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AWARD RECIPIENTS PROVE ANYONE CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN OREGON’S INVASIVE SPECIES EFFORTS

SALEM, Oregon—It doesn’t matter whether you’re a student, state employee, teacher, law enforcement officer, or journalist—armed with knowledge, anyone can stop the spread of invasive species in Oregon.

Each year, the Oregon Invasive Species Council gives awards to people whose individual efforts protect Oregon’s natural resources, economy, and quality of life from the devastating effects of invasive species.

“We look past Oregon’s borders and see states that have lost or are losing the fight against invasive species,” said Oregon Invasive Species Council Chair Mark Sytsma. “But in Oregon, we still have a chance to be proactive, to protect Oregon’s natural ecosystems, our economy, and quality of life.”

The 2007 award winners were recognized at a February 5 awards luncheon, which included guest speaker Dr. Robert Faust, who described the tremendous loss of habitat in Hawaii and the major changes in Hawaii’s natural systems because of invasive species such as Coqui frogs, Christmas berry, and rats. The main point of his talk was that people’s actions can prevent invasive species.

The Oregon Invasive Species Council awarded the following:

The Eagle Eye Award is presented for reporting the most important sighting of an invasive species. Dan Van Dyke of the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife received the award for spotting a house boat from Missouri being towed on I-5 near Medford, Oregon. As a result of his actions, the boat was stopped in Washington, inspected, and found to have zebra mussels attached. Zebra mussels are native to the Caspian Sea, entered the Great Lakes in the mid-1980s...
in ship ballast water, and have since spread to more than 20 states and two Canadian provinces. Because the mussels can live out of water for up to four weeks, they easily hitch a ride on boats and trailers. Once introduced, they smother other species by quickly multiplying, clogging water-intakes at power plants and irrigation systems, and outcompeting native fish and wildlife.

Honorable Mention Eagle Eye Awards were given to Dan Stoner of the Oregon Department of Agriculture for finding the source of a gypsy moth infestation in Shady Cover, and Todd Pheiffer of Klamath County Public Works, for finding both Taurian thistle, a new state record, and Plumeless Thistle, a new county record, in Klamath County.

Gypsy moths are native to Europe and Asia, but once introduced to the United States in the late 1890s, their populations erupted in forests, defoliating millions of acres of trees and shrubs in the northeastern United States. Since the late 1970s, small isolated populations of this insect have been detected and eradicated in Oregon. Continued vigilance will keep this invader from defoliating Oregon’s forests.

The Sandra Denyes Diedrich Award is given for making the most outstanding contribution to protecting Oregon from invasive species. It was presented to environmental reporter Beth Casper and editor Michelle Maxwell of the Statesman Journal, for development of a comprehensive and effective education series on the environmental and financial effects of invasive species in Oregon (see http://www.statesmanjournal.com), and Jeff Douglas and Ed Jahn of Oregon Public Broadcasting (http://www.opb.org), for dedicating substantial staff resources to partner, plan, and launch on Earth Day, April 22, 2008, a statewide invasive species awareness and engagement campaign.

Honorable Mention for the Sandra Denyes Diedrich Award was presented to Thea Hayes, a teacher at Binnsmead Middle School, for successfully incorporating student learning and stewardship projects on invasive species as a standard part of student inquiry education.

The 10 Fingers in the Dike Award is presented for going above and beyond the call of duty to keep new invaders out of Oregon. This years’ recipient was Deputy Dave Johnson, a marine law enforcement officer with Umatilla County, for being active in boating education and checking zealously for invasive species on boats. Honorable Mention in this award category was given to Stephen Phillips of the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission, for successful coordination and facilitation of training on rapid response and incident command should Quagga mussels be detected in Oregon and Washington. Similar to zebra mussels, Quagga mussels are native to the Caspian Sea, clog water intake pipes and underwater screens, and build up on boat docks, boats, and beaches. They eat the food source of fish and can change the food web in a lake, discharging phosphorus with their waste. To prevent the spread of this devastating non-native species, boat owners should inspect and remove aquatic plants, animals, and mud, and drain all water from their boat and equipment before leaving a boat launch; throw away unwanted bait in the trash; and spray and rinse the boat and equipment with a high pressure washer and/or hot tap water, especially if the boat has been moored for more than one day.

The Invader Crusader Award is presented for making a difference in protecting Oregon from invasive species, and was given to Gwenn Kubeck, an Oregon State University graduate student,
for developing and leading focus groups with Oregon Invasive Species Council stakeholders on their understanding of invasive species, and for obtaining baseline results for use before the launch of the statewide invasive species awareness campaign on April 22, 2008. Gwenn is supported by the Oregon Sea Grant program at Oregon State University (OSU). Sea Grant is a permanent member of the council. Honorable Mention for this award was given to Trevor Sheffels, a Portland State University, Center for Lakes and Reservoirs graduate student for increasing public knowledge of nutria populations, damage, and issues in Oregon, through research, seminars, and tours. The nutria is a large, herbivorous, semi-aquatic rodent native to temperate South America. Burrowing and feeding activities are destructive to wetlands and levees.

The Oregon Invasive Species Council was established by the Oregon Legislature in 2002. Its mission is to conduct a coordinated and comprehensive effort to keep invasive species out of Oregon and to eliminate, reduce, or mitigate the impacts of invasive species already established in Oregon. Current members of the council hail from the Oregon Association of Nurseries, Oregon Marine Board, Bureau of Indian Affairs, USDA Forest Service, The Nature Conservancy, Gilliam County Weed Department, Whiskey Creek Shellfish Hatchery, and Port of Portland. In addition, agency representatives include Center for Lakes and Reservoirs at Portland State University, Oregon Department of Forestry, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Sea Grant at Oregon State University, and Oregon Department of Agriculture.

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