

Invasive Species All Around Us!!

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H.L. Richards High School

Ecology Class

Oak Lawn, IL

Introduction to Stewardship Project

The Richards High School Ecology Class Stewardship project allowed students in the class to become more aware of local invasive species and the struggles that local organizations face with conservation of areas that have been invaded by those species. The Wolfe Wildlife Refuge adjacent to the school is an area that faces problems with invasive species. After gaining background knowledge of invasive species, the students worked with common invasive species found in the refuge.

Objective

The students studied the characteristics of invasive species, how they are spread, the consequences of their introduction, and how to prevent their spread. After learning about invasive species in general, the ecology classes researched what invasive species are commonly found in the Wolfe Wildlife Refuge and how to identify them. They then spent time gathering information that may assist with local conservation efforts. The stewardship project was a great way for students see how the information they learned in the classroom can be applied to real life and used to help the local environment.

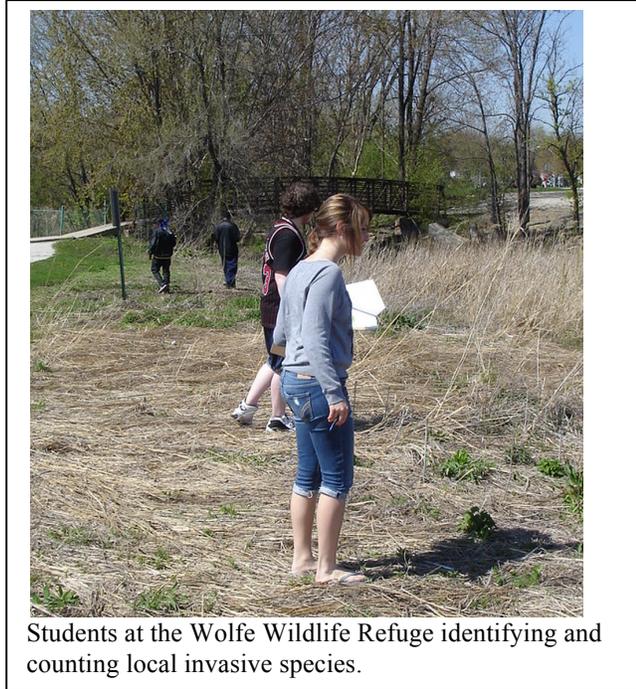
Student Activities

To develop background knowledge of invasive species, the class discussed how human activity results in the spread of invasive species and what people can do to prevent that spread. The students also learned about the ecological impact of invasive species. To accomplish this, the students spent some time using the Nab the Aquatic Invader website and the Great Lakes Invasion Publication from the NOAA Sea Grant.

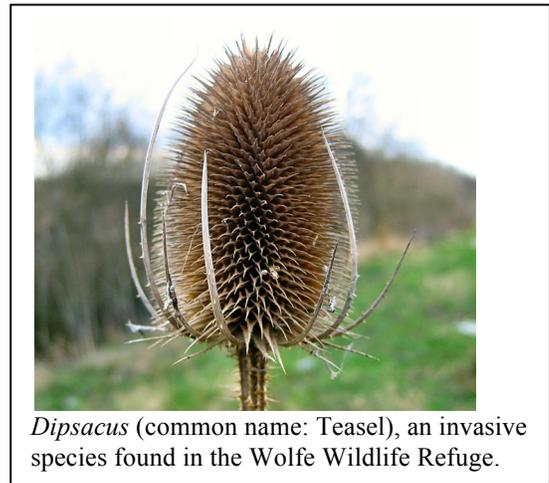
In order to apply what they have learned to a local area, the class contacted the Oak Lawn Park District, the organization responsible for maintenance of the Wolfe Wildlife Refuge, to find out what invasive species are commonly found in the refuge. The students then gathered information on the appearance and identification of these species and went out to the refuge to mark plots and identify and count invasive species found in those plots.

Outcome/Impacts of the Project

The students really felt that they had learned about nature and conservation in their own “backyard.” The ecology class shared important findings with the Oak Lawn Park District. In future years, we hope to schedule a time for students to assist with invasive species removal and planting of native seeds in the refuge. We may also expand to other wildlife preserves such as the Chicago Ridge Prairie located near our school.



Students at the Wolfe Wildlife Refuge identifying and counting local invasive species.



Dipsacus (common name: Teasel), an invasive species found in the Wolfe Wildlife Refuge.