

Treeways

2018 – 4

Invasive Species Reality Check

All invasive and alien species are bad and must be eliminated! A simple concept. A simple plan.

The reality is that the numbers of invasive and alien species is increasing and many are here to stay.

Kentucky bluegrass is not from Kentucky and it is not native and it is invasive. Are we going to eliminate Kentucky bluegrass from our lawns and cities? No. Corn is from Central America; apples, pears, and most plums are from Europe and Asia; Wheat, barley and oats were first introduced by European invaders (colonists). Along with these utilitarian crops came their associated weeds and other pests. Honeybees are necessary for our food supply but they did not originate from around here (not even in the Americas!)

Invasive and alien species ... a simple concept but a much more complicated and nuanced reality. Buckthorn is a terrific hedge shrub and was introduced as such. Buckthorn in all its forms and species, once it begins producing fruit, is nearly unstoppable in its rampage through our woodlands. Asian species of honeysuckle are also good hedge shrubs, have pretty flowers, and produce many small fruits that birds eat like buckthorn fruit and then spread the seeds everywhere. Honeysuckle is just as bad as buckthorn at suppressing native woodland species. When you aggressively manage buckthorn and honeysuckle the next invasive invaders are already there – garlic mustard and burdock and thistles and spotted knapweed and wild parsnip. How can we win?

If winning against invasive species means eliminating them completely then we cannot win.

If managing them at a reasonable level is success, then we can succeed! All invasive species have weaker links in their life cycles. All invasive species can be suppressed and desirable natives can be encouraged. This is success and this is a long-term management approach that entails encouraging species diversity. Maximum species diversity normally means maximum ecosystem resilience.

In our semi-rural city, maximum environmental species diversity will give us maximum long-term sustainability. Changes will occur and still Sunfish Lake will continue to be ecologically much the same place that it was when it first became a city. That is success for our generation and the next.

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