

## USDA Forest Service Botany in the News

### Middle School Students in Medford, Wisconsin, Battle Buckthorn Invader in City Park.

**Who (partners):** The Upper Chippewa Invasive Species Cooperative (a newly formed Cooperative Weed Management Area in north central Wisconsin), the Taylor County Lands Conservation Department, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and USDA Forest Service along with Fifth grade students and teachers from Medford, WI Middle School have come together for the past two years to remove glossy buckthorn from the Medford Riverwalk City Park.

**What (species):** Glossy and Common Buckthorn (*Rhamnus frangulus* and *R. cathartica*)

**When:** May 16, 2007

**Where:** Medford, WI

**How:** As part of a community service project, fifth graders from Medford's 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.

Prior to the students seek and destroy mission, they are first introduced to the problems of non-native invasive plant species in general and the problems with buckthorn in particular. They then learn 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. Once the students arrive at the City Park they are separated into several groups. Each student within the group is assigned a role as berry picker, hauler or cutter. The students spend about two hours cutting, hauling, piling and picking the black berries off of the buckthorn.

After the students have finished removing the offensive shrubs, members from the Upper Chippewa Invasive Species Cooperative, the Taylor County Land Conservation Department, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and the USDA Forest Service apply herbicide to the cut stumps and buckthorn seedlings. The City of Medford then chips the piles of buckthorn and uses the chipped material for pathway fill. A Pulling Together Initiative Grant provided partial funding for supplies for the project.

**Why:** Buckthorn is an aggressive growing shrub that quickly colonizes and crowds out native vegetation. This shrub produces a dense shade that eliminates native trees 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 (Czarapata, 2005).

The objective of this project is not only to control invasive species that provides a service to the community but also to increase public awareness of the invasive species problem.

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Student cutting buckthorn.



Medford's Area Middle School class picture.