

Weed Awareness

First Nebraska Invasive Plants Conference is a Success

The Lower Platte Weed Management Area (LPWMA) was created in 2003 in response to dealing with purple loosestrife and saltcedar, invaders of riparian areas along the Lower Platte River and tributaries. As the extent of these noxious weeds and phragmites (a non-native plant not yet named to the noxious weed list) was noted, concerns were raised about the upstream seed source of these weeds and the lack of control efforts.

As a result, the LPWMA spearheaded the planning and presenting of a "Threats to Nebraska Rivers—Invasive Plants Conference" held in August 2006 at Kearney, Nebraska. Lancaster County Weed Control Authority superintendent Russ Shultz served on the conference planning committee as chairperson representing the LPWMA.

This was the first statewide conference on invasive plants. The purpose of the conference was to bring together individuals and groups that had like concerns and to promote a state-wide effort in restoring healthy riparian areas. Over 200 people attended the conference.

Some of the comments from attendees included: "It was an eye opening and informative conference with excellent presentations and tour. I was pleased to see all the agencies represented. Now if we can work together and get the landowner onboard we can get something done." "Outstanding learning experience." And, "Excellent conference, informative, we need more conferences like this to communicate and share ideas."

The conference received grant funds from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and the Nebraska Department of Agriculture. Thanks go to numerous individuals, groups, agencies and organizations that were very willing and generous in their efforts and support, especially the Nebraska Weed Control Association.

Conference Highlights

Representative Tom Osborne gave a passionate keynote presentation that set the stage for an excellent conference. He made the case for providing funds for removal of

invasive vegetation on the Republican and Platte Rivers.

Conference attendees then took a tour to view the phragmites explosion and invading saltcedar along the Platte River. Demonstrations were given of herbicide applications by four-wheelers, airboat and helicopter. Grazing by goats is also used to suppress the invading plants. Dr. Blossey



Representative Tom Osborne gave the keynote presentation.

provided hands-on guidance in distinguishing the difference between native and non-native phragmites. He also discussed the potential for biological controls.

UNL Researcher Robert Wilson reported at the conference that a 2006 survey found 8,500 acres of saltcedar and Russian olive along 120 miles of the North Platte River above Lake McConaughy. He stated, that based on research in western states, the removal of these invasive trees replaced with grass could liberate 25,000 acre feet of increased water flow annually.

Chris Kelly reported on the Nebraska Weed Control Association Nebraska Invasive Weed Mapping Project (see article on next page). This is a Web-based cutting edge program to assist in identifying, tracking, mapping and analyzing invasive plants for weed managers, landowners, public and private land managers and general public.

A representative of the National Invasive Species Council discussed the coordination of federal activities regarding invasive species. The National Invasive Species Information Center at www.invasivespeciesinfo.gov is



Dr. Blossey (right) is shown here standing next to Kent Aden, tour leader, holding a phragmites rhizome runner which can grow 10 feet or more in a single growing season.

a gateway to invasive species information from federal, state, local and international sources.

Conclusions

A presentation by Russ Shultz included the following conclusions for a Nebraska action plan:

- All the native plant communities have been compromised.
- Invading plants are depleting water generally at a rate more than native plants are being replaced.
- The stream bed vegetation is greatly increasing the hazards of flooding.
- We can reverse the riparian impacts by the invading plants.

• We can work with and assist the riparian landowners in restoring and maintaining healthy riparian systems.

A Healthy Riparian System Benefits All Citizens of the State

- Will provide for more stable stream flows.
- Reduce water depletion.
- Reduce flooding hazard.
- Increase plant diversity.
- Improve wildlife habitat.
- Benefit threatened and endangered species.
- Provide for improved livestock grazing.
- Provide better hunting and fishing.
- Improve recreational opportunities.
- Increase land values and tax base.

Steps Towards a Task Force

During the conference, there was overwhelming interest to address the issues and concerns raised. As a result, the LPWMA planning committee has monthly follow-up meetings to identify areas to continue and/or initiate actions. They have sought the creation of a state task force and action plan for healthy riparian areas. To date, there have been positive steps taken by the Governor and legislature — it appears likely a task force will be formed.

Conference presentations are online at <http://www.neweed.org/tconpro.htm>

Lower Platte Weed Management Area Receives National Award

The Lower Platte Weed Management Area (LPWMA) received a 2006 Quality Vegetation Management (QVM) Project Habitat Award in the aquatic category. The QVM Project Habitat Awards, sponsored by BASF Professional Vegetation Management (ProVM), are presented to exceptional vegetation management projects that exemplify the principles and practices of QVM.



The LPWMA encompasses the 10 counties in the lower portion of the Platte River drainage, including Lancaster County. The LPWMA organized in 2003 as a cooperative effort of many partners to control the invasion of non-native vegetation of the riparian areas. To date, over 4,300 acres have been controlled along 170 miles of the Platte River and its drainage area. Efforts have focused on promoting awareness and organizing control efforts.

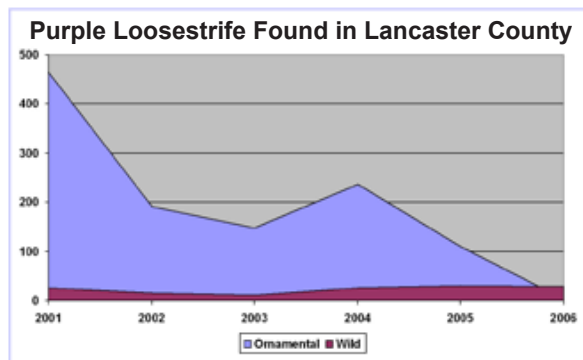
The Purple Loosestrife Story

Purple loosestrife was designated a noxious weed in Nebraska as of 2001, after which time it could no longer be sold for planting. At this time there were many ornamental purple loosestrife plants growing in residential yards and probably less than 100 wild infestations in the county. There were thousands of plants growing in 2,000 to 3,000 yards. These plants were not causing a problem in these yards, but with a single plant producing over a million seeds, many seeds were carried by rain or irrigation water to streams where they were subject to germinating and creating a wild infestation. The wild infestations are quite aggressive.

They will crowd out desirable plants and reduce quality of the wildlife habitat and plant diversity.

It was necessary to make homeowners with ornamental purple loosestrife plantings aware of the threats and get their voluntary compliance to

remove their plants. An information effort was initiated using the news media and extension. A two year purple loosestrife exchange program was



developed in cooperation with nurseries and garden centers. The goal of the Purple Loosestrife Plant Exchange program was to get purple loosestrife and ornamental purple loosestrife out of flower gardens and reduce the potential for further spread. Owners received a 25 percent discount on eligible perennial

plants up to the number of ornamental plants removed. Field inspections were made and landowners with purple loosestrife were notified by door

hangers and letters that they needed to remove their plants. There were 1,676 inspections of 915 homeowner sites and 67 sites with wild infestations over the past six years in Lancaster County. All but two of these landowners responded favorably. Ornamental plantings found dropped from a high of 465 in 2001 to 3 in 2006 (see chart). A total of 67 wild infestations have been found. All but 29 of these have been eradicated. This very successful effort is a result of the excellent cooperation of the landowners.

Although we feel that most of the ornamental plants have been removed, a plentiful supply of seeds have been transported to low lying areas and will remain in the soil until conditions are right for them to germinate. Wild purple loosestrife plants have been



Wild infestation downstream from ornamental plantings.

found in many of the Lincoln streams downstream from ornamental plantings. This includes Dead Man's Run, Antelope Creek, Beal Slough and their tributaries. Wild plants have not been found in Salt Creek to date.

Continued inspections will be made of the wild infestation sites to assure they are kept under control.