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Agency Of Natural Resources

Vermont Agency of Natural Resources Fish and Wildlife Department

Guidance for Non-Native Invasive Plant Species Monitoring and Control in Connection with Section 248 Projects

Purpose

This guidance is intended to provide applicants for a certificate of public good (CPG) under 30 V.S.A. § 248 with guidance on monitoring and control of Non-Native Invasive Species. Non-Native Invasive plants have the potential to significantly disrupt habitats and negatively impact the ecological health and diversity of natural systems in Vermont. The potential for a project to result in the introduction, or promote the spread, of NNIS into sensitive ecosystems is reviewed by the Agency as part of the Section 248 process.

Background

People have moved plants around the earth for centuries, both intentionally and accidentally. Some of these plants have aggressive growth habits resulting in their spread throughout ecosystems. Plants which have been purposefully or accidentally introduced outside of their original geographic range and which are able to proliferate and alter or displace native ecosystems are referred to as Non-Native Invasive Species (NNIS). NNIS can spread rapidly and outcompete native plants for space, sunlight and nutrients. This has the potential to destabilize an ecosystem and make it less beneficial to people, native plants, and wildlife. NNIS infestations can also interfere with navigation, recreation, water supplies, agricultural production, and create public health and safety hazards. The costs of controlling NNIS, once introduced into an ecosystem, can be substantial and efforts may not be successful. Natural resources of special consideration, such as RTE plant populations, significant natural communities, wetlands, riparian areas and un-fragmented forests, are especially vulnerable to harm from the introduction and spread of NNIS into these areas.

Therefore, for Section 248 projects which are located proximate to such resources, the Agency will recommend that an applicant be required to implement best management practices to prevent the introduction, and control the spread, of NNIS.

Best Management Practices to Prevent Introduction and Spread of NNIS

BMP's recommended to prevent the introduction and spread of NNIS may include: cleaning of construction equipment to remove visible soil and plant material prior to entering the project area; cleaning of construction equipment prior to moving to alternate work locations or other project sites after working in project areas where NNIS are known to be present; the use of

appropriate seed mixes, and; depending on the NNIS present on the project site, a site specific mowing regime. Control of pre-existing NNIS populations may also be required prior to site preparation or construction activities when the NNIS populations are proximate to RTE plants or other natural resources of special consideration. Generally, NNIS control is required within a minimum buffer of 25 feet from RTE plants or other special consideration resources. Larger buffers may be warranted in certain situations. Because of this, applicants may be required to conduct pre-construction inventories of NNIS in order to identify the types and locations of pre-existing NNIS populations proximate to the project site. Inventorying pre-existing NNIS populations assists in avoiding minimizing and documenting their spread.

NNIS Monitoring and Control

Post-construction NNIS monitoring proximate to resources of special consideration typically involves a pre-construction survey to establish a baseline and then five years of annual monitoring and reporting after completion of construction and site stabilization to determine if new NNIS have been introduced to the site or if pre-existing NNIS have spread as a result of the project activities. If no new NNIS and no significant increase in pre-existing NNIS are detected for three successive years after completion of construction, the Agency may approve that monitoring be discontinued. However, if new NNIS are detected or an increase in pre-existing NNIS is observed, then the full five years of monitoring and measures to eradicate or control their spread will be required. Monitoring shall be conducted prior to 15 September with a report submitted to the Agency by 31 January each year. If a project is constructed in phases or segments, then separate monitoring shall commence following the completion of each phase or segment in accordance with the above terms.

Longer duration monitoring and control of NNIS may be needed for projects that result in clearing or fragmentation of previously intact forest or natural habitats when there is regular activity into these areas during project operations and maintenance. Such a requirement would apply to construction of a new utility ROW within previously intact resources, as opposed to upgrading an existing line within a previously disturbed and managed area. This requirement may apply for the life of the project, but only in natural settings where there are resources of special consideration, and not agricultural or other anthropogenic settings. Removal of pre-existing NNIS prior to site preparation or construction may be a necessary step in order to control their spread following construction, especially for projects that result in clearing or fragmentation of forest.

Decommissioning

For projects where there is a resource of special consideration on the site, the Agency will likely require similar conditions as those described above at the time of, and following, decommissioning of the project.

Louis Porter, Commissioner

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Date