

News Release

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International scientists gather in Kosciuszko to discuss weed menace and climate change

A team of international scientists will gather at Charlotte Pass in Kosciuszko National Park next week to discuss the impacts of climate change on weed infestations with special attention being paid to a new, super weed that has the potential to swamp the Australian Alps within a handful of years.

The Mountain Invasion Research Network (MIREN) is a collaborative venture between international research institutions, universities and land management agencies like the Department of Environment and Climate Change (DECC), which is focused on the impact of weeds and how to control them in mountain environments.

The conference is being sponsored by DECC and the Australian Alps Liaison Committee and will run for a week beginning Monday.

DECC scientist, Dr Keith McDougall, said today that the gathering was a very important one for the Australian Alps.

"We have some of the best minds internationally gathering to help come up with some potential approaches to managing weeds in mountain environments.

"Generally mountains have been largely immune from the spread of weeds because they tend to be harsh environments that are not conducive to weed spread but two things have changed which has opened the door to some voracious weeds.

"In the past century mountains have begun to attract large numbers of tourists whereas previously there were few people. With tourists came development and the desire to make the environment more accommodating and so we had the spread of domestic gardens and exotic plants in places such as ski resorts.

"We also have climate change adding another dimension. As the climate warms the ability of weeds to survive at higher altitudes also increases markedly.

"The Conference this week will look very closely at a new threat to the Australian Alps and one which has devastated parts of New Zealand – Hawkweed.

"Hawkweed is an iridescent mountain daisy from Europe which was first found by Victoria by University of Melbourne Botany Students in Australia at Falls Creek in where it is believed to have escaped from a domestic garden. Hawkweed was soon found at another 10 sites and despite huge efforts to contain it hawkweed is now found at 125 locations in Victoria with the State government investing more \$200,000 this year in an effort to contain it.

"The weed has also recently been found a handful of locations within Kosciuszko National Park and the DECC is now making every effort to contain its spread.

"This weed has enormous potential to spread rapidly and has devastated parts of New Zealand where it covers more than 6 million hectares.

"It loves mountain landscapes and has the potential to spread right across the Alps as well as the surrounding lowlands such as the Monaro.

"In Australia it has frightening potential to change the whole appearance of the Alps, smothering native vegetation and impacting on wildlife reliant on a native understorey. This weed even has the potential to get into the bog systems and wipe out the critically endangered Southern Corroboree Frog. They have so many cunning strategies for reproduction, including not needing sex to produce seeds.

"Conference participants will contribute to an eradication strategy that is being developed as a close collaboration between NSW and Victorian agencies to control hawkweed in the Australian Alps," Dr McDougall said.

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