

News from the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services



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Pepperweed Patrol Preventing Northward Spread of Invasive Plant

Portsmouth, NH - The New Hampshire Coastal Program at the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services in partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has developed an innovative program designed to stop the spread of an invasive plant, perennial pepperweed (*Lepidium latifolium*), at the Massachusetts-New Hampshire border.

Perennial pepperweed is an aggressive non-native species in New England and poses a significant threat to habitat quality. Once a population is established, pepperweed creates dense, single-species stands, out-competing local fauna. These stands are also notorious for being poor habitat for native birds and mammals. Additionally, pepperweed has been a major agricultural nuisance in the western U.S. for decades.

In the last decade, pepperweed has been found in salt marsh edges, along roadsides, and in drainage ditches in Newburyport, Massachusetts and the islands of Boston Harbor, and is spreading northward. Isolated populations have been located along the New Hampshire coast, but there is no knowledge of the presence of pepperweed in Maine. The goal of the Pepperweed Patrol Program is to prevent the northward encroachment of this non-native plant, limit its current geographic range and to preserve the New England coastal ecosystem.

The Pepperweed Patrol Program is working to prevent massive infestations by mobilizing an early detection-rapid response strategy, finding and removing small populations before they are allowed to grow. This summer, staff and volunteers identified two populations along the New Hampshire coast, one at Odiorne State Park in Rye and one at the Hampton Transfer station in Hampton. Volunteer weed pulls were organized to remove the populations.

“Unlike programs that address invasive populations once they have become a problem, this initiative is proactive in the fight against the habitat destruction that could result due to this invasive plant. Hopefully this will allow us to catch pepperweed before it becomes a problem,” said Pepperweed Patrol Coordinator Catherine Foley.

Residents of the New Hampshire Seacoast are asked to be on the lookout for the plant. In July, the N.H. Coastal Program held identification trainings to aid locals in recognizing the plant, and has identification guides available.

The mature plant can reach up to 4 feet in height with a smooth, fleshy stem. The leaves are alternate; one leaf grows from each point along the stem, alternating the side of the stem it grows from. Pepperweed flowers in July, producing small white flowers in dense clusters. After it goes to seed in late July and early August, its flowers brown and wither. Through the fall, watch for dense stands of 3 to 4 foot tall plants with dry, brittle clusters at the end of dry stalks. In the winter look for stands of tall, brittle, grayish sticks standing approximately 3 feet high.

For more information on this destructive plant, find our fact sheet online at www.des.nh.gov/factsheets/cp/cp-22.html. If you would like more information on the Pepperweed Patrol

Program or to report a sighting please call the N.H. Coastal Program at 559-1500 or email at coastalprogram@des.nh.gov.

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