

# Phoenix School YCC Helps Fight Invasive Pond Weed



**A** crew from the Phoenix School Youth Conservation Corps received an unusual weed pulling assignment: For several days, the group members gathered an invasive aquatic plant called yellow floatingheart—from canoes!

The noxious weed has colonized a pond called Willow Sump in the North Umpqua Ranger District of Oregon’s Umpqua National Forest. This pond is important because it’s used for both recreation and as a water source for wildland firefighting. The best way to collect the weed is by boat. So the crew members paddled out in canoes, working in teams of two to gather the plants into bags.

The group had taken on many other weed pulling jobs throughout the summer, but this was the first time they had ever harvested noxious plants from the water. Crew Leader Chris Roe said that this assignment was particularly fun, and the students agreed that it was a lot less strenuous than most of their jobs.



*Phoenix School YCC crew members gather invasive yellow floatingheart from Willow Sump; left to right Chris Roe (crew leader), Adam Merker, Caleb Reese, and Jessica Keniston.*

The Phoenix YCC program operates out of Phoenix High, an alternative school for kids who prefer a hands-on approach to learning. It’s not restricted to only its own students, but is open to all young people aged 15 to 24.

Although the crew enjoys their work, they also take it seriously; there is a daily one hour educational component to the job. And in addition to learning about forest stewardship, the group members also discuss life goals and keep a journal about their reflections. They even have an ambitious physical fitness objective for each student to be able to do 100 pushups by summer’s end.

Crew member Shelby Neifert summed up the group’s work ethic well: “We work hard, but we have fun doing it. We crack a lot of jokes; it makes the time go by quickly.” Twenty years of age, Shelby says she’s saving the money she earns both to fix her car and go to college; this fall she’ll be studying medical imaging at the Oregon Institute of Technology.



Daily educational job component (counterclockwise from right): Jessica Keniston, Brandon Gresser, Chris Binder, Jedikon “Jedi” Erickson, Adam Mercker, and Chris Roe.

Eighteen-year-old Jedikon “Jedi” Erickson emphasized the camaraderie that bonds his team: “It’s a really great group to work with.” He’s also saving for college and living expenses, and will soon begin classes at Umpqua Community College.

The Phoenix Youth Conservation Corps is partly funded by Title II of the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Act, which aims to bolster regional economies by hiring local workers for projects that improve public lands. It’s a great example of the kind of project that Title II supports because its goal is to simultaneously improve both public lands and the lives of youth. The program benefits young participants by improving their graduation rate, college readiness, and employability. Hopefully the enthusiasm these young crew members bring to their forest conservation work will flourish for many years to come, and help carry them onto successful future paths.



Members of the Phoenix School YCC clean their canoes thoroughly after use to prevent the spread of invasive weeds.

## YELLOW FLOATINGHEART: An Aggressive Pond Weed Tries to Invade Oregon



Botany Crew Head Katina Verardo of the Umpqua National Forest demonstrates a leaf of the the invasive pond weed yellow floating-heart. She was one of several Forest Service employees who helped guide and direct the Phoenix YCC.

Yellow floatingheart (scientific name *nymphoides peltata*) originally came from Eurasia and was probably first introduced in Oregon as an ornamental pond plant. Its prolificacy and knack for escaping cultivation has made it an invasive weed, which is why it is now prohibited. It can clog up pond surfaces so much that the water becomes stagnant, leaving insufficient oxygen for fish and other aquatic animals and native plants. It’s able to reproduce in three different ways:

- **seeds**, which have hairy surfaces that can attach to and be dispersed by waterfowl
- **rhizomes**, which are roots with the ability to generate new shoots and form new plants
- **stem fragments**, which can sprout new roots and stems of their own, forming new plants

Yellow floatingheart is listed as a class A priority weed. “It’s not well-established yet in Oregon,” said Bryan Benz, a district botanist for the Umpqua National Forest who is leading the project to remove it from Wil-

Project Stats: Phoenix School YCC

2012 Title II funding: \$33,750  
Total Title II funding: \$353,750  
Employs: Phoenix School YCC  
Project: Forest Health Imprvmnt.  
Partner: Oregon Youth  
Conservation Corps  
Years awarded: 2006—2012

\*2012 projects:

- NU Ranger Station Grounds Maintenance
- NU Campground Spring Opening & Mntnce.
- DL Campground Spring Opening & Mntnce.
- Steamboat Creek and Canton Creek Noxious Weed Removal
- Willow Sump Invasive Harvest
- Medicine Creek Rock Shelter
- Natural Resource Education Day
- Twin Lakes Remote Toilet Replacement
- Trail Maintenance

\*NU—North Umpqua Ranger District  
DL—Diamond Lake Ranger District



low Sump. “But it’s quite aggressive. The key is to manage it right away before it can spread to other ponds.”

In spite of all their hard work, the Phoenix YCC can’t possibly eradicate the weed from Willow Sump this summer. Their mission is to weaken the plants and slow their growth while a long-term management plan is developed and implemented. The pond is about 50% infested, and the invasive weeds are so resilient that they’ll require several years of successive treatments.

The management plan will be developed this winter as an EA (Environmental Assessment) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). During this phase, members of the public are invited to offer their input on how it should proceed. Suggested control methods include the use of herbicides and spreading tarps along the bottom of the pond to block sunlight.



*Gabe Dour, a biological sciences technician for the Umpqua NF, works alongside the Phoenix YCC to gather yellow floatingheart.*

The USDA Forest Service is an equal opportunity employer.

Kelly S. Miller  
Information Assistant  
Umpqua National Forest  
2900 NW Stewart Parkway  
Roseburg, OR 97471  
541-957-3200  
2012



Secure Rural Schools  
And Community  
Self-Determination Act