# THE ENVIRONMENT AND UTILITIES

## Invasive Species Best Management Practices

Invasive species, animals or plants translocated from their native region into another, non-native area, can cause great harm to the environment in large and to rights-of-way (ROW) in particular. Their management consists of implementing systems that prevent their introduction or reduce their spread. Developing and utilizing a set of Best Management Practices (BMPs) allows utilities to have a plan and vision for how to conduct their vegetation management around invasive species.

### Impacts on Utilities

The literal and figurative toll of invasive species is wide-ranging and costly. Currently, there are, "more than 6,500 nonindigenous species… now established nationwide" causing a conservatively estimated $120 billion annually according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. (Tompkins) For utilities, the protection of native species often hinders the management of vegetation on their rights-of-way. From procuring siting and permitting to employing environmental monitors, utilities have a lot of regulatory criteria to juggle. In addition, ROWs can be a highway through which invasive species are traversing and proliferating on. The long stretches of sparse vegetation combined with the soil disruption are risk factors for this dispersal.

### BMPs

Best Management Practices (BMPs) are typically a broad set of voluntary practices adopted by utilities to minimize the spread of invasive species. (Invasive Species) The following is a truncated list of some of the BMPs developed and maintained in the industry:

- Preparation & Planning - Proper upfront environmental surveying, siting, and permitting to ensure mitigation measures can be employed to minimize invasive species transmittal.
- Equipment Cleaning – Maintain and clean all equipment and vehicles before transporting to or removing them from a site.
- Disposal of Impacted Material – Collection and disposal of all impacted media (e.g., soil cleaned off equipment or personal gear) obtained during the cleaning process prevents the establishment of invasive species on a site.
- Avoidance – Avoid disturbing areas already populated with invasive species as disturbances usually result in opportunities for spread.
- Site Restoration – Minimizing the area disturbed by work activities and re-vegetating as soon as possible with native species reduces the opportunity for colonization by invasive plant species.
- Training – Educating crews on the importance of controlling the spread of invasive species helps empower the crews to participate in the above activities. Training and education are easily incorporated into tailgate or safety briefings. This is especially important where the invasive species may be harmful to work crews. (Tompkins)

While invasive species are now a permanent fixture of most environments, working on the adoption and education of BMPs can help the growing issues of invasive species' spread. Doing everything necessary to avoid their perpetuation should not only be an ideal, but a set of practices carried out in the day-to-day.

**Works Consulted**

"The Impact of Invasive Species on Electrical Utility Rights-of-Way." *CHA, https://www.chacompanies.com/news/changemakers/the-impact-of-invasive-species-on-electrical-utility-rights-of-way/.*

"Invasive Species Best Management Practices: Rights of Way." *Wisconsin DNR - Council on Forestry Invasive Species Best Management Practices: Rights of Way, https://councilonforestry.wi.gov/Pages/InvasiveSpecies/RightsOfWay.aspx.*

*Produced by the Utility Arborist Association Environmental Stewardship Committee and Davey Resource Group:*

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