

EUROPEAN HUNTERS CONTRIBUTE TO THE FIGHT AGAINST INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES

INTRODUCTION

The Convention on Biological Diversity recognises invasive alien species (IAS) as one of the key threats to biodiversity and as a result, the European Commission in its document “Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020” has committed to comprehensively address the problem of invasive alien species.

Regulation on invasive alien species

To tackle the problem, the Council of the European Union adopted Regulation (EU) No 1143/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of IAS, which provides a coordinated approach and focuses on measures, namely: early detection and rapid eradication, containment and control measures of species, surveillance, etc.

It provides for definition of invasive alien species: “‘invasive alien species’ means an alien species whose introduction or spread has been found to threaten or adversely impact upon biodiversity and related ecosystem services”.

However, it is important to remember that not all alien species are invasive and a significant number of alien species contribute to our wellbeing, not least the humble potato. The estimates show that there are around 12 000 alien species in European environment, but only 10-15% are invasive.

HUNTERS RESPONSE TO INVASIVE ALIEN SPECIES

FACE made a commitment to address the issue of IAS in the FACE Biodiversity Manifesto and also through Council of Europe’s Bern Convention where it helped to develop a Code of Conduct on Hunting and IAS. The Code sets down 7 Principles, presenting the activities that hunters and hunting associations shall carry out to minimise and prevent the negative influence of IAS. It represents the contribution of hunters to “2020 European Strategy on Biodiversity” and to the Strategic Plan 2011-2020 of the CBD – Convention on Biological Diversity.

Hunters are one of the most common and comprehensive users of nature, as they traverse the forests not only on the paths, but observe in detail the entirety of the landscapes in which they hunt, thus comprehensively understanding the natural processes and changes of the species in the area.

There are different ways hunters can get involved, and this will vary country to country, due to different legislation and customs. It should also be borne in mind that many of these efforts are conducted on a voluntary basis. Here we present just a few of them:

EDUCATION OF HUNTERS

In the process of obtaining a hunting licence, hunters begin formal training and later systematically educated in different aspects, from legislation to functioning of ecosystems, species behaviour and health. To some extent information on IAS and their effect on ecosystems is also recorded. Much of this knowledge is obtained during their activities in nature.



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This sound knowledge base possessed by hunters is a convenient way to gather information on appearance of IAS, their distribution and population numbers.

▶ GAME MONITORING AND SURVEILLANCE

Depending on the country there are different levels of involvement, but in many cases hunters participate in wildlife monitoring schemes, to obtain information on which species are present in the area and their population numbers. During such monitoring operations species not previously observed in the area can be recorded which is of crucial importance for early detection of invasive alien species.

▶ SPREADING THE INFORMATION – HUNTING MAGAZINES

Hunters are kept well informed via hunting magazines, some of which are published by national hunting organisations. These magazines, amongst other media, provide information about the invasive alien species, their ecological information, trends, maps and techniques of eradication. This is an effective means to inform hunters with up to date information to be able to take appropriate actions.

▶ ERADICATION

Hunters are aware of the effects IAS have on ecosystems and, if there is need, they are prepared to help with eradication of these species. In many countries invasive alien species can be hunted year round under certain conditions, or during a specified open season.

▶ MANAGEMENT OF ESTABLISHED POPULATIONS

Management and control of populations by hunters can be done once the population of invasive alien species is already well established and eradication is considered unfeasible. Hunters can control the spread, abundance and density of population in order to keep them in current area and prevent them from spreading into non-occupied areas.

▶ STRATEGIES ADDRESSING THE SITUATIONS

Some countries have already adopted action plans calling for immediate removal of non-native species, especially those which are invasive. This is also true for situations where long-term management measures are required to minimize negative impacts and control spread.

CONCLUSION

These examples demonstrate the commitment of hunters in tackling the issue of IAS, the benefits for native wildlife, and for the general public. The fact that much work is done on a voluntary basis also reduces the economic burden on management of IAS.

Knowledge and first-hand experience gives hunters additional advantage when addressing the cases of appearance of invasive alien species in the area. Properly trained hunters could indeed be effectively involved in monitoring programmes of IAS distribution and could play a fundamental role in terms of surveillance on new IAS arrival or introduction to support an early detection and rapid response system.

Hunters' involvement is valuable in cases of eradication or when applying management and containment measures and for them to be successful.

For more information on hunters' activities in addressing the issue of invasive alien species read:

Bern Convention Report on the Implementation of the Bern Convention's

Code of Conduct on hunting and IAS, prepared by FACE and IAF

Also check : face.eu/wildlife-conservation/invasive-alien-species or contact:

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