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No rest in fight against invasives

By FRAN DURNER fdurner@adn.com

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After reading Naomi Klouda's lovely essay on fireweed, I realized that I have really missed seeing fireweed this year.



enlarge STEPHEN NOWERS / Anchorage Daily News Late-season sweet clover, which is spreading along roads and disturbed areas, blooms near the Trunk Road overpass in Palmer.

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I'm not sure if it is just my tired old vision or the cold, dark, wet summer, but I can't recall seeing any in my highway travels. I'm remembering large stands along the roads and the way you could keep track of the progress of the season by how far up the flower stalk the blossoms were appearing -- bright, rosy sentinels bending gently in the roadway breezes.

What I have seen this summer is mile after mile of sweet white clover, north and south of Anchorage, and

more bird vetch than ever -- both seriously invasive plant species. Could they be smothering the fireweed? My guess is that next year the invasives will have extended their coverage dramatically.

Concerns about invasive plants are well-founded. The National Park Service is considering a management plan to control invasive plants in Alaska's parks. The Juneau Empire recently posted a column by Whitney Rapp, invasive species coordinator at Glacier Bay National Park and data manager for the Alaska Exotic Plant Management Team. She explained, "Vast areas of remote wilderness in Alaska's national parks might seem resistant, but invasive plants first gain footholds in disturbed areas like roadsides, trampled areas and construction sites."

Parks along the road system are especially vulnerable.

Any land along the road system is vulnerable.

Driving north to Willow this summer, I kept an eye on the meadows of sweet white clover on each side of the road. It was especially thick around the Palmer/Wasilla interchange. Was it intentionally seeded when that highway project was finished? The invasives thinned out considerably north of Wasilla and were not noticeable at all by Willow. Wanna bet invasives will be on both sides of the road up to Willow next year?

CANWIN, Citizens Against Noxious Weeds Invading the North, is doing a wonderful job in educating the public, sponsoring weed pulls and pushing legislation that will help control the spread of invasives.

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This note is from Lori Zaumseil, who, with her husband, Troy, have been responsible for

spearheading the CANWIN effort: "The Anchorage Cooperative Weed Management Area and the muni Weed Warriors program had five weed pulls this summer, targeting everything from orange hawkweed to Canada thistle to bird vetch.

"The process is under way to hire the new statewide weed coordinator that HB330 provides for. There are states now paying the price, in the form of millions of dollars, because they waited for the problem to become prevalent.

"Instead of prevention, they are now only hoping for control. And face decisions like: Do we use significant amounts of herbicide and save wildlife habitat, or do we say goodbye to caribou and moose in this area? We can avoid having to face those kinds of decisions if we act quickly and effectively."

CANWIN meets the second Thursday of every month at 3:30 p.m. in the Bureau of Land Management Field Office on Elmore Road. You can call or e-mail Zaumseil for more information: 245-2373 or AKCANWIN@aol.com.

Talk Dirt is a garden blog for the Alaska community hosted by Fran Durner of the Daily News. Join the conversation at adn.com/talkdirt.

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tagalak wrote on 10/11/2008 06:13:41 PM:

Keep your eyes open and help if you can. We would like to NOT use our monies to fight invasives when there is STILL time to do something about it. Clover and bird vetch are spreading up the highway.. Would love to have the Valley people catch it there. We're sorry it got away from us in Anchorage, but we have NOT given up.... be a weed warrior in your part of town.

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fat_freddys_cat wrote on 10/02/2008 10:25:21 AM:

Its called evolution, survival of the fittest. You are going to kill the clover so you can look at fireweed? Gimmme the clover.

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