

PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE ON THE LOOSE

Introduced from Europe, purple loosestrife has become a major problem in the Lower 48 States and has now begun its attack on Alaska. The flowers may be pretty, but dense loosestrife colonies clog lakes and rivers and completely fill in wetlands, forcing out wildlife and spawning fish—not a pretty picture at all! In 2005 purple

loosestrife was found growing in an Alaska wetland near Westchester Lagoon in Anchorage. Alaskans still have time to prevent the spread of purple loosestrife, but once it has taken root in wild areas it can be difficult and expensive to eradicate. If we allow this plant to spread, here is what some of Alaska's lakes and rivers could look like...



Purple loosestrife infests a wetland in Canada. Photo by Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.
www.forestryimages.org

Think you've spotted purple loosestrife?

If you see a fireweed-like flower blooming in September or October, it is likely to be purple loosestrife. Fireweed is usually finished blooming by the end of August. Also, purple loosestrife has a square or 5-angled stem, while fireweed has a smooth round stem.



Purple loosestrife.

Artwork courtesy of Conservation
New England web site,
University of Massachusetts,
<http://site.www.umb.edu/conne/index.html>.

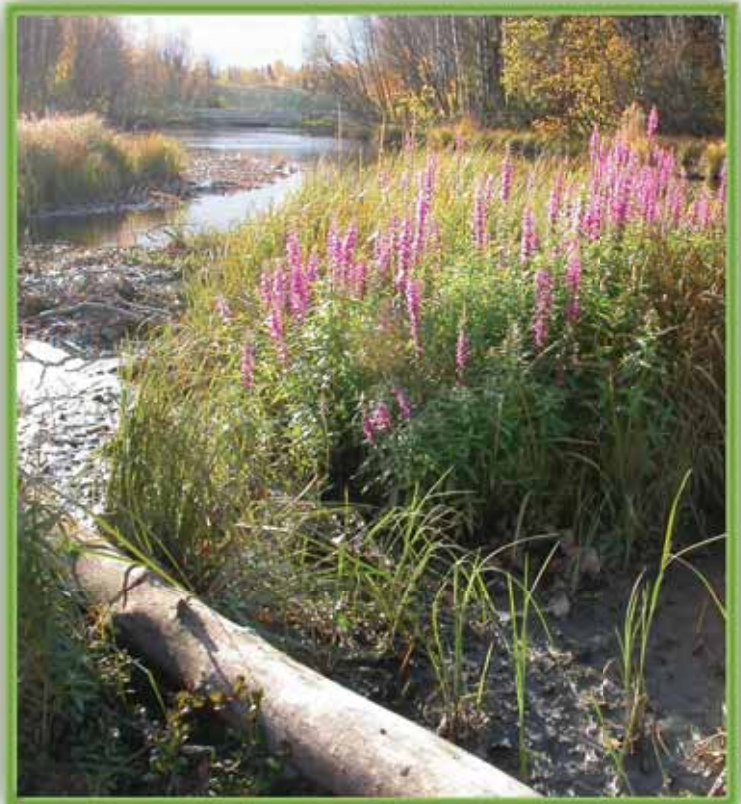
**Alaska’s Resources—
Today and in the Future**

Alaska has an estimated 175 million acres of wetlands. If only a small percentage of this area became infested with purple loosestrife, Alaskans would lose some of their most valued resources:

- Choked waterways degrade salmon habitat.
- Infested areas no longer support fur-bearing animals or waterfowl.
- Shore access becomes difficult for people and wildlife.
- Hay meadow and wetland pasture productivity is lost.

Purple Loosestrife in Gardens

Purple loosestrife is sometimes grown by Alaskan gardeners who are unaware that it can spread into wild areas and cause problems. If you have purple loosestrife in your garden, try **liatris** for a winter-hardy substitute. Other alternatives include **astilbes**, **delphiniums**, **fireweeds**, **lupines**, and **salvias**.



A new infestation of purple loosestrife growing along Chester Creek in Anchorage. Photo by Michael Shephard, USDA Forest Service.



Dig up the weed without scattering the seed!

Remove all flower stalks before digging up a purple loosestrife plant. One plant can produce up to **two million** seeds! First open a plastic bag under the flower stalk, clip, and let the stalk fall directly into the bag. Once the seeds are safely removed, the entire plant can be dug up. Remove all roots and stems—a cut stem left behind can generate a new plant. All invasive plant material should be incinerated or double-bagged in plastic and sent to the landfill.

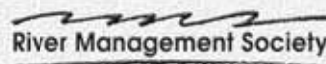
This message is brought to you by...



Municipality of Anchorage



Girl Scouts



For more information visit

<http://akweeds.uaa.alaska.edu> or your local UAF Cooperative Extension Service office