The Honorable Edward Meyer  
State of Connecticut Senate  
Legislative Office Building, Room 3200  
Hartford, CT 06106

The Honorable Richard Roy  
State of Connecticut  
House of Representatives  
Legislative Office Building, Room 3201  
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Senator Meyer, Representative Roy, and other members of the Environment Committee:

As Chairman of the Invasive Plants Council, I respectfully submit this letter and attachments for the seventh annual report on activities conducted during 2009. This Council was established and operates pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes 22a-381 through 22a-381d, and has the following responsibilities: developing and conducting initiatives to educate the public about the problems created by invasive plants in lakes, forests and other natural habitats; recommending ways of controlling their spread; making information available; annually publishing and updating a list of invasive or potentially invasive plants; and supporting state agencies in conducting research into invasive plant control, including the development of new non-invasive plant varieties and methods for controlling existing species.

The Council

The Council consists of 9 members representing government, the nursery industry, scientists, and environmental groups (see attachment #1). This group has shown a willingness to find solutions to problems and to work constructively. The Council has met 8 times since the sixth annual report dated December 9, 2008. See attachment #2 for the approved minutes for 8 meetings, including those for the December 9, 2008 meeting. The minutes for the December 8, 2009 meeting are not yet approved, and so will appear in next year’s report.

I am Professor and Head of the Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture, representing the Dean of the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources at the University of Connecticut, and serve as Chairman. Commissioner F. Philip Prelli (Department of Agriculture) serves as Vice Chairman. No changes in membership have occurred since our last annual report. At its November 12, 2009 meeting, the Council voted to retain the current Chairman and Vice Chairman for an additional one-year term.

The Council acknowledges the cooperation of the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station (CAES), specifically the Valley Lab in Windsor, for providing conference room space for this year’s meetings. Mr. Logan Senack, the state’s first Invasive Plant Coordinator, is thanked for taking minutes for the Council (among all the many things he does to help our agencies and many volunteers control invasive plants). As will be discussed in more detail later, the state funds provided to Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) allowed for the hiring of Mr. Senack through a cooperative agreement with the University of Connecticut. These funds also supported...
the cost of production and publication of this annual report. This support has been invaluable to
the Council, which for many years had to provide these clerical services through the good will of
its members and the charity of their home organizations.

Council Activities

The operation of the Council changed dramatically this year. Through the $500K/year funding
provided by the General Assembly, DEP was able to initiate a desperately needed comprehensive
program regarding invasive plants. We are very pleased that Connecticut’s first Invasive Plant
Coordinator, Logan Senack, was hired in December 2008 through a DEP contract with the
University of Connecticut. The Coordinator position is absolutely critical to the success of
Connecticut’s response to invasive plants. The Coordinator oversees these programs, further
developing early detection and rapid response procedures for emerging problems and
coordinating the implementation of a comprehensive State invasive plant control and prevention
program. With the Coordinator in place, the Council played a productive role as an advisory
body to be consulted by DEP as it moved these programs forward.

Late in 2008, the DEP announced a program to provide grants to municipalities so that invasive
problems on public use areas could begin to be addressed in our state. Especially considering that
the grants required a match from municipalities, the response to this request for proposals was
phenomenal (see attachment 3). The Council reviewed the recommendations by DEP and
unanimously approved their proposal to award 10 contracts to 10 of the 37 municipalities that
requested awards. By February, 2009, the contracts had been prepared and were awaiting final
signature, when state fiscal difficulties forced rescission of the funds that would have supported
these and other efforts.

Funding through the DEP to the CAES supported training sessions for DOA staff to identify
invasive aquatic plants that they might find for sale in the state’s pet shops. In addition, DEP had
contracted with University of Connecticut for a clean-up demonstration project to remediate
Hydrilla in the Silvermine River Watershed in Norwalk, CT, prior to the budget rescission, so this
project continued throughout the year with good results.

In addition to its advisory work early in the year on the Grants to Municipalities Program, the
Council responded to many legislative initiatives this year:

Governor’s Bill 6375 to eliminate the CT Invasive Plants Council effective Oct. 1, 2009. The
impact of this Bill was discussed at two of the Council meetings (see minutes for Feb. 10, 2009
and March 10, 2009 meetings). The Council has a legislatively-mandated role to play with regard
to maintenance of the invasive plant lists for Connecticut. Subsequently the Invasive Plant
Council was removed from the sunset list in Governor’s Bill 6375.

Raised Bill 790, An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Invasive Plant Council. See
attachment 4 for the Council’s testimony for Feb. 18, 2009 hearing with the Environment
Committee.

Appropriations committee See attachment #5 for the Council’s Feb. 19, 2009 testimony. This
testimony was made to urge mitigation of the Governor’s proposal to cut funding for the program
from $500K to 0. The Council urged retention of a “keep-alive” budget of about $100K per year
that would fund the Invasive Plant Coordinator position, thus allowing educational efforts to
continue.
The Council heard two presentations about the DEP-commissioned Hydrilla control project in the Silvermine watershed from Dr. John Volin, Dr. Jason Vokoun, and Mr. Nicholas Reif from the Department of Natural Resources and the Environment at UConn. They also heard a presentation from Dr. Mark Brand, a professor in the Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture at UConn, regarding progress in the development of sterile cultivars of barberry and euonymus. A recurring issue through the year was how enforcement of the invasive plant regulations can be carried out in the state. The Council also reviewed the lists of invasive and potentially invasive plants in Connecticut.

Suggested Plant Regulation Changes

The Council has considered changes proposed to the list of invasive and potentially invasive plants in Connecticut and has identified several plants that may be deserving of a change in classification. During its November meeting, the Council voted to change the status of four plants currently listed as ‘potentially invasive’ to ‘invasive,’ based on recent analysis of their distribution and spread. These changes, along with a slight modification to the status of the rugose rose, are documented in Attachment #6. Another issue remaining to be decided by the Council is settling on a standard authority for nomenclature.

With regard to how invasive plants are regulated within the state, inspection roles for DOA (for aquatic plants being sold in pet shops) and CAES (for plants in nurseries) are now clearly described by the legislation, and a civil enforcement mechanism is being developed by DEP. A violation of Sect. 22a-381d is listed with a $50 fine in the schedule of infractions. The situation governing inspections for aquatic plants being carried by boats and boat trailers is less clear. Sect. 15-180 of the CT General Statutes (transport of vegetation on boats and boat trailers) is enforceable by DEP but is listed as a misdemeanor, not an infraction, requiring both the offender and the officer to appear in court. Lake Authority personnel, under the authority of resident state troopers, might be a way to additionally enforce the law. An enforceable invasive plant boating law is key to preventing spread of aquatic invasives in lakes and other waterways. The Council recommends that Sect. 15-180 be amended to change the misdemeanor to an infraction, in order to make enforcement easier and more effective.

Overview of Current Activities and Needs in Connecticut

Invasive plants continue to cause obvious environmental problems, and public concern about them continues to grow. During 2009 the Council continued to receive requests from land holders who want relief from the problem of invasive plants. Removal of invasives from minimally managed areas is a costly proposition, and the State would be well-served by a program that both prevents future invasions and provides educational and financial resources to implement eradication campaigns. The level of response by municipalities to a quick-turnaround Request for Proposals shows both the awareness of the problem in the state and need for corrective mechanisms. A total of 41 applications from 37 municipalities were received, each offering a match, and a total of $936,403 was requested in funding for an opportunity that had $175K available. Thus Connecticut citizens are eager for a means to address the invasive plants on their public use lands.

Council members are grateful that the technical changes recommended in prior years were at last passed by the General Assembly this year. However the loss of funding to support the comprehensive state invasive plant program is devastating. We realize that budgetary times are difficult, but support (~$100K per year) for key “keep-alive” functions, such as the coordinator’s
salary and operating expenses, is absolutely essential if the state is going to be able to address the invasive plants problem.

As Chairman, I offer a response to the question weighing on the minds of our Council members: in view of the loss of funding for the program, what have we accomplished? Are we back to square one? I would argue that our efforts have not been in vain. We have established a working list of invasive plants for the State, and the legislature has banned many of them. We have worked to refine the legislation so that mechanisms for inspection and enforcement are now in place. We have envisioned what a comprehensive invasive plants program would look like in Connecticut, and with the initial funding for the program, DEP was able to move forward to create a Coordinator position and begin to implement this vision (attachment 7). Strong response to DEP’s Grants to Municipalities Program validates the concept of that program and shows promise for future efforts. Moreover, staff in DEP have taken up the charge of responding to the invasive plants problem, and have utilized the resources and network that the Council provides. When state finances improve and funding for invasive plants is restored to DEP, this infrastructure is ready to fulfill the goals initially enunciated by the legislation that formed the Council in 2002. That said, the near term funding for the State Coordinator’s position remains our top concern.

I and other Council members are available to answer questions and provide advice as needed. Feel free to contact me at (860) 486-2925 if questions arise.

Sincerely,

Mary E. Musgrave
Chairman

Attachment 1. Council members
Attachment 2. Minutes of meetings
Attachment 3. Grants to municipalities
Attachment 4. Environment committee testimony
Attachment 5. Appropriations committee testimony
Attachment 6. Changes to the invasive plant list.
Attachment 7. DEP invasive plant program 2009 accomplishments