

May 6, 2005

Invasive plant species “pilot” project takes off through UWSP

Purple loosestrife is not the only invasive plant species wreaking havoc on many of Wisconsin’s native plants. According to Jeremy Solin, Wisconsin school forest education specialist at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point (UWSP), garlic mustard is endangering our forests.

“Non-native garlic mustard is threatening Wisconsin’s woodlands by hampering regeneration of succeeding native plant generations of the forest under story,” said Solin. “While this may seem a small issue to some, in the long run, this could pose some serious resource issues for commercial, private and public forests throughout Wisconsin.”

Solin’s \$7,500 pilot program is funded by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources’ (DNR) Citizen Based Monitoring Program and targets school forests in approximately 20 school districts, including Wisconsin Rapids and its Grant Elementary School. Grant Principal Terry Whitmore and school consultant Richard Breen will be part of this project. Other school districts participating include Milwaukee, Rhinelander, Monona Grove, Kaukauna, Portage, DeForest, Edgar, Verona, Augusta, North Lakeland, Royal, River Valley, Westfield, Independence, Amery, Waunakee, West Salem, Argyle and Berlin.

On May 7 participants from each of the school districts will gather at the McKenzie Environmental Center in Poynette and receive training on how to gather data on garlic mustard encroachment into their school forests. The participants will receive training on plant identification as well as a Web-based software program through which teachers and their students will enter the data. One of the instructors will give GPS (global positioning system) lessons for use in data collection.

There are 342 school forests in Wisconsin with approximately 25,000 acres. The pilot project will be completed by July 1 and data results will then be tabulated and shared both with the DNR and the public.

“If our pilot program proves successful, the DNR may want to broaden its application to other school forests and even possibly to landowners as well,” Solin says.