

To: Elizabeth Benolkin, Program Officer

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

605 West Fourth Avenue, Room G-61

Anchorage, AK 99501

From: Laura Hoffman, District Manager

Upper Susitna Soil & Water Conservation District

HC 89 Box 8461

Talkeetna, AK 99676

Regarding: Final Performance Report for "Upper Susitna Youth Conservation Corps Invasive Plant Control"

Agreement: F14AC00716

Project Title: Upper Susitna Youth Conservation Corps Invasive Plant Control

Reporting period: July 1, 2015 – December 31, 2015

Today's Date: December 16, 2015

Due Date: January 30, 2016

Summary of activities conducted and accomplishments achieved:

Objectives:

1. Objective one is to survey at least 90 acres of riparian and upland habitat in 2014-2015 for invasive plant species: In 2014, the YCC surveyed a total of 92.6 acres and in 2015 they surveyed another 39.8 acres. This is a total of 132.4 acres that were surveyed in 2014-15 in the Upper Susitna Soil and Water District, exceeding the expected 90 acres set forth as an objective. The surveys were taken using data sheets provided by the Alaska Exotic Plants Information Clearinghouse, a database and mapping application that provides geospatial information for non-native plant species in Alaska. The YCC youth were trained on data collection and worked together to get accurate survey data from each site. OBJECTIVE MET.
2. Prioritize and control up to 20 acres of the highest priority invasive plant species in surveyed locations: After surveying, the YCC determines the highest priority species and an appropriate

control method. Methods include digging, weed whacking, weed wrenching, tarping, and handpulling. These sites are revisited every one or two years to ensure control methods are effective. In 2014 the YCC performed 18.82 acres of control work and this year, in 2015, 13.2 acres were controlled. This is a total 32.02 acres controlled over two years, exceeding the expected 20 acres. Control mechanisms include setting tarps over infestations, popping flower heads off of invasive plants to prevent spread, weed wrenching, and/or digging up plants from the roots. Native grass seed was placed where invasive species were removed by pulling or digging. OBJECTIVE MET.

3. Objective three is prevent further spread of invasive plants: The YCC takes great care to properly dispose of all invasive species that have been pulled. Plants go into a durable trash bag and are disposed of at the dump. Further, every crewmember and leader cleans their boots and clothing before leaving the site to prevent the spread of seeds to a new location. Education is also an effective means at preventing the spread of invasive species. The crew members are taught all about invasive plants and they, in turn, educate their friends and families. Furthermore, at every site, YCC staff documents their surveys and findings on AKEPIC data forms. At the end of the year, this data is entered into and submitted to the Alaska Natural Heritage Program (ANHP) for verification and inclusion into the state-wide database. This information is valuable to any conservation entity. OBJECTIVE MET.
4. Objective four is to educate local communities on invasive species identification, impacts to ecosystems, and prevention and control methods via outreach events. In the beginning of the season, YCC Director and Leader trained the YCC members how to identify and control invasive species. We also trained YCC members how to fill out AKEPIC data sheets. The YCC held an end of the year event on July 31st, in which community members were invited to attend. The YCC youth created poster boards which were displayed at informative booths with other displays showing how we eradicate invasive plants. Youth had a separate booth and table which displayed the invasive plant project and crew members answered many questions about invasive species control. The audience was very engaged and learned a lot. The YCC leaders also developed a public portfolio of work, which can also be found on the Upper Susitna Soil and Water Conservation District's website. OBJECTIVE MET.

Land where terrestrial surveys were completed in 2015:

1. Trapper Creek Bird Sanctuary, Saunders Field (private)
2. Talkeetna Village Park
3. Christianson Lake Road
4. Christianson Lake Beach Park
5. Northern Susitna Institute (private)
6. Talkeetna on Second Street (private)

7. Talkeetna on Third Street (private)
8. Montana Creek bridge and campsite
9. Denali South Overlook in Alaska State Park
10. Talkeetna Lakes Park
11. Talkeetna Library (New Location)
12. Talkeetna Sewer
13. Susitna Riverbank in Talkeetna
14. Moose Creek on Oilwell Road
15. Trapper Creek on Trail Ridge Street (private)
16. Veteran's Memorial in Alaska State Park
17. Chulitna River bridge
18. Talkeetna on Woodpecker Road (private)
19. Kashwitna River bridge

To see which species of invasive plants were surveyed at the above locations, please see the attached AK EPIC data forms, which includes all invasive plant work that was completed for this period.

To summarize, a total of 39.8 acres were surveyed in 2015 for the presence of terrestrial invasive plants. There were 11 different species of terrestrial invasive plants found at 19 locations. The YCC controlled a total of 13.2 acres in 2015. Control methods included manual hand pulling, digging with a shovel, using weed wrenches for Mayday Trees, and staking down a black or grey tarp for two years to eradicate the invasive species. The sites were all documented using protocol set forth by AKEPIC and data was submitted to the Alaska Natural Heritage Program for verification and inclusion into the state wide database at the end of each year. Tools and personal protective equipment were purchased to be able to put these learned methodologies to work.

The invasive plant work was completed by December 2015. Reporting documents and AK EPIC data were entered and submitted after the work was completed. See attached SF425 for budget report.

Problems or issues that may prevent achievement of goals:

The YCC crew had difficulty tarping invasive species at some sites, due to very hard or rocky ground. Therefore, the crew was unable to complete tarping as control work at these sites (see attached AK Epic data form). In this instance, the crew often popped heads of flowers and/or hand pulled the invasive plants to prevent further spread.

At some sites we had to leave the site without tarping or pulling invasive plants due to high and aggressive wasp activity, resulting in two youth getting stung. In these instances, we returned later to complete the work, once the weather cooled down to lower wasp activity.

We couldn't do any work at the Beaver Road gravel pit this year because the MSB was working heavy machinery in there and they were hauling truckloads of gravel out. It was an unsafe working environment every time we checked this site.

At the Chulitna Bridge site when we checked a tarp that was placed last year, it was gone. We think either someone took it or it could have been possibly removed by sliding snow. The area was too rocky to re-tarp so we hand pulled this infestation instead.

On Beaver Road when we returned to pull two tarps that were placed in 2013, the tarps were missing. We think perhaps they were caught up and carried away when the roads were plowed last winter.

No other problems were encountered that would prevent the achievement of goals.

Other pertinent programmatic and budget information:

No deviations from the original budget have occurred. A few of the control and survey sites have changed since the original proposal, largely due to the permissions that were obtained.

Field Work plans:

No future work exists, as the funding has been spent, the objectives have been met, and the date set for completion is 12-31-15.

Please contact Laura Hoffman at 907-733-7923 with any questions.

Sincerely,

Laura Hoffman

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