

Mad Gardeners, Inc.

MILE-A-MINUTE VINE CONTROL PROJECT

AN EARLY DETECTION/RAPID RESPONSE PROGRAM

2007 YEAR-END SUMMARY REPORT

Prepared by Kathleen Nelson, 2/14/08

Mad, Gardeners, Inc., a non-profit organization, organized and administered an Early Detection/Rapid Response program for Mile-a-Minute Vine in Litchfield and Upper Fairfield Counties, CT, in 2007.

In 2007 the program:

- Arranged with the Housatonic Valley Association and the Northwest Conservation District to be the official employers of interns and an intern supervisor. Paid interns worked the equivalent of about 32 weeks during the season.
- Raised over \$34,000, including \$10,000 from the Connecticut Community Foundation, \$5,000 from Mad Gardeners, Inc., \$2,500 from the Meserve Memorial Fund, and \$2,000 from the Ellen Knowles Harcourt Foundation.
- Began pulling plants in known infestations in New Milford, Bridgewater and Roxbury on May 21. Removed most plants in known areas by late June, then checked and re-checked until late October.
- Surveyed surrounding properties, starting in June and continuing until late October.
- Helped in Newtown: helped pull plants, helped delineate the extent of the two newly-discovered infestations, and talked with homeowners. The Newtown populations are huge and will be difficult or impossible to control.
- Conducted a study of the comparative effectiveness of a variety of control methods with State Weed Scientist, Todd Mervosh,
- Conducted extensive public outreach: distributed 18,000 ID cards, plus posters, to individuals, businesses, and town offices in 17 towns; spoke at meetings of at least 8 organizations and the entire 4th grade class of New Milford; had exhibits at 13 fairs and events; and arranged for at least 9 articles in printed newspapers (some articles were also widely distributed in on-line newspapers) plus many newsletters. No TV coverage yet -- we are happy to say there wasn't much to photograph - but we made Wikipedia.

The 2007 strategy was based on previous successes and failures. Betsy Corrigan discovered MAM in New Milford/Bridgewater in 2004. An informal group began pulling in September of 2005, and again in July of 2006. Too late, seeds flying everywhere. In 2007, the group joined with Mad Gardeners, Inc., a 501(c)(3), to raise money. We arranged with local conservation organizations to be the official employers of paid college student interns. We worked with CT Weed Scientist, Todd Mervosh, on a study of the comparative effectiveness of herbicides and other control methods.

On May 21 interns and volunteers started pulling tiny MAM plants. By the end of June, most plants in known infestations were destroyed. Workers regularly rechecked work areas and nearby properties. Most of the work required searching for scattered small plants. We found our paid interns to be much better at this than most volunteers. Very little seed was produced in most of our work areas.

Although some shrubbery was mowed in 2006 and 2007, much multiflora rose remained, and it was in these areas that MAM plants survived and set seed. Multiflora rose is our enemy: rose control will need to go hand in hand with MAM control.

In 2007 we pulled plants or surveyed for presence of plants on over 100 properties, large and small, in five towns. **Very few plants survived to set seed in the previously known portions of our 1 mile diameter New Milford/Bridgewater work area or the tiny Roxbury site.** We weren't able to totally prevent seed

production. Scattered plants survived long enough to produce at least some seed in most of the shrubby areas. This was particularly a problem on the sunny rose-infested southern New Milford site. Late season surveying of properties on the periphery of our work areas located several small patches of MAM already in seed. In addition, we found a new large area of plants upstream of the southern New Milford site too late in the season to do much other than determine the limits of infestation. This appears to be the source of the southern New Milford population. A survey in the neighborhood of the single plant found in Torrington was negative.

Year-end conclusions:

- **Eliminate dense shrubbery, then hit early, with all you've got.**
- **Use paid personnel: they do a better job than volunteers, and it is easier to raise money to hire people than it is to find volunteers when you need them.**

For 2008, we are proposing a major clearing of multiflora rose and other dense shrubbery to improve access. We need to expand the areas of control to places identified in 2007 and expand the survey area to the next ring of properties. We are proposing to hire more interns, especially for the critical May-June period. We are developing specific land care/MAM control suggestions for each property. We plan to use pre-emergent herbicides in some areas. Scouting and control by pulling will continue to be a major part of the program. In some places mowing will help. We hope to try goats. We plan to continue to expand our public education program.

Surveying neighboring properties - those that probably don't have MAM - is very time consuming. The first problem is finding the property owners to obtain permission. We plan to develop a network of volunteers to work with homeowners, such that each volunteer will be assigned to work with one or more homeowners. The volunteers will contact property-owners, obtain permission to inspect and pull, explain suggested land-care practices, inspect for presence of MAM, and notify the intern supervisor if pulling is required. The volunteer network will provide each homeowner with a continuing contact person, increase the efficiency of tracking down homeowners to obtain signed permission forms, and increase the efficiency of checking adjacent properties where MAM has not been reported.

For more information or a copy of the complete end-of-season report, contact: Kathleen Nelson, Chairperson, Mad Gardeners, Invasive Species Advisory Committee, 55 Mud Pond Road, Gaylordsville, CT 06755; 860-355-1547; knelson151@sbcglobal.net