Town of Lake Lure
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Latest News from the Weed Action Coalition of Hickory Nut Gorge

They're more than just Annoying

How Invasive Plants & Choking Weeds Create Big Environmental & Safety Challenges

We often hear questions arise about our work, such as, "Why are invasives such a bad threat for the Gorge?" "What can landowners do to help and what kind of help is out there for landowners?

You've come to the right place, as we will answer all of those questions in this article. And who are we?

We are the **Weed Action Coalition of Hickory Nut Gorge.** Founded in 2012, WACHNG is is a non-profit coalition of Gorge landowners, conservation groups, and state, federal and local governmental organizations tasked with getting rid of the pesky invasive plant species that have come to inhabit the Gorge in huge numbers. The coalition is funded through a combination of federal and state grants, along with private landowner donation.

We hear a lot that invasives are bad news, but what specifically is it about these plants that makes them such a threat? The answer is that it isn't one, single factor. And there in lies part of the problem.

- **First -** invasives create higher fire dangers because they grow in thick masses, not only preventing the fighting of fires, but creating great fuel sources, which in turn,

create hotter fires. Hotter fires destroy even large trees, as well as the native seed sources deep into the surface layers of soil.

- **Second -** invasives create greater erosion and flood control issues due to blocked waterways, less diverse root systems to secure soil, and the destruction of intact forest.   Massive infestations of invasives also decrease property values and the scenic value of the gorge - scenic value which drives the gorge's economic engine.

- **Third -**invasives further interfere with the entire ecosystem, decreasing native food and habitat, destroying biological diversity, and interfering with the natural pollination process. In all, invasives are truly bad actors!!

To fight this invasion, WACHNG has several programs underway. Goats are being utilized to fight the kudzu masses, volunteer workdays are being conducted on protected lands, and labor crews are being hired to work on some of the public lands.

Another piece of this puzzle, however, is the amount of infestation on private lands. Invasive infestation occurs quickly, and even if invasive plants are removed from protected lands, these noxious weeds will return almost immediately if neighboring private lands continue to be infested.As many of you may have heard, the Weed Action Coalition of HNG (WACHNG)

WACHNG is offering aid for private landowners in three ways:

1. Free inventory of any property so that landowners know if they have an invasives problem
2. The development of a private invasives site management plan, which, for a fee, will provide the landowner with directions, schedule and costs for treating the invasives. It also provides resources for contracting for invasives removal, and information on habitat restoration, once the invasives are gone.
3. WACHNG is also initiating a cost-sharing program for private landowners. Through grants and private donations, we can match 50/50 the cost of invasives removal using a standardized removal schedule established by the state forest service.

In this program, the landowner first must have a site management plan which provides assurance that a planned approach will be undertaken.

Then, the landowner may hire a licensed contractor of their choosing, complete the work per the management plan, and pay the contractor for the services. WACHNG will then reimburse the landowner for 50 percent of the cost, up to the rate established by the forest service.

WACHNG hopes that many landowners take advantage of this opportunity. Only with citizen participation can we ensure that the Gorge remains the ecological and scenic treasure that it's known to be.

Please contact WACHNG at www.wachng.org for further information.