Fight Purple Loosestrife: Become a Beetle Farmer

Mark Schwarzlaendar, University of Idaho www.forestryimages.org

By now almost all our readers can identify fields of beautiful purple loosestrife, which they know as a destructive invasive that crowds out indigenous wetland vegetation. Once purple loosestrife enters a wetland, it grows in such thick, intertwined profusion that it destroys wildlife cover and crowds out cattails and sedges on which birds and wildlife depend. Purple loosestrife also invades and ruins the shallow waters northern pike use for spawning grounds.

In Eurasia over 100 insect species help keep purple loosestrife under control in its natural habitat. Extensive studies found three beetle species in Europe that feed and breed exclusively on purple loosestrife – Galerucella calmariensis, Hylobius transversovittatus, and Nanophyes marmoratus all about 1/10th of an inch long.

Since 1986, these beetles have been extensively tested in the U.S. to assess their safety as biocontrol agents so we can be assured that we're not releasing an insect that will destroy native vegetation. In 1992 the US Department of Agriculture approved use of these beetles for biocontrol of purple loosestrife. DOA discovered that in as little as three years, beetles can reduce the density of the plant up to 90%, allowing native wetland vegetation to re-establish itself.

So, how would you like to help fight invasive plants by rearing and dispersing the Galerucella leaf-feeding beetles that eat loosestrife? Go to our website at www.ctriver.org for contact information for your state. Now is the time to notify your state office of your interest.

In New Hampshire as of 2004 their loosestrife control project has released at least 217,000 beetles into loosestrife infested areas. More beetles were actually released because there was no way to account for the number of reared beetles released by Beetle Farmers. For more information contact Douglas Cygan NH Department of Agriculture, Markets and Food, Division of plant Industry, 29 Hazen Drive, Concord, NH 03301 at (603) 271-3488 or dcygan@agr.state.nh.us.

In Vermont the Water Quality Division is looking for community volunteers to fight the VT infestation. They make the following suggestions for people who own land or have landowner permission to remove loosestrife from the shores of our state waters.
For more information call the Division of Water Quality 802-241-3770 or visit their web site http://www.anr.state.vt.us/dec/waterq/wetlands/htm/wl_purpleloosestrife.htm

In Connecticut the goal is to recruit volunteers to learn about the biological control program, rear *Galerucella* beetles, and release the beneficial insects into local wetlands. For more information contact Donna R. Ellis of the Connecticut Invasive Plant Working Group (CIPWG), University of Connecticut, Department of Plant Science, Unit 4163, Storrs, CT 06269-4163 at (860) 486-6448 or at donna.ellis@uconn.edu.

In Massachusetts Wetlands Restoration Program (WRP) plans to develop partnerships and support the expansion of a volunteer-based and will partner with schools and conservation organizations to help raise and release beetles and monitor treatment sites. For additional information on purple loosestrife biocontrol contact Beth Suedmeyer at WRP at (617) 626-4921.