D. Morrison. 2004. Update on the environmental and economic costs associated with alien-invasive species in the United States. *Ecological Economics* 52: 273-288

² Wilson, E.O. 1997. Preface in Simberloff, D., D.C. Schmitz and T.C. Brown (eds.). *Strangers in paradise: impact and management of nonindigenous species in Florida*. Island Press, Washington, D.C. 468 pp.

Linking work on invasive species is likely to yield improvements. For example, we should:

- capture lessons learned and institutional memory, especially as key personnel retire;
- deliver consistent and accurate information, including balanced treatment of benefits and risks;
- use existing resources more efficiently and effectively by reducing unnecessary redundancy; and
- pursue new resources more coherently with inclusive priorities that target the “biggest bang for the buck.”

Organization

Extension, teaching and research efforts at the University of Florida are too large and complicated to incorporate into a single entity or program. Smaller sub-groups initially based on specific taxonomic or disciplinary expertise would bring an appropriate array of viewpoints to the table (Addendum 1).

These initial groups would not be exclusive, and others should participate once they are identified or express interest. Eventually, an Invasive Species Coordinating Council, comprising representatives from relevant sub-groups and IFAS administration, could guide and facilitate ongoing efforts.

Primary goals – communication, coordination, cooperation and collaboration

Efforts described here would not restrict or promote existing or planned work by individuals or groups. The primary goals are to enhance communication, coordination, cooperation and collaboration within the University of Florida and between the university and external stakeholders. For example, the Invasive Species Coordinating Council and associated sub-groups would strive to:

- increase communication among different disciplines and the three functions of the university by providing a platform for learning about others’ challenges and successes, striving for a synthetic understanding of invasive species and the invasion process, and cataloging and disseminating information about equipment, materials, skills and expertise;
- improve coordination by highlighting contradictory or unnecessarily redundant messages or actions, updating lists of species that are prohibited or not recommended, and publishing metadata, such as contacts, locations, timing and purposes, for experiments, training, educational events or other efforts;
- promote cooperation by providing a forum where groups can identify and contact others undertaking similar or complementary efforts; and
- facilitate collaboration by addressing issues that span or lie between disciplines and providing impetus for forming new groups and seeking new resources.

Next steps

As a voluntary, virtual organization, the Invasive Species Coordinating Council will succeed only if it provides value to those who participate. Although the concepts appear appealing, they must garner broad-based support. Therefore, we request support and assistance in:

- identifying interested parties;
- solidifying the purpose and function of the council with help from interested parties;
- growing and adapting the council and its efforts.