



CONSERVATION CORNER

A *weed* OR INVASIVE SPECIES?

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It is the responsibility of every hunter, angler, conservationist, landowner and land manager to do their part in helping to address the potentially devastating impacts invasive species have to our state's lakes, rivers and streams. Doing so starts with educating ourselves about invasive species.

One question often asked by landowners and managers is "What is the difference between a weed and an invasive plant species?" The answer can be fuzzy.

Weeds are defined in several ways. A weed is merely a plant growing where it is not wanted, or one that interferes with a landowner's management objective. While weeds are usually non-native species, some native plant species are regarded as weeds when they negatively impact a landowner's habitat management objectives. Weeds (whether introduced or native) are usually considered only a localized problem rather than a landscape-level ecological problem.

Invasive species are plants *not* native to the local area that quickly establish themselves. They become so wide-spread they disrupt the existing plant community by outcompeting native plants. A plant species is considered invasive if it is non-native to the ecosystem under consideration and likely to cause economic or environmental harm, or harm to human health.

These definitions can be confusing, since a non-native species may be considered invasive in one landscape and

not in another. Ultimately, whether a plant is considered a weed or an invasive species depends largely on human values. Let's look at an example: the eastern red cedar.

The eastern red cedar is a native tree to much of South Dakota, historically occurring in the Missouri River breaks, deep ravines or flood plains, but generally excluded from prairie areas by fire. Today, the tree is much more widespread and often used in shelterbelt and wildlife tree plantings across the state. With the absence of fire, the eastern red cedar has now found its way into many of South Dakota's remaining prairies. Its occurrence in prairies and rangelands is often viewed by landowners as being a weed – merely a plant growing where it is not wanted. In certain places however, the eastern red cedar is so widespread in rangelands it outcompetes the native prairie plants, causing it to be viewed as an invasive species.

Because they aggressively out-compete native species, invasive species are one of the most serious problems affecting wildlife habitat and native plant communities in South Dakota and throughout North America.

While controlling invasive plant species is both challenging and expensive, it is important to remember it is our collective responsibility as hunters, anglers, conservationists and landowners to do our part in helping curb the spread of invasive species in South Dakota's lands and waters. 

BEFORE

GFP's eastern red cedar control efforts on the Round-Bullhead Game Production Area in Deuel County.



AFTER

GFP's eastern red cedar control efforts on the Round-Bullhead Game Production Area in Deuel County.

