

For Immediate Release:

March Membership Meeting of the Sudbury-Assabet-Concord (SUASCO) Cooperative Invasive Species Management

On March 8th, the Sudbury-Assabet-Concord (SUASCO) Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA), a regional collaboration of multiple organizations formed to manage invasive species in the SUASCO watershed, held their March full membership meeting at Garden in the Woods facility of New England Wild Flower Society, a founding member. Over ___ people were in attendance. At their fall meeting, the group, formed in May of 2009, celebrated its many accomplishments in the short time frame they have been working together. (See attached *Highlights 2010* document.) At the March meeting, members shared their individual priorities and concerns for the upcoming season and listened to a fascinating presentation from Tom Rawinski, botanist with the USDA Forest Service.

As members shared their priorities and concerns, it became evident that many towns, land trusts and other members managing conservation lands are grappling with the same issues—controlling water chestnut and Eurasian milfoil in rivers and ponds; as well as trying to stay ahead of the devastating effects of oriental bittersweet, Japanese knotweed, garlic mustard, black swallow-wort, burning bush, and buckthorn, to name a few of the most common nuisances in our uplands and forests. Members exchanged ideas for controlling these many threats. Another common theme that emerged was the difficulties in engaging, motivating, and managing volunteers to help on “work days”—the real-time effort of physically removing or pruning/treating the noxious plants. All acknowledged that the CISMA members benefit greatly from hearing each others’ challenges and success stories.

Other discussions focused on warnings regarding new threats that are inching their way into our region, such as broadleaf pepperweed, Japanese stilt grass, and mile-a-minute vine. The New England Wild Flower Society, under a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, is about to embark on its second year of training CISMA members and other interested parties in identifying plants that are emerging threats. These sessions prepare volunteers to look for potential infestations in their own jurisdictions and give them the knowledge and tools to control the problem in the early stages while it is still manageable.

The guest speaker, Tom Rawinski, emphasized how taking action when the problems are first observed exponentially increases the chances of controlling the problem before it quickly becomes overwhelming. For some species, the time frame for effective action is alarmingly short. He spoke, for example, about hardy kiwi, an exotic vine that has become pestilential in several areas in the Berkshires. He also advised giving a higher priority to keeping pristine areas free of invasives before focusing on cleaning up infested areas.

Mr. Rawinski’s most imperative message to the group was to be aware of how deer overpopulation is destroying many of our neighboring forest ecosystems of New York, Connecticut, and Rhode Island. To sustain over-populations, the deer not only devastate the young seedlings that would become the next generation of trees, they also eat up the native understory plants to the point that already rare plants, such as the yellow Lady’s slipper, are being driven to extinction by hungry deer. We already know that invasive species outcompete and replace native species. For example, CISMA member, Bryan Connolly, from the state’s Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, explained that his organization is in the process of listing the native phragmites, a marsh reed, as endangered because the invasive phragmites species has essentially displaced the indigenous plant in a majority of marshlands in the northeast. But, overpopulation of deer is, in a sense, a double-whammy because not only do the deer interrupt forest regeneration, they also prefer to eat the young native plants, leaving the invasives to be the successors. So, Rawinski emphasized that management strategies for controlling invasives have to include controlling the deer population as well.

The CISMA has received financial support from the Sudbury Foundation, the SUASCO Wild and Scenic River Stewardship Council, and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. In addition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Massachusetts Audubon Society provide crucial administrative support to the

group. Current membership is comprised of 12 towns; 7 land trusts; and 12 other federal and state agencies, watershed and several key environmental groups.

For further information, contact:

Libby Herland, US Fish and Wildlife, CISMA Chair, 978-443-4661 x11

Amber Carr, US Fish and Wildlife, CISMA Coordinator, 978-443-4661 x33

Tom Rawinski, USDA Forest Service, 603-868-7642