

KEEP. CARE. BE AWARE.

An Invasive Species Educational Program



Goldfish Captured in Local Storm Water Pond

PROJECT GOAL

Ontario Streams, in partnership with the Invading Species Awareness Program (ISAP), teamed up with the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council of Canada’s (PIJAC) Habitattitude® campaign and Big Al’s Aquarium Services to launch a new awareness campaign targeting aquarium and water garden enthusiasts in Ontario called [“Keep. Care. Be Aware.”](#)

“This partnership with ISAP falls right in line with PIJAC Canada’s mandate and complements our ongoing efforts to address the issue of invasive non-native species.” said Louis McCann, Executive Director of PIJAC Canada.

The increasing number of intentional and unintentional releases of non-native plants and animals into Ontario’s natural environment is wreaking havoc on our native species. In fact, a third of the world’s worst invasive species are from the aquarium and water garden trade. For example, a commonly sold turtle, the Red-eared Slider, is an introduced species that directly competes with our native turtles for food and nesting and basking habitats. Most of Ontario’s native turtle species are listed as species at risk

under the provincial Endangered Species Act and the release of pets into the wild adds further stress that ultimately reduces the number of wild, native species. Goldfish and koi are some of the most popular fish species purchased in Ontario pet stores and water garden centers. When released into our local streams and waterways, these species can successfully breed and destroy important shoreline habitat and degrade water quality.



Example of Sticker used in Store Aquariums

In addition to fish and turtles, dumped aquarium and water garden plants can also spread and alter river and lake ecosystems. Despite the perception that aquarium plants cannot survive the cold conditions of northern Ontario waterbodies, the truth is that many plants will not only survive, but thrive! These invasive aquatic plants grow rapidly, often creating dense monocultures which can have negative impacts on recreational activities such as boating, fishing, and swimming.

www.habitattitude.ca or contact us at info@ontariostreams.on.ca

The "Keep. Care. Be Aware" campaign looks to increase awareness among consumers in the aquarium and water garden trades to ultimately prevent the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species made available through these trades.

The initiative includes the placement of [removable aquarium stickers](#) with scannable QR codes on in-store aquariums. Customers can then scan the code on their smart phones and be instantly directed to information on the invasive species for sale. Awareness stickers will also be available for fish bags and turtle boxes. Additionally, posters that contain information on reporting invasive species sightings, as well as turtle and fish rescue contacts will be displayed.

As a final incentive for people to do the right thing, Big Al's can also offer their customers in-store credits for returning unwanted fish, turtles and plants. Big Al's Aquarium stores will be piloting this campaign in all their retail locations province-wide.

"In the long run, by not educating our customers about the dangers of potentially invasive aquatic plants and animals we will only harm our business. I honestly believe that it is better to be proactive. It is the right thing to do from all viewpoints" said Chris Whitelaw, District Livestock Manager for Big Al's.

Dayna Laxton of Ontario Streams who was coordinating this initiative on behalf of the ISAP, concluded by saying, "Without full cooperation of industry, the public and like-minded organizations, we really have little chance to slow the spread of invasive species. It's through great partnerships like this that we can have a positive impact".

For more information visit: www.invadingspecies.com or