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Article**

June is Invasive Species Awareness Month

Spring in Wisconsin is a great time of year. It's the beginning of the blooming season and the time of year when woods in southeast Wisconsin should be full of spring ephemerals like trillium, spring beauties, bloodroot, trout lilies, and jack-in-the-pulpit. Unfortunately, in many of our woodlands, garlic mustard is doing most of the blooming. Garlic mustard is an invasive plant that was brought here by the European settlers in the 1800s and was used as a food seasoning and medicinal plant.

New research shows that the reason garlic mustard is so invasive in our woodlands is that it kills soil fungi that are needed by many native plants for their growth and survival. The association between plants and mycorrhizal fungi is mutualistic—the fungi help plants absorb soil nutrients and the plants provide the fungi sugars and amino acids—they depend on each other for survival. Garlic mustard alters forest ecosystems by reducing the ability of native forest plants to take up nutrients.

Over 200 invasive species impact Wisconsin and include plants, insects, mollusks, fish, mammals, and reptiles. They can clog water intake pipes, kill native trees, devastate fisheries, and destroy ecosystems. An estimated \$137 billion per year is spent on invasive species in the United States. Everyone is impacted by invasive species whether they are aware of it or not.

June is Invasive Species Awareness Month. During June, numerous field trips, workshops, presentations, and work parties will be held throughout the state to teach citizens about invasive species and what they can do to stop the spread. To learn more, visit invasivespecies.wi.gov/awareness.

Control of Invasive Species in Conservation Subdivisions

K/RLT works to control invasive species on 250 acres of conservancy land in conservation subdivisions. A stewardship, i.e., land management, plan is written for each parcel. A key part of these plans is control of invasive plants, especially keeping them from becoming established. For once they have taken hold, it is very costly to eradicate them. With new species arriving all the time, plans are revised at least once every five years to respond to the new threats.

Controlling Invasive Species on Private Easement Lands

Stewardship plans are strongly encouraged, but optional, on private land where K/RLT holds a conservation easement. However, lessons learned on my 88 acres, where K/RLT holds an easement, show the value of such a plan.

Fifteen years ago, shortly after purchasing the property, a forester and I walked the mature wooded portion discussing how to manage it. He asked "is buckthorn a problem

on your property”. Having heard of buckthorn, but not really knowing what it was, I said no. Ten years later I realized I made a big mistake. Buckthorn was there, but was in its infancy. Letting it grow and spread unimpeded for ten years was like not treating an early stage cancer.

Over the past six years I have spent about \$4000 and several hundred hours of my time trying to rid the property of this insidious monster. Efforts range from spraying and pulling seedlings with densities of over 100 per square meter, to cutting and spraying stumps on half to twelve inch diameter trees. I now believe that the land will never be free of buckthorn, but another six years of similar effort should bring it under control.

An Ounce of Prevention is Worth a Pound of Cure

In 1995 I planted a 20 acre farm field with 17,000 conifer and hardwood trees. A management plan was in place from the beginning to ensure that invasive species did not gain a foothold. By starting early it now only takes about ten hours a year to remove the garlic mustard, buckthorn, box elder, and black locust trees that try to invade the field.

When restoring or maintaining a woodland, prairie, or wetland, the lessons are clear. A stewardship plan is required to create and maintain an ecologically healthy site. There is no end in sight to the assault on the land by invasive species. So there is no alternative, but to fight back with a coordinated plan. And the sooner it is in place, the better the chances of gaining control and the less it will cost in the long run.

There are several ecological service companies in Wisconsin which can develop a stewardship plan and arrange for the work to be done on your ecological project.

To learn more about invasive species, plan on attending a workshop on the subject. K/RLT partners with the UW Extension, FSA, NRCS, County Conservation, and the Seno Center on such workshops. The last one was held at the Seno Center in April and more are planned for the future.

Contact K/RLT for additional information on ecological service companies or to be added to the mailing list for future workshops.

If you would like to help K/RLT protect open spaces and natural areas, please consider becoming a member. To obtain membership information, including our Spring/Summer Newsletter and brochure, write to the land trust at P.O. Box 085153, Racine, WI 53408-5153 or call us at 262-552-6861. Additional information is available on the web at www.krlt.org.

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