

**You Ain't From Around Here!
A Better Approach to Invasives?
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Landowners, both large and small, are combating invasives of various kinds all across the US and, indeed, across the world. Most of us take small steps to deal with those that most directly impact us - weeds in the garden, stink bugs in the house, garlic mustard around the lawn. Other forest owners deal with various invasives on a larger scale, including trees like *Ailanthus*, vines like kudzu and bittersweet, stilt grass, and dozens more. We all struggle with the realization that, at best, we beat them back to some edge, beyond which they thrive and continuously send seeds, runners, and roots back across the edge into our space. We also struggle with the need to fight the battle seemingly forever, as each of the invasives has deposited a seed bank that will take years to deplete even if we pull or kill every single sprout.



Tree being overwhelmed by oriental bittersweet. Photo by Midwest Invasive Plant Network.

Furthermore, each of us tends to conduct our own experiments with various methods to determine what treatment is most effective. We could learn a lot from each other as well as through various public and private agencies and resources on the internet.

One approach that is largely unknown in Virginia, but common elsewhere in the US, is to create regional organizations that target selected species across a wide area. These organizations also serve as a means for sharing best practices and, indeed, raising funds from other sources to allow for broader, more aggressive initiatives. These regional organizations have many names, but most often are called Cooperative Weed Management Areas or CWMA. A typical CWMA covers 5 to 10 counties, but some cover whole states and some cover one county or less. These are stand-alone non-profit organizations whose steering committees consist of representatives from various non-profits like The Nature Conservancy, federal agencies and landowners like the Natural Resources Conservation Service, USDA Forest Service and National Park Service, state agencies like the Virginia Department of Forestry, and private landowners. Collectively they create and operate initiatives across their target geography, conduct public awareness activities, share best practices, and apply for grants from various public and private sources. And while the common thread is dealing with invasives, the mission is often broader - such as overall improvement of forest health. This might include how to reestablish native species where invasives have been killed or removed. Ultimately, each CWMA sets its own agenda, creates its own annual plans, and conducts its own programs. Many CWMA have grown to the point that they have part time and/or full time employees to drive their activities.

Dealing with invasives on a regional, collaborative basis is a much better answer than each of us only working separately. And as the effects of invasives become more severe and the public becomes more aware, this approach should become more and more appealing and popular.

In Virginia the only CWMA in existence today is the Potomac Highlands Cooperative Weed and Pest Management Area that covers several counties in West Virginia and two counties in northwest Virginia.

The author, a landowner in the Charlottesville area, is working with various organizations to create a CWMA in central Virginia. For more information on CWMAs, start with the CWMA Cookbook at www.MIPN.org. For more information on forming a CWMA in central Virginia, contact Rod Walker at rwalker@alum.mit.edu.