

# Contain those Crawlers!

Invasive Earthworms in Our Forests

Earthworm photo: Steve Mroczkowski

## The Forest Floor



Without earthworms, a lush forest floor.



After earthworms invade, much of the beauty is gone.

## Earthworms Invading

Believe it or not, no earthworms lived in Minnesota before European settlers brought them. At least 15 nonnative earthworm species have been introduced so far. Many new infestations get started near lakes, streams, and boat landings, where anglers dump their unwanted bait.

## The Harmful Effects

Minnesota's hardwood forests evolved in the absence of earthworms. Without worms, fallen leaves decompose slowly, creating a spongy layer of organic "duff." This duff layer is the natural growing environment for native woodland wildflowers. It also provides habitat for ground-dwelling animals and helps prevent soil erosion, which can degrade fish habitat.

But when European earthworms invade a forest, they eat the duff. Big trees survive, but many young seedlings perish, along with many ferns and wildflowers. Some species return after the initial invasion, but others disappear.

Once they have invaded, earthworms cannot be removed. The only way to protect our worm-free, flower-filled forests is to *prevent* new earthworm infestations.

## How Can You Help?

- Don't dump your worms in the woods — it's illegal.
- Dispose of unwanted bait in the trash.

For more about earthworms and ways to help, visit MINNESOTA WORM WATCH at:

[www.nrrri.umn.edu/worms](http://www.nrrri.umn.edu/worms)

## Gone With the Worms?



False Solomon's Seal



Bellwort



Goblin Fern



Trillium

Goblin ferns have already disappeared from worm-infested soil.

Many woodland flowers, including these three, are sensitive to earthworm damage.

