CNPS Seeks Comments on Draft Policy to Reduce Disease in Native Plant Nursery Stock

On September 19, the CNPS Chapter Council released a draft policy on actions to reduce the threat of Phytophthora infestations in native plant nursery stock. This policy was prepared at the request of the Willis Linn Jepson Chapter. Your Board of Directors believes that Phytophthora species and other plant pathogens present to significant threat to native plants and their habitats. This policy will help guide CNPS actions to minimize this threat.

The CNPS Chapter Council is requesting that each chapter review and comments on the draft policy. A copy of the draft policy is attached. Background information on the issue of disease in native plant nursery stock can be found here on the Jepson Chapter website. Please review this draft policy and send any comments or questions to Steven Goetz at sgoet@sbcglobal.net. The deadline for comments is November 4.
California Native Plant Society
PREVENTING INFECTION AND SPREAD OF PHYTOPHTHORA PATHOGENS VIA NATIVE PLANT NURSERY AND PLANT SALE STOCK
Working Draft, 19 September 2015

The Policy

Statement:
The California Native Plant Society (CNPS) encourages native plant nursery and propagation practices that help prevent plant diseases and that discourage the spread of phytophthora and similar plant pathogens. CNPS gives special attention to stock propagated and/or sold by CNPS chapters, and offers guidance and support to its chapters to purchase clean stock and maintain pathogen-free operations.

Intent:
- To foster the use of pathogen-free stock in all plantings of native plants,
- To proactively maintain the influence of CNPS as the principal conservation organization dedicated to using native plants in habitat restoration and in home and public gardens,
- To ensure the viability and financial success of chapter sales of native plants,
- To ensure favorable perceptions of chapter sales, and to minimize any associated legal liability.

Supporting Materials

Rationale:
New phytophthora pathogens that have begun to infect plant nurseries and other propagation operations, and these pathogens have great potential to spread into native habitat, and into landscaping and gardens that use native plants. CNPS must help to minimize that threat to native plants.

CNPS chapters typically raise funds through native plant sales involving purchased stock and/or stock that they have propagated themselves. This close involvement of CNPS with propagated materials requires that CNPS be proactive in the prevention of infection, and control of its spread. As the principal organization dedicated to California's native flora, this responsibility is especially important as public and government agencies turn to CNPS in this water-limited era for guidance in using native plants in landscaping.

Implementation

1. Recommendations for helping chapters
   a. EDUCATION - Educate chapters about the problem, and share current information about the status of infection across the state.
   b. BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES (BMPs) - Compile, develop, and communicate BMPs for avoiding infection in purchased nursery stock, and for avoiding infection in propagation.
      i. Recommended BMPs should reflect the most current science, and should be monitored for effectiveness.
      ii. Recommended BMPs should be appropriate for the size of chapter plant sale operations, and for their reliance on volunteers.
      iii. Encourage chapters that follow the BMPs to communicate that fact to their buying public.
c. **DECISION TREE** - Develop and provide to the chapters a decision tree, for evaluating the condition of stock, whether purchased or chapter grown, and for providing guidelines for dealing with infection if found.
   i. For purchased nursery stock, advise the supplier of the condition of their plants and do not make additional purchases from the supplier until they have implemented BMPs in their operation.
   ii. For Chapter-grown nursery stock, provide guidance for chapter’s to evaluate their implementation of BMPs.

2. **Recommendations for helping nurseries, the general public, and agencies**
   a. Educate the public on how diseases develop in nursery stock and how to evaluate the condition of nursery stock and recognize infected plants.
   b. Support the development of BMPs in the California nursery industry to minimize the risk of pathogens in their nursery stock.
   c. Support implementation of a certification program for California nurseries that informs consumers when practices were followed to minimize the risk of pathogens in their nursery stock.
   d. Support the use of contract specifications by public and private entities to minimize the risk of pathogens in the nursery stock used for their projects and to control their spread in the landscape.

**Considerations:**

CNPS could possibly be liable or publicly criticized if it sells infected plants or advocates incorrect guidelines. If we make good faith efforts and follow accepted practices we are unlikely to be legally liable, but we could still suffer public relations consequences if we are seen to make mistakes.

Incorporating best management practices into a CNPS Chapter Plant Sale Grower’s operation may cause significant disruption to current practices and pose a significant financial burden on a Chapter.

There are other sources of information and cooperation, and we must determine how we interact with them. Those resources include:

The UC Cooperative Extension, Marin County, is supporting *A Working Group for Phytophthoras in Native Plant Habitats* to determine steps needed to protect wildlands and assist the restoration industry. Participating organizations include: California Department of Food and Agriculture, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, Presidio Trust, USDA Forest Service – Pacific Southwest Research Station, California Native Nursery Network, California Native Plant Society, University of California Cooperative Extension, Marin Municipal Water District, Phytosphere Research, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, Santa Clara Valley Water District, National Ornamentals Research Site at Dominican University of California and others. A purpose of the *Working Group* is to develop and adapt best management practices to minimize the likelihood that native plant nursery stock will be infected with exotic Phytophthora species.iii

---

i United State Department of Agriculture, Pest Alert – Phytophthora tentaculata, February 23, 2015
ii CNPS Horticulture Committee Survey of CNPS Chapter Plant Sale Chairs, November 2014