

**New York State Office of Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation**

**POLICY ON NATIVE PLANTS
IN STATE PARKS AND HISTORIC SITES**

Introduction

The New York State Parks System harbors an extraordinary diversity of plants, animals, and ecological communities that make a unique contribution to the biodiversity of New York State. This policy provides a framework for the protection of one component of this biodiversity – native plants – by offering guidelines for native plant conservation, management, and restoration within state parks and historic sites.

Native plants are the primary food source in natural systems and provide many ecosystem services including controlling erosion, filtering pollutants, and providing diverse wildlife habitats. They are critical sources of food, shelter, and habitat for many species. Many plants also have historical and cultural significance. For restoration and landscaping, native plants often have high survivorship and vigor because they are well adapted to local conditions and have greater ecological value than non-native alternatives.

Background

The mission of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) is to provide safe and enjoyable recreational and interpretive opportunities for all New York State residents and visitors and to be responsible stewards of our valuable natural, historic, and cultural resources.

As part of this mission, § 3.09(15) of the Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Law directs OPRHP to “Enhance the natural resources within the state park, recreation and historic site system by providing habitat for various wildlife species including endangered and threatened species of fauna through practices such as ecological restoration, wetland conservation and the planting of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants indigenous to the area which act as food and protective cover for fauna. Selection of plant species or communities of species shall take into consideration the natural, ecological, historic, archeological, aesthetic, and public use resources in the immediate areas as well as the management goals of the park or site.”

In addition, § 9-1705 of the Environmental Conservation Law establishes the New York Invasive Species Council to, among other responsibilities, coordinate state actions to phase out uses of invasive species and expand the use of native species as alternatives to non-native species. State Parks is a member of the Council.

Policy

OPRHP will promote the protection and restoration of native plants and ecological communities throughout the State Park and Historic Site System by implementing the following goals and actions:

1. Identify, restore, and maintain native plants and ecological communities, improving the overall quality of habitat and biodiversity within State Parks and Historic Sites.
2. Control the introduction and spread of invasive species to reduce competitive displacement and loss of habitat, focusing on invasive species that pose the greatest ecological and operational concerns within specific parks, sites, and regions of the state. Subject to the availability of funding and effective control strategies, implement invasive plant removal projects in priority locations.
3. To the extent feasible, utilize native plants in all landscaping, re-vegetation, erosion control, and habitat restoration projects. The planting or introduction of invasive plant or tree species is prohibited. OPRHP will rely on the Invasive Species Council and its own EMB Invasive Species Team for guidance on identifying and characterizing invasive plant species.
4. To the extent feasible, utilize locally sourced native plants and seeds in landscaping and restoration projects.
5. Develop partnerships and stewardship projects to increase OPRHP's capacity to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive plants and reduce their impacts on native plants.
6. Conserve populations and habitats of endangered, threatened and rare plants and plant communities located within State Parks and Historic Sites.
7. Implement education, research, and monitoring projects that support native plant conservation and restoration.

Policy Exception

OPRHP recognizes that non-native plants, including exotic trees and flowers, are important cultural landscape elements in certain State Parks, State Historic Sites, and State Park Arboretums. In such locations, OPRHP may utilize non-native plants to maintain and restore significant cultural landscapes. In addition, OPRHP may utilize ornamental flowers, shrubs, and trees when landscaping park entrances and high use areas, provided however that pursuant to policy goal #3 above the agency will not plant or introduce invasive species. This policy recognizes that only some non-native species invasively spread in the landscape (planting of non-native species is limited to non-invasive plants).

Sources and Selection of Native Plants and Seeds

There is growing demand by public and private entities that purchase plant materials for landscaping and restoration projects to purchase native plants, native seeds, and plant materials grown from local seed sources. OPRHP will encourage this trend through its purchasing practices. The Environmental Management Bureau in consultation with regional staff will compile and periodically update a list of nurseries and other sources where native plants and seeds may be obtained regionally. A list of native plant information sources will also be developed to provide resources to staff in developing site and species plans for planting and restoration projects.

Definitions

As used in this policy:

- “Native plants” means any plant species (including shrubs and trees) that has evolved and naturally occurs in New York State. In some instances, plants are native (indigenous) to only certain regions of the state. The Environmental Management Bureau can assist agency staff in determining whether a specific plant is considered “native” for the purposes of this policy.
- “Invasive species” is a species that: a) is non-native to the ecosystem under consideration; b) aggressively spreads and displaces or degrades native species and habitats; and c) whose introduction causes or is likely to cause economic or environmental harm or harm to human health.
- “Non-native species,” also referred to as an “alien,” “exotic,” or “non-indigenous” species, are species introduced from another region of North America or another continent as a direct or indirect result of human activity. Some non-native species are “invasive,” meaning they aggressively spread in the landscape; others cannot reproduce in New York or have naturalized into the landscape at levels that do not threaten native species or ecological communities.

This policy is effective immediately and replaces all previous OPRHP policies regarding the conservation and management of native plants within state parks and historic sites under the agency’s jurisdiction.

Dated: September 27, 2010



Carol Ash
Commissioner