
Support for S2353

From Taryn MacGregor <opalinegardeningco@gmail.com>

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To SLegislation <slegislation@rilegislature.gov>; Sen. DiMario, Alana <sen-dimario@rilegislature.gov>; Rep. Spears, Tina L. <rep-spears@rilegislature.gov>

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4/6/26

Chair, Senator Alana M. DiMario, Representative Tina L. Spears, and honorable members of the Senate Environment and Agriculture Committee:

My name is Taryn MacGregor, and I live in New Shoreham, Block Island.

I am writing in support of S2353 (McKenney), which would prohibit the importation, transportation, disbursement, distribution, sale, and purchase of non-native invasive plant species in Rhode Island.

Rhode Island remains one of only four states without a prohibited plant sale list, it is the only state in New England without one. This is not a minor administrative gap. It is an active harm. Research has established that 60% of invasive plant introductions occur through intentional sale and planting (Beaury et al., 2021). Every season that nurseries and garden centers are permitted to sell these species, the problem compounds. I have watched hundreds of invasive species come through the freight lot on Block Island, whisked away by landscapers and developers alike, to be planted into the landscape, despite everyone knowing what harm they cause.

I serve as Chair of the Block Island Conservation Commission and am founder of Opaline Gardening & Landscape Design, and Opaline Property Services on Block Island, where my team and I manage approximately 45 private properties + estates as a certified invasive species manager. We are native regenerative gardeners, permaculturists, arboriculturists, biodiversity rehabilitators and deep listeners...

What we witness and have heard from this island is not abstract. It is obvious, measurable, and worsening.

Block Island's clay bluffs, among the most geologically rare and ecologically sensitive landforms on the Atlantic coast, are already eroding at a rate exceeding ten inches per year. Into this already compromised terrain, *Miscanthus sinensis*, and privet have established themselves, accelerating destabilization and displacing the native root systems that might otherwise help hold what remains. In our meadows, Chinese rose multiflora, burning bush and Japanese barberry occupy the ecological niches where native viburnum, bayberry and ninebark belong. There's russian olive growing on the dunes where beach plum could be. Cattails (*Typha* spp.) are among the most ecologically productive plants a wetland can hold. Food, shelter, nesting material, shoreline stabilization, you name it. Birds, mammals, fish, and insects all depend on them in some form, often simultaneously, which is why healthy aquatic habitat and dense cattail presence tend to look like the exact same thing. Almost all of these sacred Cattail habitats on island are being eviscerated by voracious, invasive phragmites. Bittersweet vines are actively strangling shadbush and eastern red cedar. Privet dominates the interior landscape with the same aggression it brings to the bluff.

This is the condition of the land under current law.

It also bears saying plainly: the Manissean people tended this soil long before any of the invasive plants stated above were introduced to this environment. True conservation on Block Island, Rhode Island and all sovereign nations everywhere, must begin by bringing Indigenous voices, the original stewards of this land, to the front of every conversation about its future.

Invasive species are not a neutral ecological phenomenon. They are, in many respects, a living record of colonial disruption across the landscape. Addressing this adequately equates to addressing it compassionately. That means acknowledging the truth of what has brought us to this point in linear time and honoring the knowledge of the natural rhythms that existed here, before it. Attention to what true stewardship means is necessary.

S2353 is a practical and overdue step. Please pass this bill out of committee and to the Senate floor with a recommendation for passage.

EM, Beury, Patrick M, and Bradley BA. "Invaders for sale: the ongoing spread of invasive species by the plant trade industry." 2021.

With Gratitude,

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Taryn MacGregor
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"Make the Land Sacred Again."