

Environmental Resilience Institute

Knox County, Indiana Bans the Distribution of 64 Invasive Plants

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Note: there are some PDF documents on this page of the ordinance and rulemaking that might be inaccessible to some screen readers. For an accessible document, contact eri@iu.edu or 812-855-8539.

Project Summary

Local organizations in Knox County, Indiana, campaigned to raise awareness of the environmental and economic destruction that encroaching invasive species can have on communities. Representatives from the agriculture, horticulture and landscaping industries collaborated with conservation experts and the county attorney to determine the scope of an ordinance proposal that would ban 64 invasive plant species in the county. County commissioners unanimously passed the ordinance in August 2018.



Wintercreeper (*Euonymus fortunei*) is covering the ground and climbing the trees with Burning Bush (*Euonymus alatus*) in the shrub layer. Both of these commonly sold species are prohibited with the new Knox County ordinance. Photo courtesy of Will Drews

How did they do it?

Action	Applicable Resources
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Action

Applicable Resources

Collect information from residents on local issues

- Local organizations launched a campaign to ban the sale of specific invasive species in Knox County while working with Knox County Commissioners.
- Southern Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management [<http://www.sicim.info/>](http://www.sicim.info/) looks for ways to limit the growing economic and environmental damage resulting from invasive species by sharing information, people and other resources.

Collect assessment data and conduct educational outreach

- The County conducted an economic assessment of invasive species damage.
- Southern Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management organized working group to create ordinance and invasive species board.
- Indiana Invasive Species Council [<https://www.entm.purdue.edu/iisc/plantcommittee.php>](https://www.entm.purdue.edu/iisc/plantcommittee.php) was created to work on invasive plant projects such as creating an invasive plant list for Indiana, developing best management practices (BMPs) and coordinating invasive plant educational materials.

Action

Applicable Resources

Adopt ordinance and implement new regulations

- The County hosted community engagement opportunities to train community members on invasive species.
- The County hired an invasive species specialist to implement ordinance once passed.
- This provides an outline of the [Knox County Invasive Plant Ordinance](http://knoxcountyswcd.com/kccisma/knox-county-invasive-plant-ordinance/) and includes a copy of it.

Background

Residents of Knox County, Indiana, noticed an increased presence of invasive plants, which replace native species habitat. In one example, residents were increasingly spotting non-native Japanese honeysuckle growing in ditches and near waterways, areas where local residents could historically forage for wild morel mushrooms. Many residents continued to plant invasive plants and trees despite their negative impact.

Southern Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management <<http://www.sicim.info/>> , a non-profit organization operating chapters throughout Indiana, and the Knox County Soil and Water Conservation District <<https://knoxcountyswcd.com/>> sought to halt the commercial distribution of invasive plants. Together, the organizations launched a campaign to ban the sale of specific invasive species in Knox County, while working with Knox County Commissioners.

Why plant and preserve native plant species?

Non-native, or "invasive" species, can cause or contribute to the decline of native species classified as endangered or threatened. Invasive species often compete with surrounding plants, and invasives with aggressive roots systems and large seed production rates allow them to crowd-out native vegetation. Native plant species support pollination by attracting native pollinators such as bees; provide habitat for native animals and insect species; and preserve biodiversity, yielding wider varieties of plants, birds, butterflies and animals, essential components of a healthy and balanced ecosystem. [Learn more about invasive plants](https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/invasive-species) <<https://www.fs.usda.gov/managing-land/invasive-species>> on the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service website.

Implementation

Will Drews, a member of the Cooperative and the Conservation District, conducted a comprehensive, data-based economic analysis on the environmental damage invasive species had caused in Knox County, such as the cost of destruction to County drainage ditches. Knox County Commissioners, the Soil and Water Conservation District and the county attorney used this analysis when considering a ban on medium- and high-impact invasive plants.

Local business owners had questions about the ban that helped the ordinance supporters realize the importance of including plant distributors in the planning process. In response, Drews organized a working group comprised of conservation experts, county council members and landscape professionals who drafted the ban's scope. With the help of the working group's input, Drews and the county attorney drafted the ordinance.

Prior to and during the time that the ordinance was under development, Southern Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management hosted native plant sales at the farmers market and distributed literature to the public and to agriculture, horticulture and landscape businesses. The Cooperative also initiated peer-to-peer conversations within the community and hosted “work days” to train community members to identify and manage invasive plants. These outreach and education efforts were advantageous during the ordinance-drafting process because community members came to the table already knowledgeable about the costs to the community caused by the spread of invasive plants.

The Knox County Commissioners unanimously approved the ordinance on August 7, 2018, with an effective date of January 1, 2020. The Knox County Invasive Species Board, comprised of five members, was established to oversee the ban. Board members are appointed by Knox County Commissioners with three-year staggered appointments and must always include representatives from the local agriculture, horticulture and landscaping industries. When the ordinance goes into effect, the County will hire a natural resource specialist to enforce the ordinance.

The Ordinance

Ordinance Number 11-2018: An Ordinance Prohibiting the Sale of Certain Invasive Plant Species (Not Seeds) in Knox County, Indiana <http://knoxcountyswcd.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Ordinance-Knox-County-11-2018_Signed.pdf>, prohibits 64 plants from being sold, traded or transported to Knox County. The ban extends to chain stores, nurseries, grocery stores, farmers, landscapers and all other vendors. The ordinance does not pertain to plants already planted, but is retroactive to the date the ban goes into effect—January 1, 2020. If a vendor is found to be in violation of the ban, they may be penalized \$2,500 for the first violation and \$7,500 for additional violations. Vendors found in violation of the ban may request a judicial review to be held in Superior Court 2.

Funding

No funding was required to pass the ordinance, apart from staff time. The attorney for the County Commissioners estimated fees in the amount of approximately \$10,000 for the time she spent working on the ordinance. The attorney is paid from the County's budget.

Funding for a natural resource specialist will be located in 2019 when the County facilitates the next budget cycle.

Timeline

From the initial conversations about banning invasive plants until the invasive ordinance passed in August 2018 took approximately six months.

Outcomes and Conclusions

The ordinance was relatively easy to pass because very few nurseries exist in Knox County, and local horticulture retailers receive stock from distributors outside the county. The retailers could simply switch their supply by ordering different stock. There was no need to make sweeping changes to existing businesses' operations or risk losses on unsellable stock, especially since the retailers had seventeen months to sell any existing banned plant stock and switch to alternative commodities. Many community members attended the County Council meeting when the invasive plant ban passed, applauding the ban's approval. The attendance and positive response may have been a result of Southern Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management's public outreach and education campaigns. Drews stated that most effective form of outreach was one-on-one and peer-to-peer education throughout the community.

Since the Invasive Species Ordinance took effect on January 1, 2020, it has prevented nearly 900 invasive plants from being distributed in Knox County, according to Drews. While the ordinance was initially met with some resistance, Drews observed increased cooperation throughout the year and believes that it should only get easier in the upcoming year. The greatest obstacle in the first year was the fact that plants can have many common names, which makes it difficult for garden managers without a horticultural background to identify invasive plants as distributors can use different names. To mitigate this confusion, the Invasive Species Board is considering developing online training materials to improve the information about invasive species.

In January 2019, Indiana's Natural Resources Commission adopted a rule that "prohibit[s] and restrict[s] the sale, distribution and transport" of 44 invasive terrestrial plants <https://www.in.gov/dnr/rules-and-regulations/invasive-species/terrestrial-invasive-species-plants/> . Similar to the Knox County ordinance, the state ban is being implemented in stages.

Challenges

One proprietor had concerns about how the ban would affect his business. This pushback indicated to the ban's proponents the importance of appointing members to the Knox County Invasive Species Board that represented local landscaping, agriculture and horticulture businesses. Proponents understood the importance of their proactive outreach to industry, as well.

Will Drews gave this advice:

"If I had to do it all over again, I would make an even greater effort to notify more of the business owners before we proposed the ordinance to secure more buy-in. It may have made the process smoother during the first few ordinance readings if we had established better partnerships earlier on. Altogether, everything went surprisingly well. We expected more pushback than we received."

Project Resources

- Review other details related to Knox County's invasive species ban and related documents on the Knox County Soil Conservation District's Knox County Invasive Plant Ordinance webpage <<http://knoxcountyswcd.com/kccisma/knox-county-invasive-plant-ordinance/>> .
- Read information provided by the Indiana Invasive Species Council to learn more about invasive species and best management practices in Indiana <<https://www.entm.purdue.edu/iisc/plantcommittee.php>> .
- Learn about invasive species in Indiana <<https://www.in.gov/dnr/3123.htm>> on the Indiana Department of Natural Resources website.
- Learn more about Southern Indiana Cooperative Invasives Management <<http://www.sicim.info/>> organization including information about invasive species in Indiana, and news and events throughout the state.

Start preparing your community

Adaptation Strategies

Learn how your community can prepare for invasive species.

<../strategies/invasive-species-and-pests.html>

Tools

See what tools are available to help your community prepare for invasive species.

<../tools/index.html>

Funding

See the funding opportunities available to support your resilience strategies.

[<../funding/index.html>](https://eri.iu.edu/funding/index.html)

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