



Recovery Act Project Tackles Invasive Plants

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Remember the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, signed in February, 2009? It may seem like a long time ago, but many Alaska Region employees have spent the months since then helping to coordinate, carry out and oversee the wide array of projects that were funded by this legislation in our Region. This is the story of one such project.

The primary focus of the Recovery Act is jobs. The Alaska Weed Management project, a \$1.14 million cooperative agreement between R10 Forest Health Protection and the Alaska Association of Conservation Districts (AACD), has resulted in 18 new positions at AACD, including a project manager and budget assistant, 13 new invasive plant coordinators, and three weed control crew members. The invasive plant coordinators (IPCs) are employed for one full year, and are located in a diverse assortment of communities around the state. Weeds know no administrative boundaries, so the work these people do will not only help their communities, but will also prevent the spread of invasive plants into our national forests.

In April 2010, the 13 newly-hired IPCs met in Anchorage for a week of training presented by Forest Service and other agency personnel from within and outside Alaska. IPCs learned about the problem of invasive plants, what invasives are found in Alaska, about the Alaska Exotic Plant Information Clearinghouse (AKEPIC) and about the Weed Ranking System. They were issued cameras, GPS units, laptops, weed whackers, backpack sprayers, and safety gear, all of which will remain with AACD when their

12-month tenures are finished. They learned how to identify Alaska's invasive plants, how to submit survey data to the AKEPIC database, and about methods of successful public outreach. They studied and took the

exam to become state-certified pesticide applicators. Then, they fanned out to 13 communities around the state, where they hit the ground running.

Since then, the IPCs have shown themselves to be an energetic, creative and capable bunch. All over the state, new species and new infestations are being documented, and known distributions extended. The Cordova IPC found three Japanese knotweed infestations there, the first time this highly invasive species has been documented in that community. The Kodiak IPC has identified two infestations of plants previously unknown in Alaska. The IPCs in Dillingham and Aniak are conducting the first-ever weed surveys in those areas.

Near Talkeetna and Homer, IPCs are working with local farmers to deal with large, established infestations of orange hawkweed and fall dandelion (*Leontodon*). The Kenai and Seward IPCs have convinced local and state government agencies to step up their roadside mowing efforts. Mowing is a simple way to



Fairbanks Rollergirls pulled more than 1,200 pounds of weeds in Fairbanks' first "Weed Smackdown" competition.

slow the spread of weeds along road rights-of-way. In Juneau, Cordova, Palmer and Fairbanks, IPCs worked with local partners to burn, dig, whack, spray or tarp significant infestations of reed canarygrass. The Kodiak IPC will work with the roving crew next month to begin chemical control of an orange hawkweed infestation at a remote, abandoned cannery site. While some herbicides are very effective against orange hawkweed, chemicals are often unavailable in rural Alaskan communities, and shipping them can be problematic. The IPCs are creating a template on orange hawkweed control that can be modified according to what is available for purchase in each local community. The goal is to give rural residents enough information that they can establish their own multi-year control plans, with or without the use of chemicals.

Great creativity is being shown in public outreach efforts. Posters, flyers, mailings, and handouts have been developed, each with its own local flavor. Public service announcements are being broadcast

and newspaper articles written. Numerous workshops and weed pulls have been held. An innovative weed scavenger hunt drew crowds in Juneau. In Fairbanks, a competitive “Weed Smack-down” drew 88 people who organized into teams and vied to pull more weeds than the Fairbanks Rollergirls, a female roller derby team.

The “Alaska Weed Management” IPCs realize that they can’t effect lasting change in just one year. But they are striving to give local communities enough information to continue work on invasives long after this Recovery Act project has ended.

Fairbanks IPC Darcy Etcheverry and Doug Koester (Kenai Peninsula CWMA) discuss plant identification at the Anchorage training session.

