

Strategy to Partner with the Horticulture and Landscape Professions to Implement Voluntary Codes of Conduct

Steps to Engage the Horticulture and
Landscape Businesses in Testing the
Voluntary Codes of Conduct

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Overview

Nurseries, landscape architects and installers, government agencies, and the gardening public were invited to attend the “Linking Ecology & Horticulture to Prevent Plant Invasions” workshop held at the Missouri Botanical Gardens in October of 2001 (to view the proceedings go to: <http://www.centerforplantconservation.org/invasives>). A set of Findings and Principles aimed at the issue of invasive plants were developed. These Findings, collectively called the St. Louis Declaration, describe agreed upon truths related to invasive plants. At the end of the workshop, each interest group drafted a set of codes that could be voluntarily implemented by their constituency. These codes are guidelines to establish work practices that will effectively reduce or eliminate the introduction of invasive plant species.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC), in conjunction with the Missouri Botanical Garden, has established a program that will focus on recruiting businesses to test implement the Voluntary Codes of Conduct (VCC). As part of The Nature Conservancy’s Invasive Species Initiative, the Horticulture and Landscape Professions Liaison will work directly with the horticulture and landscape industry to help set up test sites and record the results of the implementation. The overall project will include three major steps:

1. Recruiting nurseries, growers, landscape architects and landscape installation firms to implement and test the VCC in their business practices.
2. Working with horticulture and landscape professionals to provide materials that will support implementation of the VCC; including customer information brochures and non-invasive alternative species lists,
3. Monitoring progress, problems and successes of the firms that implement the VCC and reporting the results.

An additional outcome from this process will be improved communication between the conservation community, botanical gardens and the horticulture industry. This will occur through the regularly scheduled conference calls and information posted on the Invasive Species Initiative web site.

The Plan

Criteria are being developed to be used as a guideline for determining several focus regions within the U.S. to recruit VCC implementation test participants. Among the factors that will be considered are high biodiversity, known threat to biodiversity from horticultural species that have become invasive, and interest from regional horticulture and landscape firms. Focus regions will be selected to provide sampling of different areas in the nation that will complement but not overlap with allied efforts being pursued by other organizations such as Sustainable Conservation (in California) and the University of Washington (in Washington).

Participating businesses will be monitored to assess the impacts the implementation has on their business and whether their actions result in an observable reduction in distribution and use of invasive species. Ultimately, we hope to directly measure whether such reductions translate into decreased threats to biological diversity in conservation areas.

Ideally, potential participants will be clustered in the selected focus regions and will have a working relationship with each other. For instance they may be members of a supply chain, businesses from the growers to retail nursery to landscape architect to the landscape installation firm. Knowing that there are other businesses participating in the region, especially ones that work together, may help provide incentive and/or reduce the perception of risk.

Initially, a few horticulture industry individuals will be contacted and interviewed to help draft a thoughtful informational piece that contains answers to anticipated questions from the industry and other materials that businesses may request. They will also help with the development of target species and horticultural alternatives.

Face to face meetings will then begin in the focus regions with potential industry participants. The ultimate goal of these interviews and is to recruit 15 nursery/growers businesses and 15 landscape architect/contractor businesses. The Horticulture Liaison will work with these businesses to implement the VCC and monitor their progress.





















In addition, botanical garden staff, master gardeners, university extension specialists and native plant society members will be contacted to provide lists of alternative non-invasive plants for their region. Two to four total alternatives would be ideal for each invasive on the list, preferably with at least one native plant and one non-native plant alternative for each invader. Information on where to purchase these plants will also be compiled to make it easy for businesses and customers to contact them.

Before the program begins, survey questions will be developed that will help analyze the process and the success of this program. This survey will provide information on the participants' attitudes towards this program and how it can be improved. The University of Oregon's Survey Research Laboratory Department has submitted a proposal to develop, collect, monitor and analyze the statistics for this survey. The questions and the process will be reviewed and refined with the help of the horticulture business contacts.

Once the program components are in place, potential participants will be contacted to start implementing the VCC test program. Participants will be invited to join in on regularly scheduled conference calls, enabling all parties to share their experiences. This regular communication with all participants will greatly help to fine tune the process.

Another avenue for communication will be through TNC's Invasive Species Initiative web page. All interested parties will be able to check for updates on progress and any other topics related to the horticulture industry. A formal report will be written at the end of the process to summarize the program and results. These results will help to modify the VCC to fit the needs of specific horticultural industry businesses and illuminate the best process for implementing this strategy on a greater scale.

Task Timeline

TASK	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Check with TNC or other GIS staff to determine biodiversity rankings and development threats.											
Call State TNC programs to gather contact info for potential participants											
Meet with key industry representatives to work out issues and gather information for VCC marketing package											
Develop VCC marketing package for VCC participants											
Talk with Native Plant societies to gather lists of regional native plant alternatives											
Develop list of horticultural alternative plants											
Develop list of target regional invasive species											
Meet with TNC staff at their site to recruit											
Finalize industry survey (Univ of Oregon)											
Start implementing VCC											
Hold industry conference calls to share progress on VCC											
Put together a web page for involved TNC staff to share info on horticulture industry progress						