

Northwoods Cooperative Weed Management Area

*Working together to protect the northwoods of Wisconsin
from the impacts of invasive species*

Issue No 5 - October 2010

What's Up With All The Purple Loosestrife?

Get the scoop on why this invasive plant was so abundant in 2010, and find out what we can do to slow its spread in 2011.

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Seeing green?

If it is still green, there is a good chance it is buckthorn. Learn more on Page 3

Burn It Where You Buy It

Whether you buy it or cut it yourself, be sure your firewood is local. Page 3



HUNTING SEASON ...IS FINALLY HERE!

Imagine for a moment that you are a deer. You like thick bedding areas to hide in, safe travel corridors, and feeding areas with your favorite munchies. Now imagine your habitat is infested with invasives. You don't blend in as well, your favorite food has been replaced, and travel corridors are choked up or thorny. Invasive species affect habitat for deer, bear, grouse, and other game animals. So what can hunters do to protect their favorite hunting areas? We offer some tips:

- **Learn to recognize invasive plants in your area.** Familiarize yourself with forest invasives such as *buckthorn*, *honeysuckle*, and *garlic mustard*. In open areas, watch for *spotted knapweed*, *Japanese knotweed*, or non-native thistles. Look for pictures of these plants in the fall and winter. This is how you will find them

during hunting season. The Wisconsin DNR website has photos (<http://dnr.wi.gov/invasives>), or you can use guidebooks, posters, or other websites.

- **Clean clothing, footwear, and pets before and after each hunt.** A few moments is all it takes to check for seeds hitching a ride. Use a stick or brush to get the mud out of your boots. The best place to clean off is before you leave infested areas. The next best option is to clean off at the parking area, where any seeds that germinate can be seen and treated right away.
- **Volunteer to help control invasives.** Help maintain the areas you enjoy. The NCWMA has tools available to use at no cost, and can provide guidance on how to treat different plants. Be sure to check with the landowner first, whether it's private or public land.

These recommendations and others are included in the Recreation Manual of Best Management Practices developed by the Wisconsin Council on Forestry and the Wisconsin DNR, available online at <http://council.wisconsinforestry.org/invasives>

What's Up With All The Purple Loosestrife?

If you drove through Chequamegon Bay on Highway 2 this summer, then you saw it: the sea of purple in the Fish Creek sloughs. Have we lost the battle with purple loosestrife? Is it hopeless? According to Brock Woods, Wisconsin Purple Loosestrife Biocontrol Program Coordinator, "We should remain concerned about purple loosestrife, but not be alarmed." He says that most likely what we are seeing is not actually a significant increase in the *number* of plants, but rather an increase in *flowering*.

Flowering is affected by weather. Warm wet weather, such as we had this year, results in more flowering than years of drought, like we had the past several years. It is likely that heavy rainfall this summer also increased seed germination. These affects are compounded by the impacts of weather on biocontrol beetles. The beetles are particularly vulnerable because they only produce one generation each year. If that new generation is hit by heavy rains or flooding in midsummer, while in its vulnerable pupal stage, it can dramatically reduce the population for the rest of the year.

Nevertheless, Woods states there has been a substantial reduction in the size and vigor of purple loosestrife throughout in the state, much of that due to widespread use of biocontrol beetles. "Our research in Wisconsin has shown that biocontrol greatly reduces the vigor of purple loosestrife in just several years on most sites. This control is generally sustained over time, though it's sometimes variable from year to year and site to site. Overall, biocontrol has been more effective, less disruptive, and cheaper than more traditional methods such as pulling, cutting, and herbicide work, though each of these methods should still be used in appropriate

situations." He goes on to say, "Unfortunately, we estimate that our biocontrol sites still represent only about 40% of all purple loosestrife sites statewide."



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Another key point: biocontrol beetles do not actually kill their host plants. Rather, the host plants are too busy recovering from persistent feeding to expend their energy on flowering. Without flowers, it's easy to overlook the plants and assume they are gone. However, given ideal weather conditions (for loosestrife) and reduced beetle populations, the plants have the energy to resume flowering and we see that familiar purple streak in roadside wetlands.

If anything, the rise in purple loosestrife flowering reinforces the notion that there is no silver bullet when it comes to invasive species. Many of them have been in our state for decades or longer, occupying tens of thousands of acres. They will persist here for many years, but this does not mean our efforts are wasted. To the contrary, research has shown that our collective efforts are making a difference. We must emphasize prevention, and continue to involve local citizens. "Statewide biocontrol of purple loosestrife has always depended primarily on citizen involvement to locate local

infestations and produce enough beetles to establish viable local populations. Some other states have taken a more government-run approach, but this is much more expensive and misses out on many citizen educational opportunities." If you are interested in rearing, collecting, or obtaining biocontrol beetles for the 2011 field season, please contact the Northwoods CWMA.

This article is based on a piece written by Brock Woods, Wisconsin Purple Loosestrife Biocontrol Program Coordinator, in August 2010. He can be reached at Brock.Woods@wisconsin.gov or 608-221-6349.

Seeing GREEN?

**If it's still green in November,
chances are it's buckthorn.**

Common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) and glossy buckthorn (*Rhamnus frangula*) retain their leaves late into the fall, much longer than most native plants. This gives them a chance to collect more sunlight and put away more energy reserves than surrounding plants, hence their ability to invade and dominate forests in the northwoods. Once it becomes established, buckthorn chokes out tree seedlings, which are the future of our forests; it out-competes understory plants leaving only buckthorn seedlings or bare soil; and creates thorny thickets that are difficult to walk through.

This is a great time of year to find those sneaky buckthorn plants that have been hiding amongst other trees and shrubs. You can spot them in your yard, in the park, even from the highway at 55 miles per hour. If you are seeing green, but aren't sure if it's buckthorn, check out the Wisconsin DNR invasive species website at: <http://dnr.wi.gov/invasives/plants.asp>. Scroll down to *common buckthorn* and click on the camera icon to the right. To find pictures of *glossy buckthorn*, visit the UW-Green Bay herbarium website at www.uwgb.edu/biodiversity/herbarium/, click on the Trees of Wisconsin and search by common name for *glossy buckthorn*.

Should you discover buckthorn in your yard, don't despair. The Northwoods CWMA has created a Homeowner's Guide to Buckthorn Control, available on our website in the Resources webpage. We also have a tool shed with most of the equipment you need, except herbicide (available at local hardware stores). Tools can be borrowed at no cost, simply contact the NCWMA Coordinator at info@northwoodscwma.org. A good place to start is by removing any plants that have berries. Once these are gone, begin taking out the biggest plants, and keep at it until you are pulling small seedlings. If

you'd like to replace the buckthorn, keep in mind there are native and non-native alternatives that are not invasive.

So next time we get a spell of warm autumn weather, consider spending a few hours fighting back the buckthorn invasion. Or if you simply don't have time this fall, mark the plants this fall while they're easy to find, and be sure to weed them out next year.



Above: a carpet of buckthorn seedlings is easily visible in the fall when other plants have dropped their leaves

Below: large green buckthorn shrubs stand out among surrounding trees and shrubs.



Please...



It's finally time to fire up the wood stove. But whether you buy it or cut it yourself, *make sure your firewood is local!* The Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) has now been found as far north as Green Bay in Wisconsin, in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, and near the Twin Cities in Minnesota. The number one vector of spread: *moving firewood*. The EAB moves quite slowly on its own, but it has covered great distances in a few short years by hitching a ride on our firewood. You may think the chances of spreading EAB with your firewood are slim, but remember that the potential affects could be devastating and irreversible. It's simply not worth the risk. In 2011, state campgrounds will only allow the use of firewood from within the park. Other parks and campgrounds may impose similar restrictions. If you would like help finding firewood locally, ask the nearest U.S. Forest Service office, Wisconsin DNR service station, or local vendors.

Thanks for doing your part to protect our forests!