

## **Headwaters Invasive Plant Partnership Announcement and Activities**

May is Invasive Species Awareness Month in Illinois, and a local group has been working to bring attention to this very issue. The group, concerned about the impact of invasive plants in east central Illinois, has come together to form the Headwaters Invasive Plant Partnership (HIPP). HIPP is the first Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) of its kind in central Illinois, although the model has been used extensively throughout the United States. CWMA's typically rely on voluntary participation by government agency and non-profit organization employees, as well as private landowners and concerned citizens. HIPP currently covers eleven counties and features 22 members, including area park districts, forest preserves, soil and water conservation districts, the University of Illinois Extension, land trusts, and others.

Since formally organizing in 2015, HIPP has focused on raising awareness of the invasive plant issue by making sure area residents have access to information in order to recognize problematic plants and their negative effects on the environment. The group has produced a brochure, *Invasive Plants and Beautiful Native Alternatives*, highlighting landscaping plants that are better suited for supporting wildlife and natural areas than some of those offered for sale that may not behave well outside of the yard or garden. They have also organized the Great Garlic Mustard Hunt, an annual event that challenges volunteers to get out and help weed area woodlands in order to help native wildflowers thrive.

In 2018, the group is expanding efforts in order to increase invasive plant management on private lands. HIPP has been awarded \$436,000 through the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Regional Conservation Partnership Program in order to provide technical and financial assistance to farmers as they seek to implement practices that eliminate invasive plants in favor of native plant diversity. The Champaign County Soil and Water Conservation District will serve as the lead partner on the project, and landowners are encouraged to apply for programs, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

A grant, funded by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's Pulling Together Initiative, has enabled HIPP to hire its first employee, a part-time Program Coordinator, Kaleb Lukens. Lukens is a graduate of the Integrative Biology program at the University of Illinois, and has gained experience with land management at the Champaign and Urbana Park Districts. As part of the grant agreement, Lukens will get more volunteer stewards active in managing invasive plants throughout the area. Lukens will work closely with Michael Daab, Director of Natural Resources at the Champaign County Forest Preserve District, who has been acting as the Chair of the partnership since its inception.

To get a glimpse of HIPP's outreach work up close, be sure to check out the awareness project currently installed in downtown Champaign in the One Main Development landscaping. HIPP has taken invasive Callery pear trees that were removed from Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve, painted them white, and stuck them in the ground to get the attention of those passing by. The installation will remain in place throughout May, and the number of white trees has increased throughout the month in order to

simulate how invasive plants can take over an area. For more information on this project, the landscape plants brochure, and general species information, visit [www.ilhipp.org](http://www.ilhipp.org).