

State Highway Administration (SHA) Corridor Invasive Species Control Questions and Answers

Q: *How did invasive and exotic plant species become so prolific in Maryland?*

A: There are several ways that invasive plants migrated to Maryland highways. Many began in backyards as ornamental plants. Gardeners plant exotic species, unaware that, due to the prolific nature of some of these plants, they are easily transported to fertile locations by wildlife and can rapidly spread out of control.

Some highly invasive vines, such as the Mile-a-Minute Weed, spread due to undiscovered seeds that were accidentally packed in a shipment of non-invasive plants from Asia. The seeds subsequently were deposited and grew uncontrolled for years.

Q: *Why is SHA removing invasive plants?*

A: Over the past five years, SHA has undertaken several projects to eradicate invasive plant species from highway medians, including I-95 through Howard and Prince George's counties, as well as US 301 in Kent and Cecil counties. SHA is beginning a broader initiative covering six highway corridors in nine counties. These corridor projects are taking place now because federal funding was made available to rid highway open space and medians of invasive and noxious species.

Previously, hazardous trees were removed for safety reasons during daily, routine maintenance. Now, the federal funding sources are allowing a shift toward a more comprehensive program for controlling invasive species and establishing and nurturing native species and habitats along roadsides.

Q: *What Species will SHA be targeting with these projects?*

A: SHA is controlling overgrowth and invasive trees and vines to enhance safety in terms of improved sight distance and removing hazardous trees that are prone to falling in the road. Some specific species being targeted are:

- Callery (Bradford) Pear
- Thistle
- Ailanthus (Tree of Heaven)
- Phragmites (Common Swamp Reed)
- Mile-a-Minute Weed
- Japanese Honeysuckle
- Multiflora Rose
- Various invasive vines

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Q: How do invasive species harm the environment?

A: Since invasive species usually have little or no natural predators, parasites or competitors, they rapidly develop large populations, which out-compete and kill native species that provide critical ecological benefits and biodiversity. Invasive plant species can also reduce wildlife food and habitat. Some also have the potential to disrupt native ecosystem functions, such as water flow and nutrient cycling.

Q: Why is SHA removing trees that have attractive white flowers?

A: Callery Pear trees spread rapidly and are highly susceptible to breaking or splitting in even mild wind storms. To help improve traveler safety, re-establish desirable vegetation, and to provide screening where vegetation is being removed, SHA is replacing removed trees with a variety of native species of flowering trees, shade trees, and evergreen trees, as well as a variety of shrubs. Callery Pear trees grow and spread rapidly and often grow in areas that are not safe for tree growth such as in close proximity to roads.

Q: Why is SHA spending money taking care of the roadsides when highways are in need of repair as well?

A: Roadsides are important to the highway system, especially for adequate roadway drainage and habitat creation for birds and insects. Roadsides and medians were planted and SHA needs to remove the invasive species before they have completely taken over and destroyed much of our desired plantings, as well as impede proper highway drainage. Removing these species now will provide long term benefits by reducing future maintenance needs by eliminating vines and trees that can in fact undermine the highway infrastructure and impede SHA maintenance forces during mowing operations. In addition to the economic benefits, SHA has a legal obligation under [Executive Order 13112 on Invasive Species](#) (1999) which encourages government agencies to prevent and control invasive species and to plant native species.

Q: How long will it be before the newly planted vegetation reaches a noticeable size?

A: Most of the hardwood trees selected have a relatively rapid growth rate. The heights of these newly planted native trees range between 60-100 feet. After the two-year establishment phase, these trees will have growth potential of up to two feet per year. Flowering trees have a significantly faster growth rate and can reach heights of up to 35 feet.

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Examples of Prolific Invasive Species in Maryland



Callery/Bradford Pear



Multi-Flora Rose



Tree of Heaven



Mile-a-Minute Weed



Canada thistle



Wild grape

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Stages of Invasive Species Removal

Before



During



After



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