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**IN SUPPORT OF BILL 5320
AA AN ACT CONCERNING THE ENFORCEMENT OF PROHIBITED ACTIONS
CONCERNING CERTAIN INVASIVE PLANTS.**

**Testimony of David Sutherland - Director of Government Relations
Before the Environment Committee – March 8, 2010**

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy's 28,000 members, I am here today to express our appreciation for the attention that this committee has given to the issue of invasive plants over the past several years, and our support for bill 5320 - AAC the Enforcement of Prohibited Actions Concerning Certain Invasive Plants.

This bill would clarify the authority for DEP's Conservation Officers (*CO's*) to enforce the statute which prohibits the sale, cultivation or intentional spread of certain invasive plant species. While the statutes currently give the DEP Commissioner broad authority to enforce environmental statutes, the invasive plant statutes are not among those specifically authorized for enforcement by *CO's*.

To quote from an October 2009 OLR Report, "The agriculture commissioner and the experiment station director may enforce the invasive plant law in specific circumstances. CGS 22-84 and 22-344 (e), as amended by PA 09-52, respectively authorize the (1) director to inspect nurseries and nursery stock and (2) commissioner to inspect pet shops, for violations of the invasive plant laws." It is unclear, therefore, whether any law enforcement officials have clear authority to enforce these laws outside of pet shops and nurseries. Among various possible enforcement agencies, DEP's Conservation Officer corps would have the best access to the type of expertise and the discretion needed to most knowledgeably enforce these provisions.

What's the Problem with Invasive Plants?

Thousands of plants have been introduced to New England over the past few centuries from other regions or continents. Most of them do not present problems for natural habitats. Several dozen of these alien species, however, are a grave threat to forests and other natural areas, because they are able to aggressively out-compete native plants, and are not nearly as valuable for native animals which evolved with those native plants. Instead of a mosaic of many species of native plants and animals, our forests and wetlands become dominated by far fewer species of plants and animals, and therefore less healthy. Many lakes and rivers have become impenetrably clogged with aquatic invasive plants.

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Unlike pollution, invasive plants, once introduced, continue to spread without further human assistance and do not degrade over time. Rare species appear to be particularly vulnerable to changes wrought by non-native invaders, but even relatively common native plants and animals can be driven to near extinction by some invasives.

How are Invasive Plants Spread?

Invasive species are introduced and spread into new areas by many means, including landscaping and the sale of plants between countries and states; inadvertently through the transport of other products; seeds or plant fragments being transported on boats from one water body to another; and by wind, water, and birds.

What Can We Do?

Reducing the spread and impacts of invasive plants will require many different approaches, including physical removal, education of nursery consumers, rapid detection of response to invasions by new species, and restrictions on sale of certain plants. Many municipalities, land trusts, lake associations and other organizations are spending hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to remove or control invasive plants.