

Crew from MLK Education Center Helps Fight Invasive Weed

The war against an invasive weed called Scotch broom got some help this summer from a crew of the Martin Luther King, Jr., Education Center. Their Juvenile Forest Work Team (JFWT) took on the tough but important challenge of clearing the weeds from alongside Forest Road 2301, near White Creek in the Cottage Grove Ranger District of Oregon's Umpqua National Forest.



Scotch broom growing alongside Forest Road 2301.

The MLK Education Center is an alternative high school for kids who are working hard to make positive changes in their lives. Many of the students in this program had a challenged upbringing and a history of delinquent behavior and problems at school. The goal of the program is to prevent this from escalating and keep the kids out of the adult penitentiary system. "Our methods reduce the rate of recidivism [re-offense] by about 70%," said Program Director Matt Sterner. "Of course, this benefits the kids by helping them turn their lives around. But it also saves taxpayers the tremendous expense of maintaining them in the adult system."



Two JFWT members work together to uproot a Scotch broom plant.

The program is funded in part by Title II of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act, which stimulates regional economies by hiring local workers for projects that improve public lands. Depending on their status, some of the crew members get to keep their wages; many are saving to go to college or buy cars. The wages of other workers go toward victim restitution, to pay for damages done to private property.

Crew Leader Alan Butler has been with the JFWT for 13 years; he explained how the program works. Title II funds pay for Forest Service work projects, but their crew also contracts with other government agencies like the City of Eugene and Bureau of Land Management. The JFWT is part of their broader Horticulture Program; the school also has other curriculums such as Culinary Arts.

Acting Crew Leader Korey Lynde said that the program also rewards successful students by helping them find jobs outside the school system. They often partner with a local steel company that recruits MLK students for jobs in their industry. Lynde is a University of Oregon student majoring in sociology. "I love working with the kids," he says. "Helping them is very rewarding."

A JFWT crew member hard at work with a weed whacker.



For the Scotch broom project, the crew members used tools that provided leverage to pluck the entire plant, including the roots. Dr. Upekala “Pek” Wijayratne, a biologist for the Umpqua’s Cottage Grove Ranger District, explained what makes this weed such a troublesome invasive species: “The idea is to get the adult plants so they can’t continue reseeding, then come back for the seedlings as they grow. Unfortunately, we really have to keep at it, because the seeds can be viable for up to 70 years. We could use an herbicide, but we try to avoid using chemicals on public lands.”



Dr. Pek displays an uprooted Scotch broom plant.

Scotch broom is native to Scotland and other parts of Europe. It’s in the pea family, which becomes apparent when it forms seed pods. It requires lots of sunlight and can’t grow in dense forests, but it can creep in along roadsides and disturbed habitats, as was the case with the patch growing by Forest Road 2301. Once it penetrates a roadside or other grassy clearing, it quickly takes over, outgrowing the native plants that animals like deer and elk need to eat.

“I’m glad crews like the JFWT are available to work on weeding projects,” said Dr. Pek. “Field crews are on the front lines of the war against weeds.”

Project Stats: MLK, Jr., Education Center

2012 UNF Title II funds:	\$15,000
Total UNF Title II funds:	\$55,233
Employs:	MLK Education Center JFWT
Project type:	Forest Health Improvement
Partner:	MLK JFWT
Years awarded:	2010
2012 projects:	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weeding for Scotch Broom • Fall Creek Trail Brush Clearing • Downed Tree Bucking • Root Removal

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 2012



Secure Rural Schools
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