

**Invasive Plants Council
Minutes
March 23, 2004**

Present: Dr. Anderson, Mr. Goodwin, Comm. Gresczyk (Melanie Attwater sitting in for Commissioner), Mr. Larson, Dr. Mehrhoff, Dr. Musgrave, Mr. Sutherland, Mr. McGowan

Absent: Comm. Leff

The Meeting was called to order at 2:05 PM by Dr. Anderson in Room 1C of the Legislative Office Building.

Dr. Anderson had members introduce themselves before introducing Sen. Don Williams (Co-Chair of the Environment Committee). Sen. Williams addressed the council and thanked them for their work. He outlined the legislative schedule and stressed to the council that he is looking for a comprehensive list from the council before the end of session. Council members asked if a list of the majority of plants, excluding some that might be too complicated and too controversial to decide upon in such a short time period, would be acceptable. Sen. Williams said that he was looking for a good faith effort. Rep. Pat Widlitz (Co-Chair of the Environment Committee) also briefly addressed the council thanking them for their work.

Dr. Anderson asked members in the audience to introduce themselves.

Bob Heffernan from the CT Green Industries addressed the council on the issue of economic impact of banning certain plants. He stated that banning the plants listed in the bill before the legislature would have over an \$18 million sales impact, and this was being very conservative. He submitted written testimony to the council outlining cost of each plant with significant sales.

Connie Millane of Millane of Millane Nurseries in Cromwell spoke to the council. He stated that they have over \$300,000 worth of Burning Bush in the fields right now. He says he has never seen it to be invasive in all the years they have grown it.

Fred Platt from Robert Baker Company addressed the council. This bill would have an \$2.5 - \$3 million impact on his company. He spoke of the loss of jobs and tax revenues to the state on the plants that they wouldn't be able to sell. He stressed that working with live products is very different than any other type of industry.

Mark Sellev from Farms in Lebanon spoke to the council. He showed pictures of plants that have been growing on the side of the road to show that there are no seedlings growing. Mr. Sellev stressed that their buyers might abandon them entirely if they are not able to provide them with the plants they want in the fall.

David Richards from Clinton Nurseries spoke as well. He stated that he doesn't believe this bill will impact the problem of invasives. They have over 380 employees. They feel that the plants in the bill amount to 7% of their sales but banning them would possibly cause 17-24% drop in revenue because of loss of customers due to unavailability of certain plants.

Greg Schaan from Imperial Nurseries in Granby addressed the council. They are in the process of getting certified to send plants to Canada and as part of that process they were inspected to show

that their barberry cultivars are not invasive in their fields. This ban would cause them to lose 30 employees.

Chuck Newman from Planters' Choice Nursery in Newtown spoke to the council. Most of their plants are sold in state. They would lose 50-60 employees because of this bill. They grow Burning Bush and Barberry. He said that 3 years to clear their inventory would not be enough time.

Mr. Larson stressed that 3-5 years for a phase out would be a minimum needed by the industry.

Dr. Mehrhoff said that he is very much in support of education issues and that the industry can really help with education. He offered to take any industry representative on a field trip to show them the invasiveness of these plants. He asked Mr. Heffernan if the plants on his list were the only ones that the industry would object to banning at this moment. Mr. Heffernan said yes.

Mr. Sellew stated that the answer to all of these problems were sterile cultivars. Please don't kill the market before they arrive. Once these plants are banned it will be impossible to have the public convinced of sterile cultivars.

Mr. Sutherland asked what the current market for Barberry and Burning Bush are. They said that demand is on the increase. Mr. Platt stated that they cannot grow enough of either plant to meet demand.

Dr. Musgrave asked why there are no native plants that they can substitute for these plants. Mr. Sellew said that there is no real alternative for barberry but there are a few for burning bush. He also said that the industry could not lose burning bush. Mr. Larson followed up with saying that at this time there are no real alternatives for barberry or burning bush that could make up the market loss.

Dr. Musgrave asked if the plants they grow produce seeds in the fields before they are shipped. Mr. Millane answered that burning bush does not produce seeds before they sell it but Mr. Sellew stated that barberry can produce seeds before they ship it.

Mr. Sutherland asked how much are instate growers accounting for instate sales of these plants. Mr. Schaan said probably less than 50% are grown in this state.

Dr. Anderson stated that he thought it would be best to have Chairman Leff at the meeting before they make decisions on how to proceed with the ban list.

Mr. McGowan stated that the council needs a plan to deal with these plants. Donna Ellis (sitting in for Dr. Musgrave) said that researchers should be included in the solution.

Dr. Mehrhoff asked if the council would consider a motion to ban all of the non-controversial plants right now. The consensus of the council was to wait until the next meeting to vote on these plants.

Respectfully Submitted,

Emanuel Merisotis
Clerk- Environment Committee