

The National Association of Exotic Pest Plant Councils (NAEPPC): PAST AND PRESENT

by Brian Bowen – SE-EPPC liaison to NAEPPC

It was October 1995 when several Exotic Pest Plant Council (EPPC) officers representing Florida, Tennessee, California, and the Pacific Northwest, the only four EPPCs at the time, met at Asilomar, California to consider starting a national organization of EPPCs. The meeting lasted the better part of two days and from it came a Memorandum of Understanding announcing an agreement to form the National Association of EPPC. It was fondly referred to as the “Asilomar Accord” by its charter members.

A purpose of the fledgling organization was to address issues of national importance related to federal invasive plant policies that state or regional EPPC might not otherwise be attuned to, since national issues are broader in scope than what EPPCs might be working on within their own political boundaries. Another purpose was to bring the EPPCs together in an effort to speak as one voice and bring attention to a cause that had been woefully ignored at the national level.

Keep in mind this start-up occurred well before the Federal Executive Order was signed by President Clinton (1999) and at a time when there was little advocacy concerning invasive plants. NAEPPC began with great hope and aspiration, and even hired a part-time director to lobby in DC (which only lasted a short while). But since its inception, it has evolved slowly, coinciding with the formation of new organizations. Its activity level has progressed with the participation of members from these nascent groups.

Since 1995, the National Association of EPPCs has grown to include 20 state or regional Exotic Pest Plant Councils and Invasive Plant Councils. The “Asilomar Accord” identified several goals. Two of them were: 1) to help facilitate the formation of new EPPCs, and 2) to help increase membership. Most of this growth happened because key individuals in various states and regions organized their own non-profit organizations; however during this time, NAEPPC also created a network for communication which facilitated this activity.

NAEPPC represents its member organizations as one voice which is heard by federal agencies and legislatures. EPPC organizations participate in NAEPPC via the internet, conference calls, e-mails, and an occasional face-to-face meeting. Bylaws provide for elected officers and an executive committee, which handles the coordination of the organization’s affairs. Voting or consensus on proposed NAEPPC positions takes place primarily online by use of a dedicated board of directors’ listserv or, in some instances, by conference calls.

The board of directors is comprised of a president (or chair) from each of the 20 member organizations, and the NAEPPC officers: a president, vice president, treasurer and secretary. By intent, NAEPPC attempts to minimize its member’s involvement to essential concerns since everyone’s time is extremely valuable and limited. Face-to-face organization meetings tend to occur once or twice per year, most always in conjunction with the Natural Areas Conference in the fall, and occasionally in Washington, DC in conjunction with National Invasive Species Awareness Week in late February.

Action items are presented to the board using a listserv. A proposed bill, documentation explaining the bill, and related source information is provided. The Executive Committee offers the board a written position response. If agreed to, a letter writing campaign and phone calls follow. Other non-legislative initiatives are approved by the board using a similar process. Conference calls may occur when issues are complex or significant matters of concern require discussion.

NAEPPC positions and activities are posted at <http://www.naeppc.org/>. The website provides a national map showing EPPC locations, a list of member EPPCs, and information about each organization and their activities. The website also serves as a contact hub for multi-agency state invasive species councils; Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs) and Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMAs); and other partnerships based on the collaborative management of invasive plants. A goal is to provide a strong communication network through the website between the many groups working on invasive species issues.

NAEPPC is currently publishing *Policy Notes* on the website, a monthly summary of activities provided by Janet Clark who serves as policy liaison for NAEPPC in a part-time term position. Funding for the position was received from the Union of Concerned Scientists and became available through NAEPPC’s membership in the National Environmental Coalition on Invasive Species (NECIS).

The policy liaison keeps NAEPPC informed about legislative policy (i.e. Q - 37, the Reid Bill, etc.) while communicating NAEPPC’s positions to agencies, NGOs, legislators, and others involved in invasive plant issues. This includes coordinating advocacy with NECIS and others, while assisting NAEPPC with organizing its members and other grassroots organizations to advocate for funding of on-the-ground projects and sensible regulations.



Janet's work also includes outreach and networking with the many like-minded organizations that support invasive species issues. She is a member of the Invasive Species Advisory Committee (ISAC) to the National Invasive Species Council (NISC), and was involved in organizing this year's National Invasive Species Awareness Week (NISAW) in which many NAEPPC members participated by leading workshops and as panel members.

The NISAW event in Washington, DC has expanded from what was once National Invasive Weeds Awareness Week, to what is now an "all taxa" event. The 2011 event was a mix of workshops with presentations and panels, luncheons with speakers, meetings, and federal agency forums. Members of the NAEPPC Executive Committee were leaders in the following workshops: Elements of Effective State and Regional Coordination; Strengthening Grassroots Partnerships; and the Regional and State Early Detection Networks. While NAEPPC did not meet as an organization at NISAW this year, its executive committee met with many key DC staff and agency leaders.

Networking with key partners is particularly important to establish working relationships with organizations and groups who are involved with invasive species at the national level. NAEPPC continues to participate in NECIS and has recently signed a MOU with the National Network of Invasive Plant Centers (NNIPC). The NNIPC agreement recognizes the similar interests both organizations share, and agrees to collaborate as partners to advance these

interests. NAEPPC also has a similar agreement with the Natural Areas Association which was signed in 2003. This agreement has led to participation in the annual NAA Conference and an opportunity for the NAEPPC board to hold meetings at these conferences.

This year, NAEPPC and NAA have entered into a MOA specific to collaborating as partners at the 38th Annual Natural Areas Conference in Tallahassee, Florida. This recognizes NAEPPC as a co-host and enables NAEPPC to organize the invasive species program at the conference. NAEPPC has been involved in this capacity in past NAA conferences and played a significant role in organizing the Nashville conference in 2008. The agreement provides a formal framework for this partnership. This year's NAA Conference will have a strong EPPC presence November 1-4 in Tallahassee..

These agreements and our participation with other organizations advances NAEPPC involvement in national issues and provides opportunities to interact with organizations that help us form coalitions to inform policy. NAEPPC will continue to evolve and its success will depend on the member organizations and their continued participation in advancing the EPPC cause at the national level. We will continue to speak with one voice on this issue.

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