



Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest

New Century Snapshot

Medford students battle buckthorn invader

By Ann Hoefflerle 715-748-4875, ext. 24
USDA Forest Service

Medford, Wis. – Looking for productive ways to harness the energy of 100 fifth graders? Try turning them loose armed with nothing but pruning shears and shrub loppers on a large infestation of buckthorn.

As part of a community service project, fifth graders from the Medford Area Middle School have taken up the battle to control a large infestation of glossy buckthorn on the banks of the Black River along the City's Riverwalk Park.



So, what's so bad about buckthorn and why should we care? Buckthorn is an aggressive growing shrub that quickly colonizes and crowds out native vegetation. This shrub produces a dense shade that eliminates native tree seedlings, saplings and ground flora, which decreases forest health and regeneration and alters habitat for wildlife and some rare plant species.

Buckthorn was originally introduced to the Midwest from Eurasia in 1849 and cultivars of this shrub are still being planted today for visual screening and in areas where space is too



limited for larger trees. Other than purposeful plantings, this species is typically spread through its abundant berry production. The black, red to dark purple berries are particularly attractive to birds. While this might appear good for the birds, the berries actually have a severe laxative affect on them and often results in loss of energy.

Prior to the students' seek-and-destroy mission, they are introduced to the problems caused by invasive species, as well as learning how to identify buckthorn through the leaves, berries and bark. The hunt for buckthorn usually takes place in the fall or early spring when it's easiest to identify. The students spend about two hours cutting, hauling and picking the black berries off the buckthorn.

With the organizational efforts of local teachers, the Upper Chippewa Invasive Species Cooperative, the Taylor County Lands Conservation Department, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and USDA Forest Service, these students have been controlling this buckthorn infestation for the past two years. The battle is waged annually with a new group of students recruited each year.

Check out our Website

www.fs.fed.us/r9/cmnf

