



IUFRO Spotlight is an initiative of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations. Its aim is to introduce, in a timely fashion, significant findings in forest research from IUFRO officeholders and member organizations to a worldwide network of decision makers, policy makers and researchers.

IUFRO Spotlight issues up to October 2014 will primarily focus on the *IUFRO World Congress* that will take place on **5-11 October 2014 in Salt Lake City, Utah, USA**. The topics of individual Congress sessions will be highlighted in order to draw attention to the wide variety of themes that will be addressed at the Congress and their importance on a regional and global scale. [Link to: IUFRO 2014 World Congress Scientific Program](#)

IUFRO Spotlight #19/ April 2014 / IUFRO World Congress

‘Citizen science’: A way to fight invasive species?

Invasive species are a threat to forest ecosystems around the world.

No surprise there.

Thousands of invasive flora and fauna have been transported – sometimes by accident, sometimes by design – to different continents and countries. Very often their impact is detrimental to their new region.

But, usually when one thinks of the negative impacts of invasive species, top of mind would be the effect on the economy – for instance, phytophthora dieback, an Asian import, affects the economically important jarrah tree in Australia. Or perhaps one would think of environmental damage, such as the destructive swath cut through the forests of Tierra del Fuego by imported North American beaver, to give just two illustrations of unwanted economic/ environmental results.

But the societal impact is equally important.

And at the 24th IUFRO World Congress in Salt Lake City this fall, a session on the “societal impacts of invasive forest pathogens and pests”, will be presented by organizers Matteo Garbelotto of the University of California at Berkeley, USA; Giles Hardy of Murdoch University, Australia; and Paolo Gonthier of the University of Turin, Italy.

The organizers note that anything that has an economic impact has a societal impact, but there are many issues related to loss of plant hosts that can have a serious cultural impact with no apparent economic impact.

One example would be sacred tree species. The tanoak, which grows in parts of California and Oregon in the USA, is not of significant economic value *per se*, but it is sacred to some native Californians from the Central and Northern coast. They use tanoak acorns to make a traditional/ritual dish. However, tanoak is being decimated by Sudden Oak Death, which is believed to have originated in Asia, and the loss of this tree species is a major tragedy for these native people because it eliminates an important linkage with their past.



At Shelley Beach, a few miles North of San Francisco, tanoaks and oaks, the most sacred trees to native people of the Northern California coast, have been decimated due to the exotic disease known as Sudden Oak Death (SOD). SOD is thus not only changing the landscape dynamics but also profoundly altering the local culture.
(Photo by Matteo Garbelotto)

As a second example, the organizers note that closing forests to the public to prevent the spread of invasive pests and diseases is another case of societal impact – withdrawal of an environmental service – that is difficult to place a monetary value on.

One of the motivations for the symposium is to alert the scientific community to the need to work more closely with stakeholders and the public to better explain what the non-economic loss of a tree can mean to different social groups.

The organizers see this “citizen science” (one definition of which is: the engagement of non-scientists in decision-making about policy issues that have technical or scientific components) as a way to move forward in the fight against invasives.

Their hope is that by making the public partners with a stake in the issue – as well as some clout with decision-makers – rather than clients, it will help form a bond with the public that will generate enough pressure to bring about change in the way some sectors of the economy operate.

They note that the international trade in certain products – live plants and untreated wood, among others – offers the major pathway and entry point for invasives. But rapid, definitive action is difficult because that trade affects so many different interests.

For that reason they believe that researchers must spend more time providing policy makers, other stakeholders and the public with relevant, fact-based, easily understood information about the nature and mechanisms that lead to invasives’ introductions and to the wide-ranging implications. Otherwise, they say, one can’t really expect governments to make quick decisions on issues that have such huge economic ramifications.

Visit the webpages of [IUFRO Division 7 Forest Health](#) to find out more about IUFRO’s activities in this field.

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