

# DON'T LET IT LOOSE: FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## Why Be Concerned?

Invasive species are plants and animals that are accidentally or intentionally introduced to a region that they are not naturally found in. As invasive species lack natural predators and parasites that keep their populations in check in their native habitat, they can reproduce rapidly and outcompete native animals and plants for food and habitat. Invasive species can therefore result in serious impacts on our environment, economy and human health. Some of B.C.'s most harmful invasive species came from the intentional or improper disposal of aquariums, terrariums, and ornamental ponds into our waters and other outdoor spaces.

### **Q: What kind of environmental impacts do released pets have?**

A: Some non-native or exotic plants and animals are capable of thriving in an environment outside of their native range. Once they establish their population, they are likely to outcompete our native species for food and habitat and may transfer diseases. For example, Red-eared Sliders outcompete our native and vulnerable Western Painted Turtle for basking sites.

### **Q: What kind of pets can be invasive?**

A: Any species that is not native to the region poses the threat of becoming invasive if released. Some invasive pets and plants include, but are not limited to: Red-eared Sliders, American Bullfrogs, Goldfish and Koi Carp, European Rabbits and Eurasian Watermilfoil.

## Why Should I Care?

### **Q: What is the economic impact?**

A: Eurasian Watermilfoil is an invasive species that is believed to have been originally let loose from an aquarium. The species diminishes the water quality of lakes in the Okanagan and disrupts recreational activities like swimming and boating. The Okanagan Basin Water Board spends between \$800,000 - \$850,000 a year to manage the weed.

### **Q: What if I want my pet to be free?**

A: Domestic pets generally do not have the survival skills to live beyond their tank or pond. In some cases however they may survive, reproduce and spread, becoming aquatic invasive species. Even if your pet is native to the local environment, it should never be released, as it may be carrying diseases or parasites.

### **Q: Will I be in trouble if I release my pet into the wild?**

A: Releasing any organism into any body of water can start an invasion, but you can stop it. It is illegal everywhere in Canada to introduce any species into a body of water where it is not native. Stop aquatic invasive species: don't let it loose. It is ILLEGAL to possess live fish or release live fish into B.C.'s lakes or streams. Persons convicted for a first offence of the illegal movement of aquatic invasive species could be fined up to \$100,000 and/or receive a prison term of up to 12 months.



Photo from Government of British Columbia

**Fact:** In 2021, Marimo moss balls contaminated with invasive zebra mussels were found in Canadian pet stores. Information on how to properly dispose of mussel contaminated moss balls and aquarium water can be found [here](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/invasive-mussels):



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## How Can I Help?

Make sure to research the lifestyle, environment and costs associated with the pet you are interested in prior to bringing it home. Choose a pet that you will be capable of providing everything it needs to live a happy and comfortable life. Different species require different habitats, diets, social lives, and upkeep - so choose one that fits your life best.

### Q: What do I do if I can no longer care for my pet?

A: There are a number of safe humane options for someone who can no longer care for their pet. You can get in contact with the business you originally purchased the animal from to see if they are able to take the pet back, contact a local animal shelter, science centre, wildlife park, or aquarium to see if they can care for the pet or use it to help educate others. If there are no other options, have a qualified veterinarian euthanize the animal in a humane and peaceful manner.

### Q: How do I properly dispose of my dead pet?

A: Deceased fish should not be disposed of by flushing down a toilet. This method of disposal is improper as it can lead to the spread of diseases carried by the pet. Instead, wrap the animal in a biodegradable material and freeze it until burial is possible or it can be placed into the garbage.

### Q: What should I do with unwanted aquatic plants?

A: Because some aquatic plants are able to thrive in our lakes, it is important not to dump any aquarium or garden debris into lakes, rivers, streams, or storm sewers. Instead, freeze the plants and dispose of them into non-compostable garbage.

### Q: What should I do if I see an invasive species?

A: The provincial government has created multiple ways to report invasive species sightings. These include downloading the "Report Invasives BC" app, completing an online form, or by sending an email to [invasive.plants@gov.bc.ca](mailto:invasive.plants@gov.bc.ca).

To report aquatic invasive species using the province's online platforms, visit: [www.gov.bc.ca/invasive-species](http://www.gov.bc.ca/invasive-species)



**Fact:** Feral Eastern Cottontail Rabbits have been an invasive species in Kelowna, B.C. for over a decade. Rabbits can exhaust resources such as food and habitat needed by many native mammals and cause property damage.



**Fact:** Goldfish have unfortunately been introduced to waterbodies across B.C. They outcompete native fish for food and habitat, and carry harmful diseases such as koi herpesvirus. Goldfish also stir up mud while feeding which can affect the growth of native plants by altering the quality of water.



For more information on  
invasive species:

**OISO.ca**



**DON'T MOVE A  
MUSSEL** 

