'Tis The Season for Invasive Plants in Kodiak

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

Summertime is a great opportunity to check out Kodiak’s dazzling local flora, but it’s also a bitter reminder of the pesky invasives that litter the island. These seasonal plants often pop up this time of year and keep folks like Blythe Brown, the Kodiak Soil and Water Conservation District project coordinator, hard at work trying to eradicate them.

“Invasive plants are not just non-native plants. We’ve got a lot of non-native plants here and most of them don’t do any damage. Invasive plants are the ones that will out compete your native plants, or even out compete in your garden, the plants that you want there. The classic picture of the orange hawkweed on the back of our free booklet here, that’s orange that hawkweed that has taken over, it’s out competing all the native wildflowers, that should be a native wildflower meadow.”

She said the invasive plants compete for water, nutrients and space.

The booklet she refers to is free, and details selected invasive plants from Alaska. She said anyone who would like one should contact the district to pick one up.

While orange hawkweed has become somewhat of a poster child for invasive plants, Brown said there are many others to look for.

“Top big bad weeds, we’ve got Japanese Knotweed, Orange Hawkweed, Common Tansy, Oxeye Daisy, Canada Thistle, Bull Thistle, Toadflax, Common Toadflax has potential to be one of our big bad ones.”

Brown said orange hawkweed is still a huge concern, and compares it to fighting a wild fire.

“I personally don’t think we’ll ever be able to get it out completely, there’s just too much of it, and the seeds live for a long time. So what this program is doing is to helping to cool down this huge fire and then hopefully prevent sparks from escaping from it.”

The program she mentions is a reimbursement incentive program. She said it makes it easier for folks to take up arms against any invasives they may have on their property.

“It is still going on. We’ve got a little bit of money left in that fund. The Lions Club donated $2,000 to us this year. And so we will reimburse up to $150 per site, per owner, of the cost of treating or controlling your invasive plant.”

Meanwhile, Brown and her crew, which includes some summer interns, work diligently both in Kodiak and surrounding villages to survey where non-native invaders are and take action against them. In general, she said there are less than 50 total invasive plants on Kodiak, and some are less aggressive than others.

Most of the work they do is funded through grants.

“And this year we have one grant specifically to attack Canada Thistle. And we have another grant where we’re working with a national group called Wildlife Forever, outreach to lodges and guides and stuff. And so we’re putting together a kit with that project which will include a boot brush, or a little brush that they can clean off their ATVs before they go out, clean their airplane floats so they don’t get aquatic weeds transferred from lake to lake.”

Brown said people should contact her at the district to learn more about how to remove invasive plants, which often require some sort of herbicide to do so. She said it’s also helpful when people call her with sightings of potential invasives, and keep an eye out for specific plants, especially outside the city.