

## Headin' On Out to the Great Outdoors

Summer is finally here and outdoor enthusiasts are gearing up to head out into the Lillooet region to get exploring. We are extremely fortunate to live in an area with so much access to wild and wonderful places for outdoor recreation. This incredible area is a treasure trove for hikers; mountain bikers; fishers; backcountry horseback riders; ATV and motorbike riders, and hunters. Sadly, all of this outdoor adventure can come with a heavy price when it comes to the introduction and spread of invasive species.



Invasive species are non-native plants that have been introduced, either intentionally or by accident. They arrived without the natural controls that would keep them in check in their own countries, giving them an advantage over native species in BC. Invasive species can be highly destructive, difficult to control, can degrade wildlife habitat and can limit future access to some recreational opportunities.

There are numerous ways outdoor activities can be responsible for the spread of invasives. Plants and seeds can get caught in tire treads; in the undercarriage and suspension of ATVs, dirt bikes and 4x4s; in bicycle tires and frames; in boot treads, clothing and other hiking equipment, and on pets. Once plant material and/or seeds are picked up in these ways, they can be carried long distances before being dropped off to start new infestations. Often, off-road vehicle use as well as side skidding, excessive braking and riding at high speeds on bikes will cause soil erosion and compaction, creating conditions that are ideal for invasive plant seeds to germinate and grow. Also, boats can easily pick up aquatic invasive plants and animals from infested waters and introduce them into untouched waters further away.

Invasives have numerous impacts on our natural systems. Invasives can:

- Reduce available forage for ungulates
- Interfere with fish habitat
- Increase fire hazard
- Increase erosion and sedimentation
- Interfere with forest regeneration
- Decrease property values
- Reduce crop quality and yield
- Reduce the aesthetics of an enjoyable environment

The good news is that there are ways outdoor enthusiasts can help reduce the introduction and spread of invasives in our natural environments. Prevention is the best solution! One of the most effective ways to manage invasive species is to "Take

Action and Get Involved'. The following are the best management practices outdoor recreationalists can use to help do their part:

- Learn to identify invasive plants
- Check your boots, clothing, gear, pets and bikes for invasive plant fragments and seeds: remove plants, animals and mud and place into a garbage bin or bag and properly dispose of later.
- Clean your gear before and after entering a recreation site
- When horseback riding, use weed-free or certified hay. When using hay for other purposes and weed-free hay is not available, use straw because it is less likely to carry weed seeds.
- Use local firewood.
- Stay on existing and designated roads and trails and avoid crossing weed infested areas when walking, hiking, running, biking, riding your horse or off-road vehicle.
- Regularly inspect and wash the undercarriage of vehicles, ATV's, dirt bikes and 4x4's to reduce accidental introductions. Inspect and remove plant fragments from sleds.
- Control your bike to prevent soil compaction and erosion
- If new trails are created, whenever possible make use of previously disturbed areas such as old roads, skid trails or game and livestock tracks.
- Avoid using parking and staging areas with weed infestations.
- Inspect and remove aquatic plant fragments from your boat and trailer before launching and after leaving the water. Avoid operating boats near infestations of aquatic weeds, particularly Eurasian watermilfoil.
- Report isolated infestations to Lillooet Regional Invasive Species Society (LRISS)

LRISS has partnered with an amazing education and outreach campaign called PlayCleanGo. This is a great program with messaging to 'Stop Invasive Species in Your Tracks' and 'Give Invasives the Brush-off' to recreationalists. The objective is to slow or stop the spread of terrestrial invasive species through changes in public behavior. This program promotes awareness, understanding and cooperation by providing a clear call to action to be informed, attentive and accountable for stopping the spread of terrestrial invasive species. More information about this program can be found at [PlayCleanGo.org](http://PlayCleanGo.org). LRISS has posted educational signs at various trailheads in the region with similar messaging for recreationalists to gain awareness and take responsibility of their actions.

