



Non-Native Invasive Plant Partnership Between Hoosier NF and Indiana University

Participating agreement results in a four-prong approach to give elementary school students a better understanding of invasive species.



Sixth grade Monroe County students act as invasive plants as their peers discuss their fate.

Four plants are put on trial. Each is an invasive species represented by a child in a gaudy tropical looking costume. These children have "habitat cards" which give them the background information they need to understand their character.

Other children represent courtroom jurors. Each jury member is given question cards that they can ask of the different "plants" to determine guilt or innocence.

After the plants are thoroughly interrogated, the jury is divided up into four groups. Each group has to decide, unanimously, if the plant on trial is an invasive and why.

"The results are the children understand why these particular plants are invasive, and what characteristics make an invasive plant, as well as how they affect forest habitat," said Stacey Duke, Interpreter on the Hoosier National Forest.

"The teachers love the programs," said Duke. "They're interactive and fun, delivered in the schools, meet state-wide curriculum standards, and are free."

She described another part of the exercise that involves having the children read a paragraph from a flip chart. Then she flips a page, and a different child has to read the paragraph.

With each page, a different letter drops out and as the pages are flipped, it becomes increasingly difficult to read the words until the paragraph loses its meaning. The letters of the alphabet are compared to native plant species in the forest. As each one is lost due to invasive species, an important component of the forest is gone.

The Hoosier has developed a long-term participating agreement with Indiana University to control non-native invasive plants (NNIP) in the Charles C. Deam Wilderness and other areas of the Forest.

The partnership is in response to the Chief's call to aggressively manage NNIP's, and the Forest need to initiate NNIP actions on the ground.

The Forest realized that additional resources and expertise were needed for a long-term solution to the problem. One of the greatest assets the Forest has is nearby Indiana University and its outstanding environmental sciences teaching and research staff.

A project proposal was made to SPEA to "...establish a long-term partnership supporting the development, understanding, and implementation of control methods for non-native plant infestations on the Hoosier National Forest."

The benefits for students (source of income, research opportunities), staff (teaching opportunities, student projects) and the Forest were clear and the partnership began.

The goals of the project are to reduce the vigor and size of NNIP populations, identify new invasive plant populations and control methods, and increase community awareness and action in the control and spread of non-native invasive plants.

The Agreement encompasses a four-pronged approach to achieving the goals: 1) On the ground control actions targeting specific species; 2) Research study to determine most effective control methods; 3) Conservation education program targeting schools and local communities; and 4) Public relations and media management.

As part of the effort to increase community awareness, the local 4th through 6th grade students are receiving these in-class programs on plants considered to be invasive species on the Hoosier National Forest.

Future plans for the program and partnership include community presentations and teacher training.

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