

BLUE RIDGE PRISM

STRATEGIC PLAN

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INTRODUCTION

This document is the strategic plan for the Blue Ridge PRISM (Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management). It is intended to provide an overview of the mission of the PRISM and the strategies to be employed to achieve that mission. As with all new programs, this document is expected to change over time as we gain more experience. Nonetheless this document is the starting point to be used to focus our efforts and gain maximum benefit from our limited time and resources.

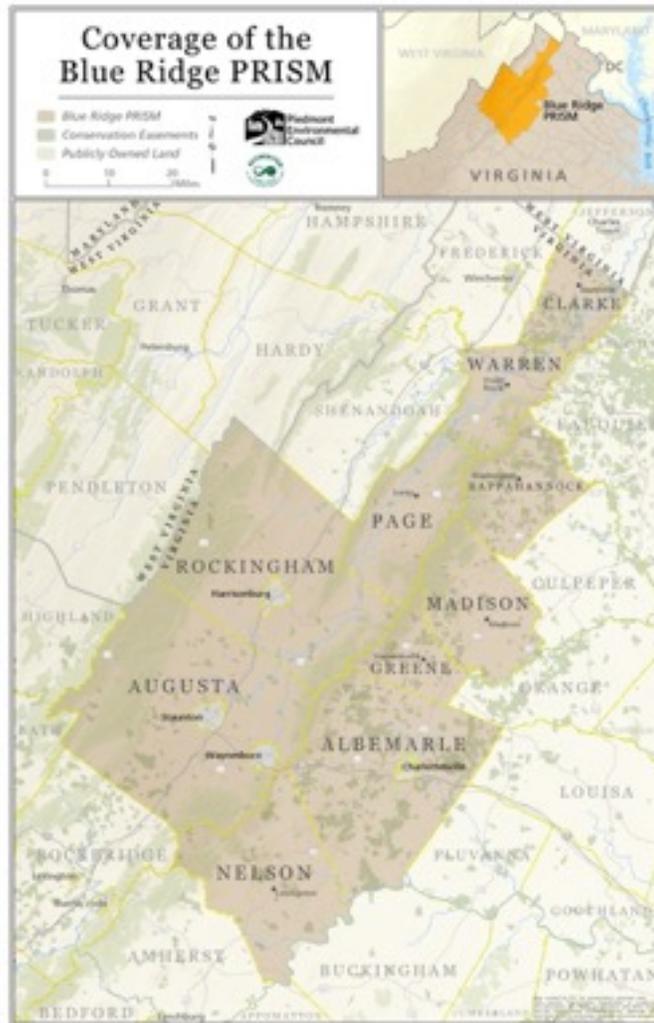
The Blue Ridge PRISM is a Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA). Readers not familiar with CWMA's are referred to www.mipn.org, a website run by the Midwest Invasive Plant Network and the clearinghouse for information related to CWMA's.

For questions or suggestions related to this document, please contact Rod Walker at rwalker@alum.mit.edu or go to www.blueridgeprism.org.

MISSION AND OVERVIEW

The mission of the Blue Ridge PRISM is to reduce the impact of invasive species in our targeted geography.

Our targeted geography is the 10 county area in Virginia on both sides of the Blue Ridge stretching from Nelson and Augusta counties on the south up to Clarke County at the north end. See the map below. This area is a little less than 3 million acres.



In naming this a PRISM and using the words “invasive species” in the title, the intention was to leave the door open to expanding the scope of our activities even though the intent initially is to focus on invasive terrestrial plants, as opposed to aquatic plants, insects, pathogens, animals, et al. Furthermore the focus on terrestrial plants is initially further focused on plants mostly associated with forested areas, which may include some fields and meadows.

GOALS AND TACTICS OF THE BLUE RIDGE PRISM

The goals of the Blue Ridge PRISM are to:

- Focus on the 10-20 most damaging invasive plants. As of today our list includes:
 - Ailanthus
 - Autumn olive
 - Chinese privet
 - Garlic mustard
 - Japanese honeysuckle
 - Japanese stiltgrass
 - Kudzu
 - Mile a minute vine
 - Multiflora rose
 - Oriental bittersweet
 - Porcelainberry
 - Wavy leaf basket grass
- Push these plants into the background such that they are not threats to the native plants, don't dominate the ecosystems and cause minimal damage
- Prevent the introduction of new invasives into our defined geography
- Promptly deal with newly arrived invasive plants such that they are eliminated or contained and don't spread across a wide area
- Set an example that leads to the establishment of other CWMAs in Virginia

Key tactics to be employed to achieve those goals include:

- Implementation of landowner focused programs to encourage and assist in the control of the targeted invasives
- An early detection and rapid response program to deal with new invasive plants
- Education and outreach programs for the general public and landowners to increase awareness and generate interest in participating in our programs
- Prevention programs that limit the sale and importation of invasive plants in Virginia and otherwise reduce the spread of invasive plants within the state
- Research programs that keep us abreast of the latest information on dealing with our targeted species including the potential for effective biocontrols
- Growth in our membership to include all the major conservation organizations that operate in our geography plus as many landowners as possible and other interested parties

LANDOWNER PROGRAMS

The principle landowner programs of the Blue Ridge PRISM will be:

- The availability and dissemination of **landowner kits** for each of our targeted species. These kits will be made up of existing third party materials plus supplemental materials prepared by the PRISM. Each kit will include the following information:
 - Why the species is on our targeted list
 - How to identify it and distinguish it from similar non-targeted species
 - Recommendations for how to treat it

- Required tools, sprayers, chemicals, et al, where to buy them, what they should cost, et al
- What remedial work is recommended to add or encourage native species to fill the gap, including where to obtain recommended plants and how to establish them
- Who to contact if professional assistance is desired
- Alternative sources of financial assistance and how to obtain such assistance
- How to coordinate with other landowners and right of way owners
- Other resources for more information
- **Volunteer assistance** for landowners seeking to understand what is growing on their land
 - When a landowner contacts us and ask if someone is available to come to their property to help them understand what they are looking at, PRISM volunteers will be available to make “house calls”, walk the land and help the landowner understand what they have on their land. These volunteers will aid with identification of plants, provide materials (e.g. the landowner kits) and refer them to various sources of assistance. These volunteers are not experts in treatments and are not there to give professional advice. Their role is limited to education (helping the landowners understand what they have) and providing information.
- The **Area Stewards program** is a proactive program to recruit landowners to collaborate and work together across larger and larger contiguous areas. The idea is to have passionate landowners who are treating invasives on their own lands contact and recruit their neighbors to do similar work and thereby create islands of control that grow larger and larger every year. The Blue Ridge PRISM will recruit additional Area Stewards and support the Area Stewards in several ways:
 - Creation of an Area Stewards working group to share best practices for this program
 - Availability of the landowner kits for distribution to neighbors
 - Access to the volunteer assistance described above
 - Information on third party financial incentives to offer to their neighbors
 - Direct financial assistance from the PRISM if and when the PRISM is able to raise the funds to support such a program
 - Other services as agreed upon (e.g. provide maps of contiguous landowners and their contact information).
- The **General Landowners program** is our response to landowners who contact the PRISM and ask for assistance, but who are neither near an Area Steward nor are able to act as an Area Steward themselves. The services we will provide to these people include:
 - The landowner kits described above
 - The volunteer assistance program
 - Financial incentives information from third parties and financial assistance directly from PRISM programs if and when the PRISM has funds available over and above those needed to provide incentives through the Area Stewards program

EARLY DETECTION AND RAPID RESPONSE (EDRR)

The EDRR program is intended to prevent newly arrived or uncommon invasive plants from becoming widely disseminated. When new species are detected in our targeted area, this group will muster volunteers and/or other resources to remove the plants, monitor the sites for recurrence and, if appropriate, fill the gap with native plants. This same approach will be used to deal with uncommon species on our targeted list, like kudzu, to try to suppress those species as much as possible and prevent their further spread.

The PRISM needs to:

- Identify the species to be on the lookout for
- Develop its strategies for increasing surveillance throughout our geography and
- Develop the response protocols and coordination with VA DCR and other groups.

The bottom line is that we need to be able to find occurrences and we need to be able to make rapid responses actually happen.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

The education and outreach functions of the Blue Ridge PRISM include:

- Preparing materials for public consumption including but not limited to:
 - Displays and brochures for events
 - Landowner kits for each of our targeted species - these should be developed in conjunction with the Area Stewards
 - Press releases and articles
 - Flyers to draw people to PRISM events
 - A full-fledged website for the Blue Ridge PRISM
 - Uses of social media to further our goals
- Helping the Area Stewards organize events for neighboring landowners
- Soliciting participation, donations and volunteers
- Creating an annual calendar of events to be sponsored, attended, spoken at and/or tabled
- Developing a cadre of volunteers to respond to landowners seeking education on their properties as described above in the Volunteer Assistance program
- Generally being creative in finding ways to enlist more landowners, increase public awareness and attract new members and volunteers.

PREVENTION

The Blue Ridge PRISM will seek to head off the introduction of invasive plants in our targeted area through the following activities:

- Identify dispersal corridors such as hiking trails, roads, rivers, et al and create information kiosks, tools (e.g. boot scrapers), and other means of reducing the carry of plants and seeds into our geography
- Work with the horticulture industry, the Virginia Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, the General Assembly, and other state departments and offices to fix the noxious weed laws and regulations to restrict the importation and sale of invasive plants in Virginia
- Identify where the worst of the invasives being sold come from and contact those purveyors directly to see if they will cease and desist in selling those plants or seeds in Virginia.

RESEARCH

Research-related activities of the Blue Ridge PRISM will further the depth of our knowledge with each of our targeted species and will include:

- Keeping abreast of the latest developments and best practices for control of our targeted species. In particular understand what is happening with biocontrols and how such developments should alter our offerings and advice
- Foster relationships with university or other institutional research programs relevant to our activities and goals
- Collect data on the control activities of our members to determine the effectiveness of the various approaches and whether we need to alter/clarify our recommendations on how to control specific species. Cost and effectiveness data are hard to find and would be particularly helpful to our members, landowners considering taking action, legislative discussions, et al
- If appropriate, propose our own research programs and work with the funding team to obtain the needed resources.

SUPPORT ACTIVITIES

Other key parts of the strategic plan include:

- At this time the Blue Ridge PRISM is not a stand-alone 501(c)(3), but instead operates as a project of the Shenandoah National Park Trust. Once the PRISM becomes a large enough operation, it may choose to become its own 501(c)(3) entity.
- A grants and funding team seeks funding both for the internal operations of the PRISM as well as to provide financial assistance through our landowner programs.

ORGANIZATION

The Blue Ridge PRISM is managed by a Steering Committee made of representatives from each of the organizations that sign the General Agreement. The Steering Committee will be responsible for:

- Maintaining the bylaws
- Electing officers
- Setting policy and key procedures
- Overseeing the direction and strategies of the organization
- Forming working groups to carry out the work of the PRISM

ANNUAL OPERATING PLANS AND REPORTS

This document does not contain particular quantitative goals or specific timelines. Instead each year the Steering Committee will draft an operating plan highlighting the specific objectives being targeted for that year. Some of those objectives may be measured in acres treated, new members signed up, funds raised, events attended, etc. Likewise at the end of each year an annual report is to be prepared summarizing key accomplishments and metrics for the year.