

TO: Chair Sosnowski and honorable members of the Senate Environment and Agriculture Committee
Email: SLegislation@rilegislature.gov
CC: Senator Bridget Valverde and House Representative Jennifer Boylan
FROM: Chelsea Blanchette
RE: Support for S2352
DATE: April 6, 2026

Dear Chair and Honorable Members of the Senate Environment and Agriculture Committee:

My name is Chelsea Blanchette and I live in Newport, RI. I am writing to urge you to support S2352 (McKenney), which would prohibit the importation, transportation, disbursement, distribution, sale, or purchase of any species of non-native (exotic) invasive plants in Rhode Island.

There is an existing Rhode Island Invasive Plant list created by the Rhode Island Invasive Species Council (RIISC) in 2020 that should be used by the Department of Environmental Management to create and enforce a regulatory list of invasive species per mandate of successfully passing bill S2352. The RIISC list is the foundation for University of Rhode Island's Cooperative Extension Invasive Plant Management Certification Program established in 2008, which sells out consistently year after year with an ever-growing waitlist, as landscapers statewide struggle to control invasions on properties they manage. To date, nearly 1,000 green-related industry professionals (e.g. landscape architects and designers, landscape contractors and maintenance staff, arborists), environmental consultants and engineers, volunteer land managers and homeowners have attended the training, and half of those have earned certification as RI Certified Invasive Managers. These certified individuals are permitted to control invasive plants in sensitive coastal and riparian areas for the purposes of enhancing wildlife habitat, and their work is monitored closely by staff at the RI Coastal Resources Management Council and the RI Department of Environmental Management. While the RIISC List and the URI training exist, and CRMC and DEM dedicate time and resources to the issue of invasives, the lack of regulation around the importation, transportation, disbursement, distribution, sale or purchase of invasive plants negates the efforts of state officials, academic scientists, Extension educators and green-related industry professionals working to remove these plants from the landscape in Rhode Island.

The primary source of plant invasions is through the horticultural trade and sale of ornamental plants (Beaury, 2021). The purpose of regulatory lists is to prevent the introduction of invasive species through the trade, and is enforceable through state-monitored nursery inspections (Beaury, 2021). Without consistent enforcement across state boundaries, it is unlikely that nurseries will abandon high market value species such as *Miscanthus sinensis* (Chinese silvergrass), *Rosa rugosa* (Japanese beach rose), or *Ligustrum sp.* (Privet), as demonstrated by garden centers in Saunderstown, Coventry and Johnston, RI. The overlap between nursery stock lists and invasive plant lists makes it difficult for plant traders and consumers to navigate the ornamental trade industry responsibly, spreading misinformation and contributing to the continued growth of invasive species the state, independent contractors, and homeowners are paying to control (Beaury, 2021).

The lack of a prohibited plant list is hurting Rhode Island's habitat richness, as well as causing ecological and monetary damage to neighboring states who enforce prohibited noxious and invasive lists through nursery sale regulations and inspections. The [State-Based Regulated Plant Data Viewer](#) created by the University of Massachusetts in partnership with the Northeast Regional Invasive Species Climate Change Network (NE RISCC) clearly demonstrates the effect Rhode Island's negligence is having on its neighbors in the Northeast and across the country. See Figure 1: *Ligustrum obtusifolium* (Privet) and Figure 2: *Rosa multiflora* (Multiflora rose) for a clear representation of states that have restricted the sale of these species as well as many other invasive plants outside of Rhode Island (Singh). It is important to note that these species, and invasive species in general, are known for forming dense thickets that crowd out native plants and diminish native habitat for wildlife and pollinator species

as well as disrupt natural ecosystem services, leaving landscapes vulnerable to climate change and intense and costly future management.

As indicated by Figure 3: (The Invasion Curve) as invasives persist, invasive species management only becomes costlier. Early detection and rapid response (EDRR) is necessary to curb invasions and mitigate control costs in sensitive habitats such as salt marshes, coastal buffer zones, and wetlands that provide citizens with essential ecosystem services (Reaser, 2019). These ecologically valuable habitats contribute greatly to climate resiliency through ecosystem services such as water filtration, carbon sequestration, erosion control, storm flooding mitigation, air quality control, and pollination (USDA Climate Hubs). Without an enforceable invasive plant list, these valuable, sensitive ecosystems will continue to lose their functionality due to invasion, increasing climate crises in Rhode Island. Not only will the ecological fragility of these essential habitats continue to suffer at the hands of the local horticultural trade industry without an enforced invasive plant list, but the state budget and Rhode Island tax payer dollars will also suffer at the cost of controlling these species. National budgets for invasive species management from 2010 to 2020 were \$21 billion dollars annually, largely made up of mitigating damage to critical infrastructure including water treatment facilities, power grids and agriculture (Fantle-Lepczyk, 2021). Without proper regulation, these costs will continue to rise and wreak havoc on Rhode Island's infrastructure and management budget.

As climate change persists, it is the collective responsibility of Rhode Islanders including environmental policy makers and horticulture business owners to act together in accordance with surrounding states to stop the spread of invasives. Participation in ecosystem and climate resiliency through the banning of invasive species sale and trade can no longer be voluntary. It is the Rhode Island General Assembly's responsibility to enforce invasive plant sale restrictions to protect our valuable ecosystems and minimize state budget spent on invasive management. Invasive species control and management through prohibited plant lists is being practiced by 46 states across the U.S., and it is long overdue that Rhode Island get on board to work together with our neighbors to promote healthier habitats and ecosystems through invasive species regulation.

Rhode Island is one of only four states without a prohibited plant sale list, a list that restricts the sale and distribution of invasive plants, and the only state in New England without one. Invasive plants are a specific category of non-native plant that have been shown to wreak havoc on local ecosystems by spreading exponentially and crowding out native plants species. This bill would prohibit the sale of these plant species at nurseries, garden centers and anywhere plants are sold in the state. Research has shown that 60% of invasive plants are introduced through their intentional sale and planting (Beaury et al., 2021).

Please pass this bill out of the Senate floor with a recommendation for passage.

Sincerely,
Chelsea Blanchette
Newport, RI

Figure 1: Ligustrum obtusifolium (Privet), states highlighted in green have restrictions on the species. Rhode Island is a glaring contradiction to regional control efforts.

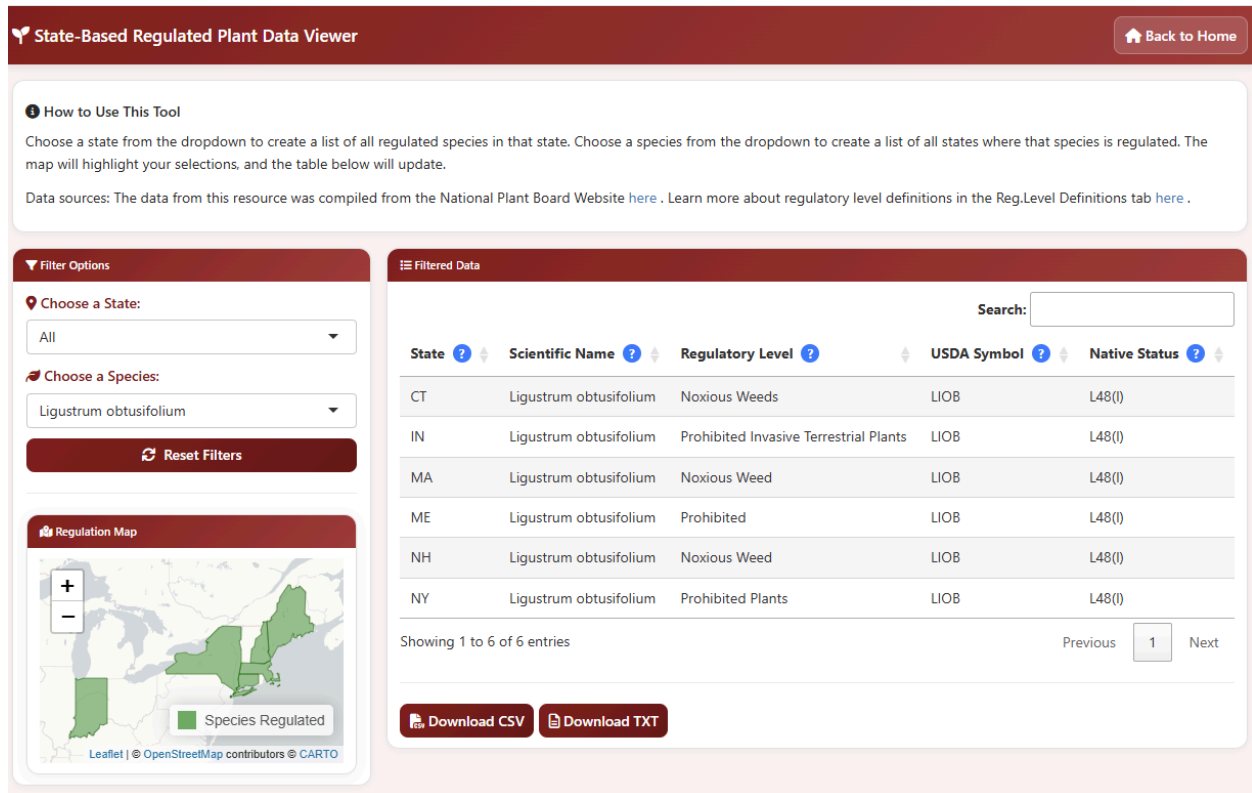


Figure 2: Rosa multiflora (multiflora rose). States highlighted in green have restrictions on the species. Rhode Island is a glaring contradiction to regional control efforts.

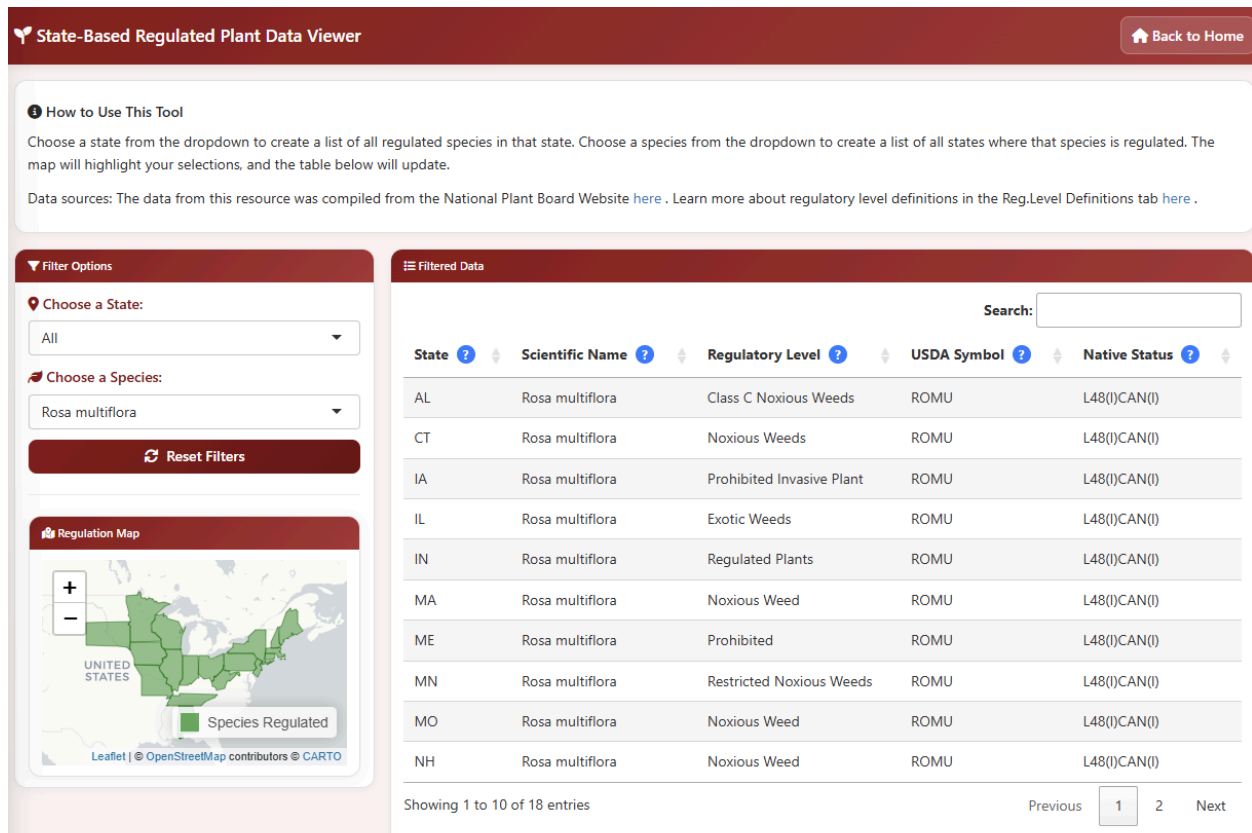
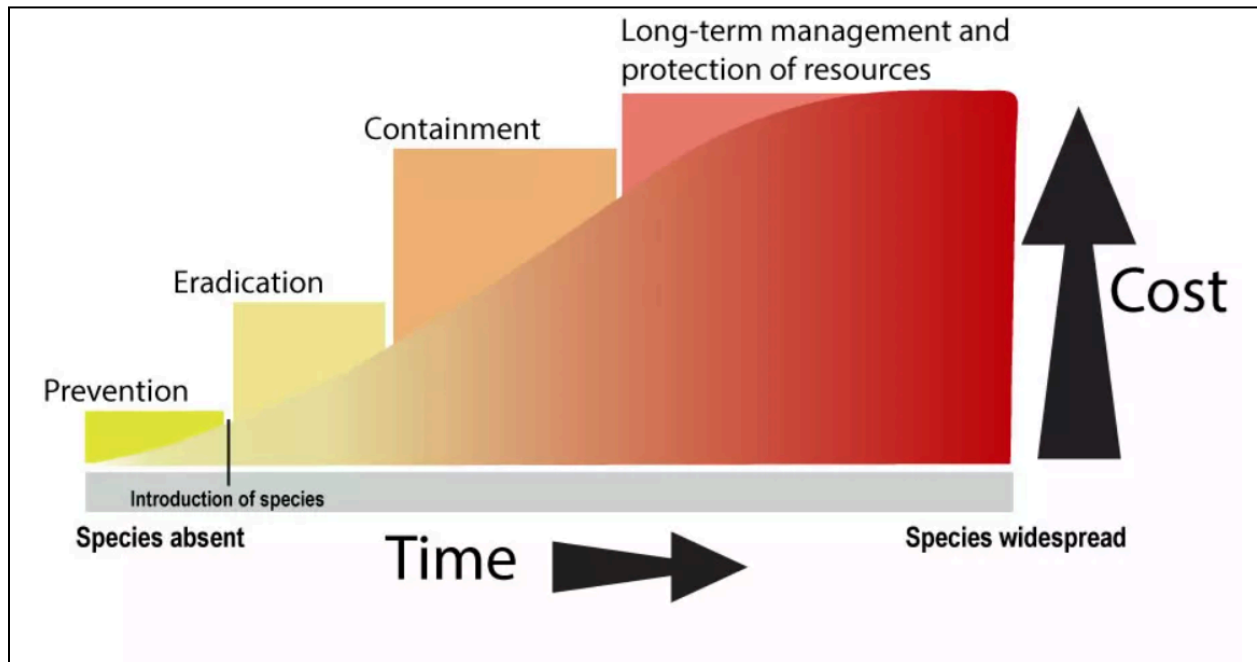


Figure 3: Invasion Curve from the National Parks Service (National Parks Service)



Resources

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"Early Detection and Rapid Response." *National Parks Service*, U.S. Department of the Interior, www.nps.gov/subjects/invasive/early-detection-and-rapid-response.htm. Accessed 6 Apr. 2026.

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"Invasive Plants in Rhode Island—2020." *Invasive Plants in Rhode Island - 2020*, Rhode Island Invasive Species Council, 2020, www.crmc.ri.gov/invasives/RINHS_Invasives_2020.pdf.

Reaser, Jamie K., et al. "The early detection of and rapid response (EDRR) to invasive species: A conceptual framework and federal capacities assessment." *Biological Invasions*, vol. 22, no. 1, 31 Dec. 2019, pp. 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10530-019-02156-w>.

Singh, K., J. Salva, M. Fertakos, and B.A. Bradley. RISSC Tools: State-based regulated plant data viewer. URL: <https://www.riscctools.org/regulatory-visualization/>, April 6, 2026.