National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Natural Resource Program Center

Exotic Plant Management Teams

A mobile strike force

An Exotic Plant Management Team has been established through the Natural Resource Challenge to control exotic plants in capital-area parks.

"Without understanding … and having considerable resources going into the matter of controlling alien invasives, the goals … of preserving biodiversity cannot be met."

—Peter Raven, Discovery 2000 conference

The national parks are home to complex native communities of plants and animals that have developed over millions of years. The delicate natural balance arrived at over time in these systems is threatened by a wide number of exotic plants (plants introduced into a natural community that are not native to that place). These exotic plants are able to reproduce rapidly, displacing native plants, because the animals and diseases that kept them in check in their home ranges are missing. When the populations of native plants are reduced, the animals that depend upon them lack the food and shelter needed for survival. Today, exotic plants infest some 2.6 million acres in the national park system, thereby reducing the natural diversity of these places. The National Park Service is establishing Exotic Plant Management Teams (EPMTs) to combat and control exotic plants as part of the Natural Resource Challenge.

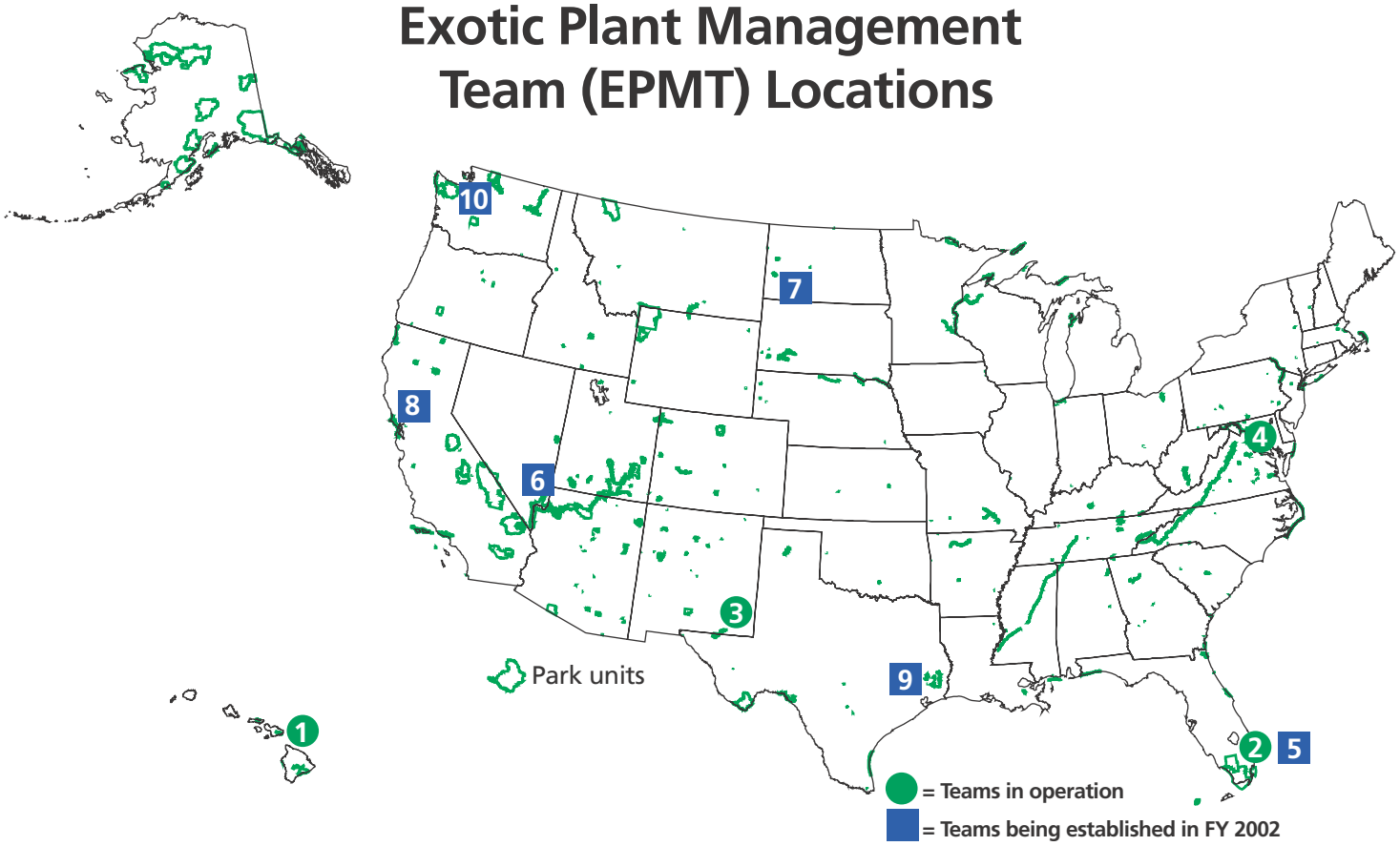
Modeled after the approach used to fight wildfires, EPMTs are designed to provide a highly trained, mobile strike force of plant management specialists to assist parks in the control of exotic plants. In 2000, four Exotic Plant Management Teams were established through the Natural Resource Challenge. Using a competitive process, teams were inaugurated in Rock Creek Park, serving the National Capital Region; Carlsbad Caverns National Park, serving southwestern parks; Haleakala National Park, serving the Pacific Islands; and the Florida Partnership EPMT, serving the state of Florida. Six additional teams are being established in FY 2002.

Each of the four established teams has developed strategies for combating exotic plants that reflect the needs and resources of the parks they serve. For example, the Florida EPMT is a partnership with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection to address the state's exotic plant problem. Through this program, the State of Florida matched each Challenge dollar spent to control exotic plants in Florida's 11 national park units. By contrast the National Capital Region EPMT directly assists the 10 parks in its region to identify, map, and control exotic vegetation. Control measures range from the use of chainsaws to the application of herbicides.

The success of the Exotic Plant Management Teams derives from their ability to adapt to the conditions of the parks they serve, while working cooperatively with local agencies and experts. To make sure these lessons are not lost and to evaluate the effectiveness of the EPMT concept, the Biological Resource Management Division is developing a database that tracks progress and gathers information about each project.

Stemming the spread of exotic plants is critical to protecting the health and natural diversity of our national parks. Exotic Plant Management Teams hold tremendous promise for meeting this challenge.

Exotic Plant Management Team (EPMT) Locations



Exotic Plant Management Teams in operation

1 Pacific Islands EPMT
Host park: Haleakala National Park

2 Florida Partnership EPMT
In partnership with the State of Florida

3 Chihuahuan Desert/Southern Shortgrass Prairie EPMT
Host park: Carlsbad Caverns National Park

4 National Capital Region EPMT
Host park: Rock Creek Park

Exotic Plant Management Teams being established in FY 2002

5 Florida Partnership EPMT
(increased funding)

6 Lake Mead EPMT
Host park: Lake Mead National Recreation Area

7 Northern Great Plains EPMT
Host park: Theodore Roosevelt National Park

8 California EPMT
Host park: Point Reyes National Seashore

9 Gulf Coast EPMT
Host park: Big Thicket National Park

10 Columbia Cascades EPMT
Host parks: North Cascades and Olympic National Parks

For more information

See *http://www.nature.nps.gov/epmt and http://www.nature.nps.gov/ challenge/nrc.htm.*