

February 25, 2024

Esteemed Chairs Lopes and Gresko,  
Members of the Environment Committee:

The Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) appreciates the opportunity to comment on Bill 5225, *An Act Concerning the Recommendations of The Invasive Plants Council*.

WestCOG **supports** this bill. Limiting the spread of invasive species is critical to protecting the state's environment, its people, and its economy. While the listing of additional invasive species is welcome, **this bill falls short by failing to include one of the state's most harmful invasives, Japanese barberry (*berberis thunbergii*).**

Japanese barberry invades a diverse range of natural environments (including woodlands, wetlands, pastures, and meadows), creating expansive briar patches that displace native plants, diminish wildlife habitat and forage, and alter soil pH, nitrogen levels, and biological activity.

In addition to damaging local ecosystems, Japanese barberry presents a public health threat. **Japanese barberry exponentially raises tick concentration and thus the risk of contracting tick-borne diseases such as Lyme disease.** According to the U.S. Department of the Interior, Japanese barberry "has been proven to enhance tick, host and Lyme disease pathogen densities and that barberry control significantly reduces tick populations and infection prevalence."<sup>1</sup>

**Tick concentrations rise more than tenfold where barberry is spreading**, according to researchers at the University of Connecticut: "When we measure the presence of ticks carrying the Lyme spirochete (*Borrelia burgdorferi*) we find 120 infected ticks where Barberry is not contained, 40 ticks per acre where Barberry is contained, and only 10 infected ticks where there is no Barberry."<sup>2</sup> The Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station reported similar results, finding that Japanese barberry favors tick survival, and that managing it reduces tick abundance and thus the risk of disease.<sup>3</sup>

Given the prevalence of tickborne disease in Connecticut – the state ranks among the highest nationally on per capita infection rates – and the huge health toll these illnesses can exact, **it is extraordinary that Connecticut has not yet joined Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, and Vermont in banning Japanese barberry.**

I urge your Committee to take a vital step to protect the environment and human health by passing this bill with the explicit inclusion Japanese barberry.

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<sup>1</sup> [The interface between invasive species and the increased incidence of tick-borne diseases, and the implications for federal land managers](#) (U.S. Department of the Interior, Invasive Species Advisory Council)

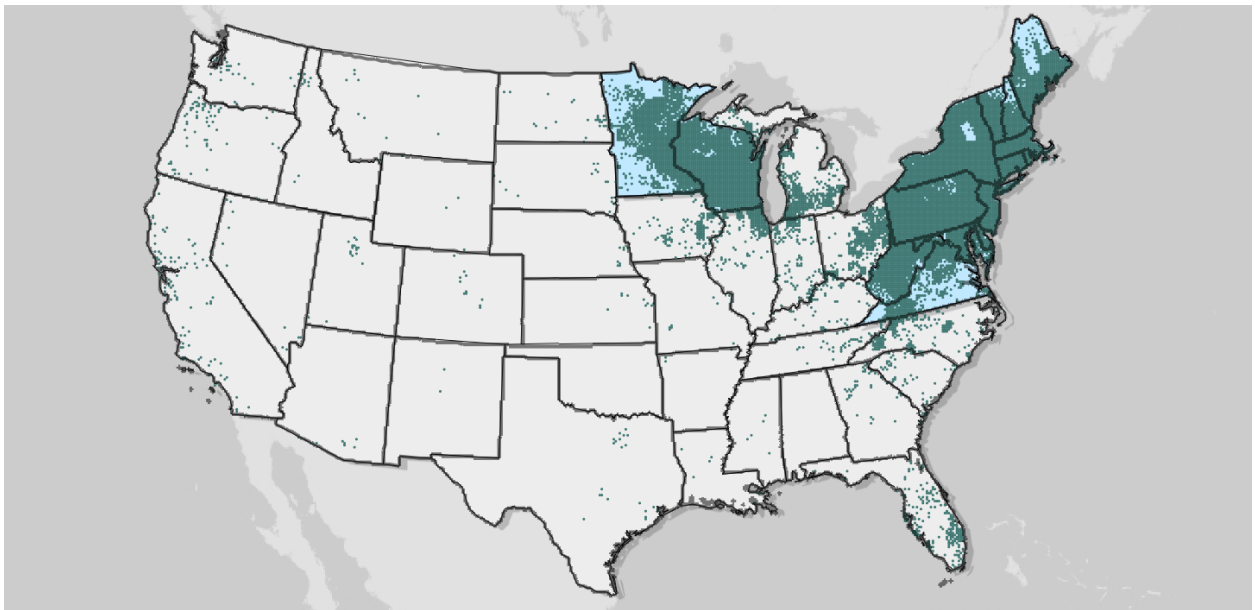
<sup>2</sup> [Controlling Japanese Barberry Helps Stop Spread of Tick-Borne Diseases](#) (UConn Today)

<sup>3</sup> [Manage Japanese Barberry to Keep Tick Levels Low, Reduce Lyme Risk](#) (Entomology Today)

Image of a typical forest choked by Japanese barberry<sup>4</sup>:



Lyme disease cases by state (2022)<sup>5</sup>



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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> [Lyme Disease Map](#) (Centers for Disease Control)

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Francis Pickering". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

Francis R. Pickering  
Executive Director