



Round Table 3

Pesticide Free Towns

Management of invasive species in public areas across Belgium

Participants

Dan Slotmakers – Flemish Environmental Agency (VVM)

Manuela de Vault de Champion – IBGE (Brussels region)

Philippe Bizoux – Walloon Public Service

Discussion

Invasive species management has a cost and is a permanent problem for municipalities. In the Flemish Region it is possible to get a derogation to use pesticides against invasive species, but only once. Is this correct?

Dan Slotmakers explains that in Flanders, in cooperation with land users, various new or existing invasive species have been identified, against which it is not, or almost not, possible to fight without pesticides. For these species, they have proposed a table presenting the products to use and the integrated methods for alternative control. It works well that way.

Listed species are black cherry, Japanese rootknot and giant hogweed. A series of conditions must be respected such as : not to use these products close to water bodies (pond, swamp, creek, ...) and wetlands, only during a certain part of the life cycle,

What is the situation in the different regions about invasive species? Is it possible to control them? Are the processes too heavy?

Manuela de Vault de Champion explains that for Brussels region, first they look at the degree of infestation. If the species are new, they try to destroy them so that they do not spread. If the species are already installed, they try to prevent their further spread in areas where they are not yet present. There is a system to record observations related to Brussels parks. The Japanese rootknot is the main problem. There are very few individual controls currently.

Philippe Bizoux explains that in Wallonia, some species are widespread, mainly Himalayan balsam, Japanese rootknot and giant hogweed. Concerning Japanese rootknot, there is no general management plan against this species. It is an illusion to fight it so they are rather trying to prevent its spread in places where it could become a problem. They are preparing an evaluation grid with specific criteria including the place and the amount of invasions, to determine whether control is possible or not in a given area, and guides to avoid new contaminations, for example through soil transport.

Concerning balsam, in some areas the management is done by river managers, especially in some heavily infested drainage basins.

Concerning giant hogweed, there is a plan of action at the level of the Walloon region, aiming to strongly reduce the degree of infestation of this species, through mechanical techniques. This plan has been applied for 4-5 years and results are good, with a decreasing number of big populations.

Public funding allows the management of huge populations by private companies, thanks to the investment of municipalities, river managers and other actors from public administrations such as roads and watercourses who manage public spaces which are part of their area.

For less frequent species, an early warning system has been developed with the cooperation of the Brussels and Flanders regions. This system aims at detecting newly arrived species. In this early warning system, the main species found are aquatic plants, and the actions depend on available resources, as these species are quite problematic regarding their management costs.

Is there in the different regions a helpdesk for citizens in case they would like to know how to eliminate invasive plants?

There is one unit on invasive species in the Walloon Public Service. This unit develops hubs on the web to give advice on invasive plant species, mainly on the three most problematic species. Citizens can contact this unit thanks to a general mail address to get management advice. At municipality level, at more local level, river managers are important contacts as they know the management methods well as they apply it themselves and they can reply to municipalities and to citizens.

In Brussels, NGOs deal with citizen requests of information. This aspect will be developed in the nature plan which is being elaborated, as it will include an action plan related also to the pesticide reduction program against invasive species

In Flanders, people who want to know more about invasive species can consult the website Ecopedia <http://www.ecopedia.be>. It is a recent website created by the Agency for Nature and Forest, dedicated to nature management and presenting information to fight against invasive species. The website is quite dynamic and very popular. The information is constantly updated. It is the reference website on the fight against invasive species.