

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 the 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 BC'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.



Photo from Government of B.C.

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 Western Painted Turtle for basking sites which are crucial for our native turtles to maintain its body temperature.

Q: What kind of pets can be invasive?

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

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):



www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/invasive-mussels

Why Should I Care?

Q: What is the economic impact?

A: Eurasian Watermilfoil is an invasive species that was 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. To manage the aquatic plant, the Okanagan Basin Water Board spends between \$800,000- \$850,000 a year. Because there is not a way to completely remove Milfoil, this cost will only continue to rise as the species further establishes its population.

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

A: Many pets released into the wild are not capable of adapting to a new environment. They have not learned how to survive on their own and they are not in an environment suitable to support them. As such, they are not likely to survive in the wild.

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

A: It is the responsibility of the pet owner to make the best decisions for that pet until it is no longer under their care. Once you have decided to keep and own a pet, the onus is on you to take responsibility for that animal's actions and wellbeing. The abandonment and release of exotic animals in an unsuitable environment is a form of animal cruelty and can result in a penalty enforced by the B.C. Wildlife Act's Controlled Alien Species (CAS) Regulation. This can lead to a first time offender facing up to \$250,000 in fines and/or an imprisonment term of up to two years.

How Can I Help?

Q: What can I do before I get a pet?

A: Make sure to research the lifestyle, environment and costs associated with the pet you are interested in prior to committing to caring for them. Choose a pet that you will be capable of providing everything they need 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 center, 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 pets 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.



Photo by Veronika Andrews (Pixabay)

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 small mammals and cause extreme property damage.



Photo by kaori (Pixabay)

Fact: Self-sustaining populations of Goldfish have been introduced to waterbodies across British Columbia. Goldfish outcompete native fish for food and habitat, carry harmful diseases such as koi herpesvirus, and stir up mud while feeding which can affect the growth of plants by altering the quality of water.



For more information on invasive species:
OASISS.ca
OISO.ca

