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The National Wildlife Refuge System Can Use Your Help!

Michael: Hi, I'm Michael Lusk, Invasive Species Coordinator for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Jenny: And I'm Jenny Ericson, Invasive Species Volunteer Program Coordinator for the National Wildlife Refuge System.

Michael: In the National Wildlife Refuge System, we manage over 96 million acres distributed over 545 refuges, 37 wetland management districts and 50 coordination areas.

Jenny: The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of the fish, wildlife and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.

Michael: One of the most serious threats to our mission is the growing problem of invasive plants. For example, in the refuge system's Threats and Conflicts database, invasive species are the most commonly listed threat to our refuges.

Jenny: By "invasive," we mean plants that are not native to a specific geographic area and that can become so difficult to control that they actually cause harm to the economy, environment or to human health. According to our most recent estimates, 2.3 million acres of refuge lands are infested with invasive plants and the number of infested acres has been steadily increasing over the past five years.

Michael: The impacts on the refuge system are enormous. Invasive plants seriously degrade the quality of habitat that our native plants and animals depend on and the cost of fighting these invaders drains our management budgets. For example, in 2005, the refuge system spent approximately \$8.1 million in its fight against invasive plants and animals. In addition, there are currently \$107 million worth of proposed invasive species projects that still need funding.

Jenny: That's why we need the help of you, the National Wildlife Refuge System volunteer. This problem is just too big, and too serious, for us to handle by ourselves. We need your time, your hard work and your expertise to combat the threat of invasive plants on the lands and waters that we manage for the benefit of the American people.

Michael: In these learning modules, we want to help prepare you to take on the challenge of invasive plants in partnership with your local refuge staff. We hope to give you the background that you will need to understand the impacts of invasive plants on

Volunteers and Invasive Plants—Learning and Lending a Hand

our natural resources, introduce you to the tools that are used in managing invasive plants, and hopefully, motivate you to join the fight.

Jenny: Once again, thank you for making the effort to learn about invasive plants. And thank you for the time and energy you spend to help protect the beautiful lands, waters, plants and animals that are the National Wildlife Refuge System.