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## Trying to detect problem weeds sooner

Joe Eaton, Ron Sullivan  
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Dan Gluesenkamp  
Invasive *Helichrysum petiolare* (licorice plant) covers this section of Mount Tamalpais.

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Mike Perlmutter, rapid response coordinator for the Bay Area Early Detection Network, has a different fantasy. "When I worked for the National Park Service, I spent a lot of time pulling weeds," he says. "I thought, 'What if I could have gone back in time and pulled that first plant out?'" That would

have had tremendous implications for the landscape today. Once you succeed at eradication, it's gone."


It's not just aesthetics. Daniel Gluesenkamp of Audubon Canyon Ranch said, "Invasive weeds are important, not because they are out of place but because the worst of them can destroy the ancient biodiversity of places we love, and cost California

hundreds of millions of dollars in control costs and lost productivity annually."

The network's goal, Perlmutter said, is to coordinate the detection and control of invasive exotic plants: "Early detection is finding out what are the species that could be the next French broom or the next Jubata grass, and before they have a chance to take a foothold, targeting them and eradicating them when there are still only a few plants at one or two locations."

Developed by Gluesenkamp and Andrea Williams of the Marin Municipal Water District, the network hopes to tap into the Bay Area's host of native plant enthusiasts. "We're blessed with such a wealth of knowledge from people who are parobotanists - California Native Plant Society members and others," said Williams. "We don't have a lot of concern about the reliability of reports from citizen scientists." The Water District offers training for volunteer weed watchers (see box).

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Anyone who spots a new plant with invasive potential, or a known invasive in a new place, can report it to the network's Web site. A Google Maps-driven interface will help them pinpoint their sighting, and they can upload photographs, too. Network staff, including coordinator Aviva Rossi, will evaluate the report and organize a response.

How that happens will depend on where the problem plant is.

"Most public land managers have some kind of early detection and rapid response program," Williams explained. "They're all hungry for information, and looking for more collaboration. With a problem this big you need everyone working on it."

"We want broad partner participation and support so that everyone owns this, from county agriculture commissioners to the National Park Service," says Perlmutter.

"We plan to let land managers know of the occurrence, and if they have the capacity they can treat it themselves. Not all lands are covered that way, though. Where there's no land management support, we have funds to hire folks to go out."

Potential pests on private lands would require a different approach. "We're still working on that," Williams said. "We'll probably find the plants first on public land, then identify private landowners around the detection site and do outreach."

Perlmutter pointed to a pilot project on the Peninsula, where an invasive grass, slender false brome (*Brachypodium sylvaticum*), has been identified: "The only known occurrence in the wild is near Woodside. We know it's invasive; it's spread all over Oregon and parts of Washington State.

"The Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District has been treating it on their land and has an incentive program for private landowners. It's amazing how much buy-in that has created. Plants don't know boundaries. It doesn't matter if the land is private or public."

For its first field season this year, the network is setting priorities. "If we see these things popping up in our region, we can figure out what are the highest priority species and highest priority sites," Perlmutter said.

"Are the species invasive in other parts of the world? How do they spread? Are they in nurseries? We're also looking at the presence of sensitive native species in the habitat and the sizes of infestations. Our goal is to remove the worst plants from the best places as successfully as we can."

Williams and Perlmutter hope the network, itself built on smaller-scale National Park Service and Marin Municipal Water District programs, will evolve into something bigger.

"We'd like to pilot the Bay Area network and demonstrate how successful it is, then expand it to cover other regions of California," said Perlmutter. "Andrea tells people to steal the protocol with pride."

### Learn more

Bay Area Early Detection Network: [www.baedn.org](http://www.baedn.org)

Marin Municipal Water District Weed Watchers program: [links.sfgate.com/ZJLA](http://links.sfgate.com/ZJLA)

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