

## Focus on Conservation

Steve Foltz  
Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden  
IPPS 2015 Cincinnati OH

There is a lot of talk lately on invasive plants. Maybe not so much on the homeowner level but in the land management and natural resources areas there is a lot to discuss. Every State has set up invasive plant committees and councils. These generally are led by the people that are most affected by invasive plants. Usually the nursery industry is represented but they are not the majority. This has led to a lot of mistrust and angst between environmental groups and the nursery industry. That has led to more University researchers in Biology, Environmental Sciences and Horticulture doing more studies on invasive plants. It looks like this trend of studying invasive plants will continue to grow in the coming years. USDA-APHIS has spent much time researching invasive plants and doing their best to try and figure out what might be the next big invasive plant threat. State regulators are now getting into the mix discussing how to regulate plants on a statewide level. With such a wide range of groups looking into how to handle the invasive plants issue we thought it would be time to bring this topic up at the IPPSER.

The goal of the meeting was to bring in leading researchers in the field of invasive plants to give a snapshot of where all of this is going and what that means to the members of IPPS. Mike Yanny from JN Plant Selections and long time member of IPPS started the day off with a great talk on “Where Ecology meets Economy”. This set the tone of the day on how we all can work together on this issue facing our industry. Theresa Culley from the University of Cincinnati followed this with a presentation on the science behind protocols for assessing invasive plants. The approach of using science based research that is transparent and collaborative with all invested parties is a good place to start in determining whether a plant is invasive or not. This also led to the conversation of how to assess cultivars of invasive plants and cultivars of plants in general. The next item on the agenda was focusing on how the states of Wisconsin and Oregon were approaching regulation of nursery plants. Kelly Kearns from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and Gary McAninch from the Oregon Department of Agriculture shared their approaches to regulation. It was very interesting to see the different approaches of the Departments of Agriculture vs. Natural Resources.

Mark Brand from the University of Connecticut shared his research on sterile cultivars (or close to it) looking at whether this was a viable option for invasive plant breeding to take on. This was followed by Kay Havens from the Chicago Botanic Garden with a presentation of her research with “Consequences of Fecundity Reduction in Cultivars of Invasive Plants”. The purpose of these talks back to back was to see the possibilities of breeding for sterility in invasive plants and what consequences that may have. Is this an option to remove some of the “bad actors” in the industry in a timelier manner by having replacements that are less likely to cause harm? The idea is a good one although more research is needed in this area. Deah Lieurance, University of Florida, presented on how the University has gone to pretesting potential plants they may introduce for invasiveness. This may also be of interest to plant breeding or nurseries selecting plants to move into the market.

After lunch a short survey was conducted by Mark Renz, Extension Weed Specialist of the University of Wisconsin and President of the Midwest Invasive Plant Network (MIPN). A question/answer period followed in which there were some lively conversations. This was followed by a presentation from Bill Hendricks, President of Klyn Nurseries in Perry Ohio. Bill spoke on his efforts to increase the diversity and availability of Native Woody Plants to the nursery industry. What Bill has done in this area is a model for how the nursery industry can bridge the gap with the conservation community.

The final presentation was by John Clark, Executive Director of the Center for Plant Conservation (CPC). John spoke on how the nursery industry can help in the conservation of threatened and endangered species. This takes us full circle in our journey to “Focus on Conservation”. By reducing the threat of invasive ornamental plants in our industry, diversifying and making great plants available to the industry and propagating threatened and endangered species IPPSER has a lot of impact on plant conservation.

Plant propagators are the most uniquely qualified group of individuals who can have the most impact in the propagation and production of threatened and endangered plants. The question is can the conservation community and the International Plant Propagators Society work together on saving threatened and endangered plants throughout the United States and throughout the world? Is that or should that be a goal of the society? If it is, how can we make this happen?