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INTEGRATION PROJECT OF THE SÃO FRANCISCO RIVER AS A PATHWAY FOR EXOTIC AND INVASIVE SPECIES

Matheus da Silva Asth¹, Paula Martins Ferreira², Renato Garcia Rodrigues², Rafael Dudeque Zenni¹

1. Departamento de Biologia, Universidade Federal de Lavras, Lavras, 37.200-000, Brazil; 2. Núcleo de Ecologia e Monitoramento Ambiental (NEMA), Universidade Federal do Vale do São Francisco, Petrolina, 56.306-410, Brazil. *Correspondence to asthmatheus@gmail.com

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Biological invasions are in the hall of the main causes of loss of biodiversity in the world, through the homogenization of diversity, extinction of species by predation and competitive exclusion. In this context, mega-projects can promote a dispersion of invasive alien organisms. The objectives of this study are to evaluate if the integration channels of the São Francisco River (PISF) are acting as pathway of exotic species and if these are establishing themselves as invasive and expanding their occupation in the Caatinga. Monitoring of exotic populations has been conducted since 2015 through the fixed-point method, which consists of observing and monitoring invasive populations along two PISF axes through predetermined sample points sampled at six-month intervals. The transection method was used to sample and characterize the invasive alien plants. Over two years of monitoring, 17 exotic species were found, of which three are invasive populations (*Prosopis juliflora*, *Nicotiana glauca* and *Calotropis procera*). There has been no increase in the number of exotic species established since 2015. The species didn't spread to new sites in the PISF and didn't became more frequent where they already existed. However, there has been an increase in the number of invasive alien populations on both axes. The presence of exotic species forming invasive populations in the PISF area of influence is a threat to the Caatinga biodiversity. PISF channels are a means of dispersing exotic species and reinforce the idea that mega-projects have a negative impact on biodiversity conservation. The data of this study are from the last period of works, which may have affected the distribution and expansion of the species. With the end of the works and without constant anthropogenic pressure it will be possible to determine the real risk of biological invasions facilitated by the integration of the São Francisco River.