

Be On Neighborhood Watch

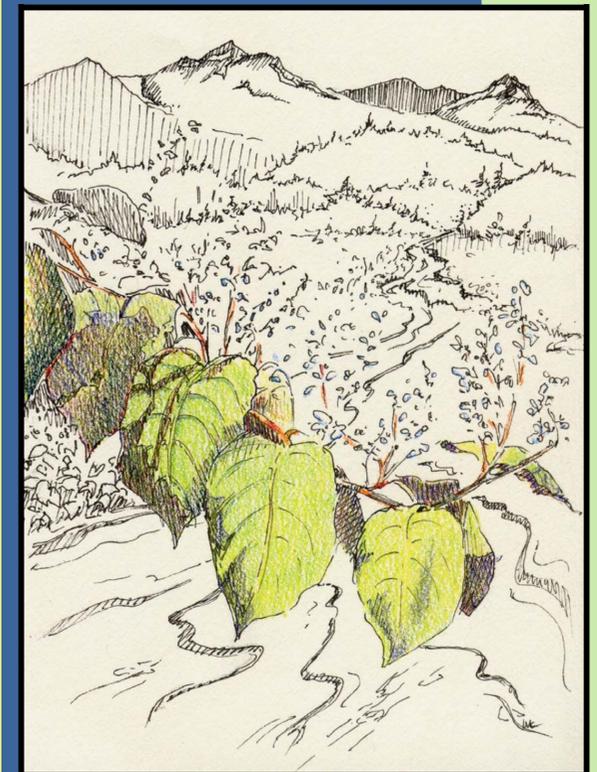
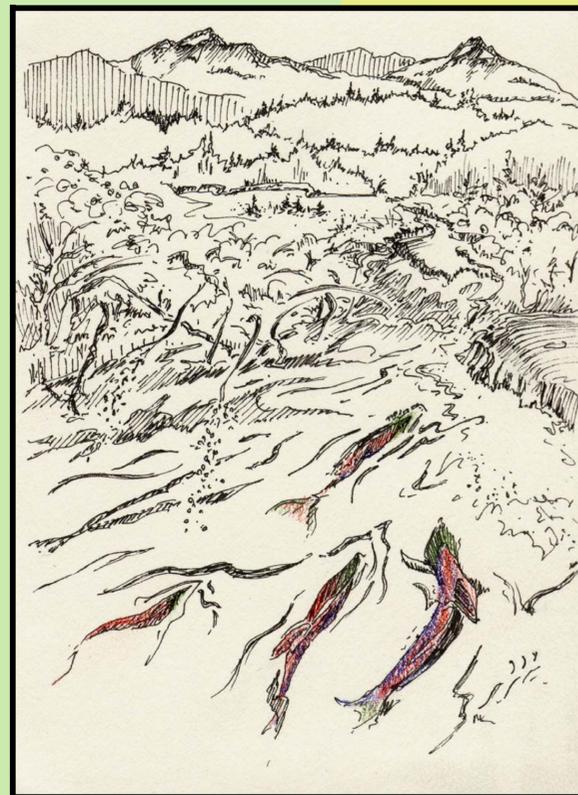
Most people are aware of the existence of invasives, but until these plants threaten their vital resources, they are easily ignored. Many enjoy the eye-pleasing daisies and hawkweed that sprout up in fields and ditches, forgetting that in order to become established, these plants replace native species. One invasive in particular could soon sprout up in South-Central Alaska, affecting residents and visitors alike, Japanese Knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*).



Japanese Knotweed, native to Eastern Asia, was introduced into North America as an ornamental in the late 1800's. Now widespread throughout the U.S., it has become a worrisome invasive in riparian (shoreline) areas, spreading easily by rhizome (underground stems) fragmentation. Once established, the rhizomes develop into deep, thick mats, obstructing root removal. They can spread as far as 65 feet from the parent plant and penetrate 7 feet into the soil. Small fragments can form new colonies, which grow faster than surrounding native vegetation.

Threatening Alaskan Salmon

A healthy riparian (shoreline) system includes adequate forest structure and composition, which are beneficial to wildlife. The presence of an aggressive invasive decreases the diversity of vegetation in the riparian zone and out-competes many species needed to sustain healthy wildlife populations. Erosion can also increase over time, due to the lack of massive deeply rooted systems trees provide.



From the Sketchbook of Mary Keefe Bloom

The presence of Japanese Knotweed can have negative impacts on salmon populations. In healthy riparian systems, plants such as alder, willow, and cottonwood grow along the shoreline, dropping catkins and bud scales into the water in early spring. Bacteria feed on this organic matter and serve as a food source for small invertebrates, which are critical to the diet of juvenile salmon. Japanese knotweed disrupts this cycle, due to the fact that it doesn't flower until late July. It also cannot provide the large woody debris necessary for salmon spawning.