

# Afton Naturalist

The Natural Resources and Groundwater Committee (NRGC) is pleased to issue the Afton Naturalist to provide insights and opportunities that improve our natural resources. In this issue, please find information on invasive species in Afton.

We are pleased to provide an overview of invasive plant species in Afton based on an interview with Elissa Thompson and Tara Kelly of the Washington Conservation District (WCD).

NRGC: "Thank you for meeting with us to provide insights and recommendations regarding invasive species. Can you help us understand why invasive species are an issue here in Afton?"

WCD: "Invasive non-native species cause economic and environmental harm to humans and the ecology. We estimate that 85% - 95% of the lots in Afton contain at least one invasive species. So yes, this is important."

NRGC: "Wow – that's larger than I thought. What do you recommend a landowner start doing on their land?"

WCD: "First, we recommend walking the land and documenting the species. The mission of WCD is to enhance, protect, and preserve the natural resources of Washington County and we would enjoy meeting with landowners to discuss recommendations. Some basic approaches to managing invasives are **monitoring**; **controlling** (multi-pronged biological, chemical, mechanical and cultural activities as well as Integrated Pest Management); and **containing** (preventing the further spread through multiple control tactics including a revegetation plan)."

Six of the most prominent invasive species in Afton are highlighted below but please visit the websites by the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Agriculture, Washington Conservation District and MN Department of Transportation which has a special section for noxious weeds for more information.

## Grecian Foxglove



**Habitat:** Full sun to partial shade - woodland edges and open fields

**Toxicity:** All plant parts contain a cardiac glycoside that is poisonous to humans and livestock

**Means of spread:** Small wingless seeds are easily transported by birds, animals, humans as well as wind and water

**Identification:** Perennial beginning its first year as basal rosette with single flowering stalk from 2-5 feet tall in subsequent years

**Management:** Wear appropriate protective clothing – avoid direct skin contact with plant. Caution should be taken if burn-

ing. Mechanical: repeated mowing/cutting to prevent flowering can drain plants of energy and help reduce infestation. Flowering can occur on mowed, short stems



## Common Buckthorn



**Habitat:** Buckthorn thrives especially upland in the understory, on the forest edge and in sunny spots that bloom May - June

**Means of spread:** Ripened berries drop directly beneath the plants resulting in a dense understory of seedlings  
Buckthorn is allelopathic, producing toxins that eliminate other species from growing

**Identification:** Tall shrub 20-26' tall with potential to be over 35' with a 5-6" trunk. Leaves are shiny green 1 - 2.5" oval with tiny teeth on leaf

edge with veins that curve to the tip

**Management:** Mechanical: Hand pulling or a weed-wrench can help control small infestations. Cutting of stems must be accompanied by herbicide or continuous cutting



## Common Tansy (*Tanacetum vulgare*)



**Habitat:** Found most often in open, disturbed areas like stream, trail edges and roadsides

**Toxicity:** Alkaloids in common tansy are toxic to humans and livestock

**Means of spread:** Rhizomes and seeds

**Identification:** Herbaceous, perennial reaching 2-5'. Stems appear to be slightly woody and hairy. Leaves are 2-12" long and alternate, pinnately divided, toothed on the edges



**Management:** Care required mowing or pulling not to spread small root segments. Mow prior to flowering

## Knotweeds (*Polygonum spp.*)



**Habitat:** Prefers moist soils in full sun to partial shade

**Means of spread:** Primarily by rhizomes and seeds

**Identification:** Large perennial plants (5-20' tall) with smooth stems that are green with reddish-brown blotched non-woody stems. Leaves have a blunt tip, are alternate with branched flower structures at leaf

**Management:** Mechanical treatment can invigorate reseed-ing and should be coupled with chemical application



## Garlic mustard (*Allaria petiolata*)



**Habitat:** An invader of shady, moist forests and woodlands. May inhibit growth of beneficial fungi

**Means of spread:** Spreads by seed that matures in June/ July

**Identification:** Herbaceous, perennial starting as basal rosettes in year one and growing to +4' year two on. Foliage on flowering stem is alternate, triangular and coarsely toothed



**Management:** Manual methods include pulling plants in early spring prior to flowering and cutting plants to the ground as they bolt

## Wild Parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*)



**Habitat:** Disturbed sites such as abandoned fields and dry or wet meadows. Full to partial sun is a must

**Toxicity:** Contact to sap and exposure to sunlight can produce painful, burning blisters

**Means of spread:** Spreads primarily by seed, moved by animals/humans

**Identification:** Classed as a monocarpic perennial. First year as a basal rosette that can grow to 5' in subsequent years.



Leaves can be 6" in height on flowering stalk leaves

**Management:** Mechanical: Plan early mowing at first inflorescence and the repeat as resprouting occurs

NRGC: "So now we know more about invasive species, what options do we have to 'manage' them?"

WCD: "The basic approaches to 'managing' invasives are **Biological** (natural plant enemies/predators to mitigate invasives); **Chemicals** (highly dependent on timing and application); **Mechanical** (mowing, cutting, and digging) and **Cultural** (controlled burns to replenish the lands). Putting a plan together is very important for the long term health of the land and we hope readers will feel free to call the WCD so we can walk together and develop a plan to improve the health of their land."