

Invasive Plant Threatens Waterways

by Ryan Wittkopf

Japanese knotweed (*Polygonum cuspidatum*) is a new invasive plant in the Farming and Conservation Together (FACT) project area of eastern Sauk and western Columbia counties. It has been found to form dense stands on riverbanks, degrading riparian habitat. Management of Japanese knotweed is a priority on and near the Baraboo River.

Japanese knotweed is a perennial with a stout, hollow, bamboo-like stem that reaches heights of ten feet. Leaves are broad and heart shaped. The flowers are pale white to green in color, occurring



Japanese knotweed can grow up to ten feet tall, choking out native plants and degrading waterways

in small plumes. Like Canada thistle, knotweed reproduces clonally and, if cut, plant pieces can re-sprout into new individual plants. Japanese knotweed was first introduced to the United States as an ornamental in the late 1800s.

Knotweed destabilizes the soil next to rivers causing erosion and deposition. As soil containing root fragments washes downstream, new populations are formed. Large monocultures take over area,

shading out all native plants and leaving bare soil exposed, further increasing erosion. Dense populations block human and wildlife access to rivers and restrict fishing.

Three large knotweed populations in the FACT area were experimentally treated during the summer of 2006. All three populations were managed by cutting, using a combination of hand tools, power brush saws, and a tractor mower. Cut debris was left on site to prevent spreading the plant to other areas through transportation.

Two of the three sites were located along streambanks, so chemical treatment was not considered. At the third site, the knotweed canes were allowed to regrow to approximately three feet tall, and were then sprayed with a RoundUp solution to kill the young re-sprouts.

Japanese knotweed is especially aggressive, even for an invasive, thus management practices need to begin as soon as this plant is spotted. Highest priority should be given to controlling populations along moving bodies of water. An integrated management plan incorporating cutting and foliar chemical application is the best course of action to combat knotweed. When cutting Japanese knotweed make sure not to further the spread of this plant. Do not leave canes or plant fragments along riverbanks where they could be washed into waterways. Installing silt fencing along waterways during treatment may help prevent spread.

Ryan Wittkopf worked with landowners as an intern with Farming and Conservation Together in 2006.