SLELO PRISM

St. Lawrence Eastern Lake Ontario Partnership for Invasive Species Management

"Teaming Up to Stop the Spread of Invasive Species"

2026 Autumn Newsletter

Cross Boundary Collaboration Enhances Early Detection



About the Cover:
Cross-Boundary Collaboration Enhances Early Detection

Megan Pistolese-Shaw, SLELO PRISM

When it comes to invasive species management, outreach, collaboration, early detection and rapid response are among our most effective tools. Invasive species do not recognize the boundaries drawn on maps, making partnerships and community involvement essential to preventing their spread. This field season provided two powerful examples of how informed and engaged individuals can make a lasting difference.

Over the past field season SLELO PRISM collaborated with the Finger Lakes PRISM to host a spotted lanternfly (SLF) workshop at Green Lakes State Park. The workshop was designed to strengthen early detection efforts by training volunteers near the boundary of both PRISM regions. Participants learned how to identify, report, and survey SLF and its preferred host plant, tree of heaven (TOH).

During the field session, one of the newly trained volunteers spotted an adult SLF perched high in a TOH being used for a demonstration. The observation became the first confirmed sighting of SLF at the park and was immediately reported through iMapInvasives. The discovery prompted a rapid response from park staff, who conducted follow-up surveys to determine whether the insect was an isolated hitchhiker or part of an established population. Their survey revealed that SLF was present exclusively on TOH scattered throughout the park. Investigators also found egg masses, indicating that the population had likely been present for one to two years. Park staff are now planning to manage tree of heaven to help control the SLF population.

What began as a volunteer training event quickly demonstrated the value of outreach and collaboration. By giving community members the tools and confidence to identify and report SLF and TOH, partners increased surveillance efforts and helped uncover a population of this high-priority species that may otherwise have gone unnoticed.

A similar success story unfolded on the water. Across New York State, watercraft inspection stewards help protect waterways by inspecting boats and educating recreationists about invasive species prevention. Serving as a frontline defense, stewards encourage boaters to Clean, Drain, and Dry (CDD) their watercraft and equip-ment before traveling between waterbodies.



2026 SLF workshop © SLELO/TNC.

This summer, a steward at the Mexico Point Boat Launch intercepted hydrilla, on a watercraft from out of state, before it could enter Eastern Lake Ontario. Hydrilla is one of the world's most aggressive aquatic invasive plants; known for forming dense mats that can disrupt ecosystems and recreation it poses a significant threat to high-value waterways. Because of a vigilant steward and a strong prevention program, this introduction was stopped before it could occur. Additional efforts are underway for cross-state collaboration to enhance boater awareness about the importance of following CDD practices.

These examples demonstrate that successful in-vasive species management depends on more than a single organization. It relies on partner-ships that cross boundaries, outreach that em-power people with knowledge, and community members willing to take action when it matters most.

Every outreach event, every boat inspection, and every volunteer effort strengthen our collective ability to protect the places we care about. **The next important discovery could come from someone just like you.** By joining our Land Protector or Water Protector programs, you can become part of a growing network of stewards helping safeguard our lands and waters for future generations.

Together, we can transform awareness into action and make a lasting impact to manage and prevent the spread of invasive species. Learn more on our website.

Celebrating Volunteers Who Make Conservation Possible

Megan Pistolese-Shaw, SLELO PRISM

Behind every restored habitat, successful invasive species project, and community science effort is a dedicated volunteer making a difference. Their passion, commitment, and countless hours of service play a vital role in protecting and enhancing our natural resources, and we are incredibly grateful for all they do.

This fall, we had the pleasure of recognizing those contributions at our first volunteer appreciation event, held at the scenic Whetstone Gulf State Park. The event provided an opportunity to connect with volunteers, celebrate their achievements, and reflect on the collective impact they have made across our region.



Volunteer appreciation event.© SLELO/TNC.

As part of our commitment to supporting and recognizing volunteers, we also launched the Volunteer Engagement & Impact Program (VEIP). This new initiative celebrates the many ways volunteers contribute to conservation while providing meaningful recognition for their dedication and growth.

Modeled after the development of a thriving forest ecosystem, the VEIP features five achievement levels that acknowledge participation and conservation impact. As volunteers advance through the program, they are recognized not only for their service milestones but also for the conservation and environmental stewardship they cultivate along the way.

Whether you're already an active volunteer or are looking for a way to get involved, there's a place for you in our growing conservation community. Together, we can continue protecting habitats, restoring ecosystems, and conserving the natural places that make our region special for generations to come. Visit our volunteer webpage to learn more and particiapte in our volunteer community.

Volunteer Spotlight:



Born in Oswego, New York, and raised in hurricane-prone South Louisiana, I witnessed the resilience and sustained effort required to rebuild communities after severe storms and flooding. These experiences are a primary catalyst guiding my interest in conservation work. Reviewing the DEC weekly newsletter, I grew interested in the iMapInvasives tool and in 2025, I made the decision to join forces with SLELO PRISM finding practical experience through hands-on sustainability work.

I volunteered with SLELO PRISM for the first time in autumn 2025, at Deer Creek Wildlife Management Area, where we planted native shoreline species to help protect riparian areas from erosion and lakewater intrusion. This summer, I completed the Aquatic Invasive Species Learning Experience and became a Water Protector. Through this experience I've learned to identify and report invasive species and have adopted a waterbody to monitor.

Volunteering with SLELO has sharpened my conservation focus and reinforced my interests in environmental conservation and science. The partnership is perfectly aligned with my desire to contribute to science through the collection of data, physically removing invasive species, and restoring natural habitats. The lineup of year-round projects needing volunteers makes it easy to stay involved in any season.

~ Dannon Trahan, *SLELO Sapling Steward*

Species Spotlight: Laurel Wilt

Amanda Dillon, NYS Department of Environmental Conservation

Laural wilt is a disease native to Southeast Asia that affects trees and shrubs in the laurel family. First identified in Georgia and South Carolina in the early 2000s, it is caused by Harringtonia lauricola. This fungus blocks the flow of water and nutrients from the roots to the crown, causing the leaves to wilt and fall off—killing the tree or shrub, usually within weeks. Despite the name, not all plants with "laurel" in their name are susceptible to the fungus. In North America, trees and shrubs that are at risk include redbay, sassafras, avocado, spicebush, and swampbay. Sassafras and spicebush are the only native hosts found in New York State

Laurel wilt is spread primarily by the invasive redbay ambrosia beetle (*Xyleborus glabratus)*. The beetle, also native to southeast Asia, lives symbiotically with the fungus, carrying it on specialized structures on their bodies and infecting their hosts as they tunnel into the wood to lay their eggs. The larvae then feed on the fungus. Once the beetles complete their life cycle, the adult beetles exit their host in search of another to lay their egg and begin the cycle anew.



Staining of tree vascular tissue, a characteristic of laurel wilt. © Natalie Ammerata, NYSDEC.

Confirmation of the disease can only be done through testing at a diagnostic clinic, but there are clues as to whether laurel wilt might be the culprit. **Sassafras and spicebush may be infected if they have the following signs or symptoms**:

- Leaves that suddenly wilt and turn brown.
- Dark streaking of the sapwood under the bark.
- Small entry holes on the branches, trunk, or roots.
- Presence of frass (sawdust-like insect excrement pushed out by beetles as they tunnel into the wood).



Sassafras tree with laurel wilt.
© Natalie Ammerata, NYSDEC.

Currently, laurel wilt appears to be restricted to Long Island. Though in 2026 we did find some westward and eastward expansion, we have not yet found it moving north up the Hudson Valley. We have heard statewide reports of spicebush decline but so far, that has been attributed to a suite of environmental conditions, native pathogens, and feeding damage from insects like thrips. While laurel wilt may not yet be an issue in the SLELO northern New York region, you can still help us keep an eye out for emerging forest health concerns by submitting reports of unhealthy trees to DEC's Forest Health Research Lab or by submitting a report through iMapinvasives.

Pledge to Protect: Finish the Season Strong

Megan Pistolese-Shaw, SLELO PRISM



Fall is an ideal time to manage invasive plants. As native vegetation goes dormant, invasive species often become easier to spot and treat. Plants are also moving nutrients to their roots, making some control methods more effective. Acting now can help reduce invasive plants and create space for native species to thrive next spring.

Fall Management Tips: Before beginning, correctly identify invasive plants and choose a management method appropriate for the species, infestation size, and surrounding habitat.

Remove Small Plants by Hand: Small seedlings and shrubs can often be pulled or dug when soil is moist. Remove as much of the root system as possible to prevent regrowth.

Use Cut-Stump Treatment for Larger Woody Plants: Cut stems close to the ground and immediately apply an approved herbicide to the outer edge of the stump. Always follow label directions, wear recommended protective equipment and avoid treatment before rain.

Take Advantage of Late-Season Visibility: Many invasive plants retain leaves or fruit after native vegetation goes dormant, making species such as porcelain berry, Japanese barberry, oriental bittersweet, and buckthorn easier to find. Prioritize removing fruiting plants to help limit seed spread.

Monitor and Restore the Area:

Revisit treated areas for invasive plant seedlings. Once invasive plants are removed, establish native species to restore habitat and reduce opportunities for reinvasion at the site.

Disposal Guidelines

- Do not compost flowering or fruiting invasive plants.
- Chip or burn debris on site when appropriate.
- Remove fallen fruits to prevent reestablishment.
- Cut vines at the base and leave them in trees to die back naturally.

Restore What's Native to Support What Matters:

After removing invasive plants, consider planting native trees, shrubs, and vines that support wildlife and strengthen ecosystem health.

Benefits of Native Plants

- Provide food and shelter for wildlife.
- Support pollinators throughout the growing season.
- Help compete with invasive plants.
- Add seasonal beauty with flowers, fruit, and fall color.
- Strengthen resilient habitats.

Become a Protector

Receive monthly emails with easy ways to care for our lands and waters. Take part in fun blog challenges for a chance to win prizes, explore helpful resources, and share inspiring content from our social media library. Visit iPledgeToProtect.org to sign up!

Growing Healthy Watersheds Through Tree Planting and Planning

Sarah Trick and Katie Spaulding, Jefferson County SWCD

Protecting water resources requires both on-the-ground conservation and long-term planning. In Jefferson County, recent tree planting initiatives and watershed planning efforts are helping create healthier ecosystems, improve water quality, and strengthen community resilience. Together, these projects also support invasive species management by restoring native habitats, reducing environmental stressors, and providing the framework needed to identify and address water quality threats before they become larger ecological challenges.

The New York State Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act established an ambitious goal of planting 25 million trees by 2033, with Jefferson County identified as an area in significant need of reforestation. In response, the Jefferson County Soil & Water Conservation District (JCSWCD) continues to coordinate tree planting projects throughout the county.

Trees provide numerous environmental and economic benefits, including wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, soil stabilization, flood reduction, and enhanced property values. When planted along streams as riparian buffers, trees help improve water quality by reducing erosion, filtering sediment and pollutants, providing shade, and creating healthier aquatic ecosystems.

JCSWCD has supported local conservation efforts for more than 30 years through its Annual Tree Sale and educational programs such as SW CARES (Storm Water, Carbon Awareness, and Reforestation Education for Students). Partnerships with local schools provide students with hands-on experience planting trees and learning about watershed stewardship. Through collaborations with The Nature Conservancy and state-funded reforestation initiatives, approximately 60,000 trees were planted across 120 acres in Jefferson County during the 2026 planting season, with additional plantings planned this fall. To see drone footage from this year's planting efforts, visit the Jefferson County Soil & Water Conservation District Facebook page.

Complementing these restoration efforts, JCSWCD continues to advance watershed planning throughout the county. Watershed management plans help communities identify water quality concerns, prioritize improvement projects, and strengthen eligibility for state and federal funding



Aerial view of planted trees © Jefferson SWCD.

Since 2022, JCSWCD has been developing a Sandy Creeks Nine-Element Watershed (9E) Plan, a science-based framework recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and approved through the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. The effort has included water quality monitoring, computer modeling, public outreach, and collaboration with local partners. The final draft is expected to be submitted for state review in spring 2027. At the same time, the JCSWCD has begun water quality sampling in the Stony Creek watershed, laying out the groundwork for a future 9E Plan. Community members can learn more about this work by viewing the WPBS Weekly: Inside the Stories feature on the Stony Creek Watershed project.

Together, reforestation and watershed planning create a powerful approach to natural resource protection. Healthy forests and well-managed watersheds improve habitat for native species, increase ecosystem resilience, and reduce conditions that can favor invasive species establishment and spread. By investing in both restoration and strategic planning today, Jefferson County is building a stronger foundation for long-term water quality, biodiversity, and environmental stewardship.



Water sampling © Jefferson SWCD.

Darling Chestnuts

Lindsay Stone and Dr. Andrew Newhouse, SUNY ESF

While efforts continue to remove water chestnut from our local waterways, a different chestnut is the focus of an exciting restoration effort. American chestnut trees were important components of eastern North American forests. At the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF), the American Chestnut Research and Restoration Project is working toward reestablishing this once-dominant species.

In the early 1900s, a fungus that causes chestnut blight was accidentally introduced from Asia. It soon spread throughout the tree's native range, killing billions of American chestnuts. These trees were important both ecologically and culturally. American chestnuts supported wildlife, nourished pollinators, provided valuable timber, and supplied an important food source for people and animals. Today, surviving stumps may continue to produce sprouts, but blight often kills the stems before they mature, leaving the species functionally extinct.

Researchers at ESF are working to change that by enhancing blight tolerance in American chestnuts. A variety called 'Darling 54' was developed using biotechnology to insert a gene from wheat called oxalate oxidase. This gene breaks down a toxin, oxalic acid, produced by the blight fungus. This approach doesn't prevent blight, but rather helps the tree tolerate the disease and offers a potential avenue for restoration.

Before Darling chestnuts (or any other transgenic plants) can be distributed or widely planted, they must undergo strict federal regulatory reviews. In August 2026, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (USDA-APHIS) deregulated Darling 54 after thorough review of scientific data, supporting documents, and public comments. The agency concluded that the tree is "unlikely to pose a greater plant pest risk than its unmodified counterpart." This followed a six-year review process and marks a major milestone for the project.

The project's next steps include working through reviews by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This process has never been applied to a wild tree, so we don't yet know details, but EPA approval will likely involve two phases. The first phase will focus on expanded research plantings across the American chestnut's native range, which will help us evaluate the trees while building community partnerships.



American Chestnut Tree © SUNY ESF American Chestnut Project.

Widespread distribution would start later, likely a few years after the research phase starts. Scaling up to distribute trees for restoration requires collaboration with partners. American Chestnut Restoration, Inc., a nonprofit dedicated to chestnut restoration and SilvaBio, a public benefit company focused on developing improved tree seedlings for restoration, will play important roles in helping make Darling trees available when distribution is authorized. In the meantime, we are continuing to improve American chestnut varieties and working to protect other threatened trees such as American beech and American elm.

Our team's long-term goal is to enable the restoration of the American chestnut while prioritizing biodiversity, scientific research, and building awareness. Achieving this goal will take time, continued exploration, and collaboration. Each regulatory milestone advances efforts to bring this iconic species back to our forests and helps inform future preservation of other threatened tree species. Learn more on the American Chestnut Research and Restoration website.

Linking Undergraduate Ecology to Conservation Practice

Dr. Eric Hellquist, SUNY Oswego

This fall, the SUNY Oswego Plant Ecology class worked with SLELO PRISM in a collaborative effort to introduce twenty undergraduates to ecological data collection and invasive plant species management. The class worked at the NYDEC Deer Creek Boat Launch in Pulaski. SLELO staff introduced students to the responsibilities of their jobs and provided background on how they arrived at SLELO and their careers in conservation. SLELO staff then summarized invasive species distribution, native plant diversity, and management practices at the site.

As part of the course, students design and carry out a research project. This fall projects are being conducted in collaboration with SLELO. Students collect and analyze data and will present their work as research posters this spring.

Students visited Deer Creek four times to design and carry out their projects related to invasive species ecology. Their projects are focused on the following themes:

- Species richness and herbivory associated with purple loosestrife and spotted knapweed.
- Photosynthetic efficiency of native and exotic shrubs and small understory trees.
- Population characteristics of *Phragmites* following management.
- Exploring if flower color and species origin influence pollinator visits.
- Population structure of teasel and spotted knapweed.

The class also spent one day dedicated to invasive species removal, in which over 1,600 stems of spotted knapweed, 32 densely clumped rosettes of meadow knapweed, and 260 rosettes of teasel were dug out and removed from the site. Additionally, honeysuckle and glossy buckthorn edge were clipped back. Removal of spotted knapweed along the roadside was particularly rewarding as clumps of native goldenrod and New England aster found themselves suddenly in the open without competitors. Removal of all species also limited future seed dispersal, giving an advantage for native plants to re-establish where invasive species were removed.



Students at Deer Creek © SLELO PRISM/TNC.

Meanwhile, students are now working up their data and preparing their work to give a presentation at the SUNY Oswego Quest Scholarship Day in April 2027. By presenting at Quest, Plant Ecology students will have a research presentation for their resumes giving the project additional value beyond class responsibilities. We also hope that these presentations will provide useful information to aid management efforts at the site. The collaboration with SLELO PRISM was a unique way for students to get real life experience with field research. Student Brooklynn Thomas is working on the pollinator project and shared the following about her time working with SLELO,

"*This project has been such a fun and rewarding experience! From spotting a red admiral butterfly on knapweed, garter snakes, and a wasp nest, to enjoying fresh crabapples, every visit has brought something new…One of my favorite parts has been learning how disturbances shape ecosystems and getting hands-on experience by removing invasive plants and creating opportunities for native species to thrive. It's been exciting to contribute to SLELO PRISM's projects while seeing firsthand how our efforts can help restore and protect local ecosystems.*"

From an Aging Dam to a Living Waterway

Rylee Smith, Syracuse Univeristy

When I first visited the Little Salmon River with Engineers Without Borders at Syracuse University (EWB at SU), I didn't fully realize how important our water infrastructure is for aquatic connectivity. Across New York State, many dams have reached or exceeded their intended design life. In the Village of Mexico, New York, our EWB at SU team partnered with local leaders to address two deteriorating flood-control structures on the Little Salmon River.

Through EWB at SU, I also conducted macroinvertebrate sampling with Jeremy Dietrich from Cornell University at nearby Black Creek, a tributary connected to the Little Salmon River. There, I saw firsthand how nature-based engineering can restore native fish passage while maintaining barriers to invasive species such as sea lamprey.

We are thankful for the support and funding provided by the NYS DEC, NYS Water Resources Institute, and the NYS Environmental Protection Fund for this project.

Engineering for Connectivity and Sea Lamprey Control:

Dams can restrict native fish passage, but they can also help prevent invasive species such as sea lamprey from reaching upstream spawning habitat. At Black Creek, a low-head crest barrier is designed to balance both goals by allowing native fish passage while limiting the upstream movement of adult sea lamprey.

During assessments of the Little Salmon River sites, our EWB at SU team identified concerns including limited fish passage, sea lamprey presence, sediment buildup, severe bank erosion, and nearby municipal infrastructure. Observing Black Creek's design and conducting macroinvertebrate sampling helped me understand that improving aquatic connectivity requires careful planning to support native species without increasing invasive-species risks.

At Black Creek, a series of step pools break a large elevation to drop into smaller steps, creating resting areas for migrating fish. Salmon and trout can move between pools, while sea lampreys have greater difficulty navigating the structure. Additional barrier features, such as low-head crests with vertical drops and horizontal lips, may further reduce the ability of adult sea lamprey to climb upstream.



EWB at SU members tour the Little Salmon River with Village of Mexico officials and local partners, November 2024.© Rylee Smith.

Since both the Little Salmon River and Black Creek have a history of sea lamprey treatments, any modifications to existing barriers must be carefully evaluated to avoid opening new spawning habitat upstream.

Community Stewardship and Dam Owners:

Dam owners are responsible for maintaining safe structures, but they can also play an important role in monitoring aquatic invasive species (AIS), especially when considering dam modifications or removal.

Community members contribute as well. At Black Creek, the recent detection of fanwort, an aquatic invasive plant, has prompted removal efforts and public outreach. This response demonstrates how agencies, local partners, and residents can work together to prevent invasive species spread. **Dam owners can help by:**

- **Monitoring** waterways and impoundments for invasive species.
- **Keeping inspection records**, photos, and field notes.
- **Reporting** suspected invasive species to their regional PRISM.
- **Following Clean, Drain, Dry** practices for equipment and watercraft.
- **Coordinating** with NYSDEC and resource-management partners before modifying barriers.

Through EWB at SU, I've learned that restoring waterways takes careful planning and collaboration. For dam owners, stewardship begins with understanding the waterway and the species that depend on it. Protecting our rivers means restoring connections thoughtfully while preventing the spread of invasive species.

Monitoring From Above

Carolyn Koestner, SLELO & APIPP PRISM

This summer, in partnership with NYSDEC, we once again conducted drone flights across Deer Creek and Lakeview Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) to monitor the status of several infestations of aquatic and riparian invasive species. Target species included water chestnut, phragmites, and American lotus. These annual flights provide valuable aerial imagery that allows us to track changes in invasive species populations over time, identify emerging infestations, and evaluate the effectiveness of ongoing management efforts. Drone technology has become an increasingly important tool for monitoring large and difficult-to-access wetland habitats, helping us collect detailed information efficiently and accurately.

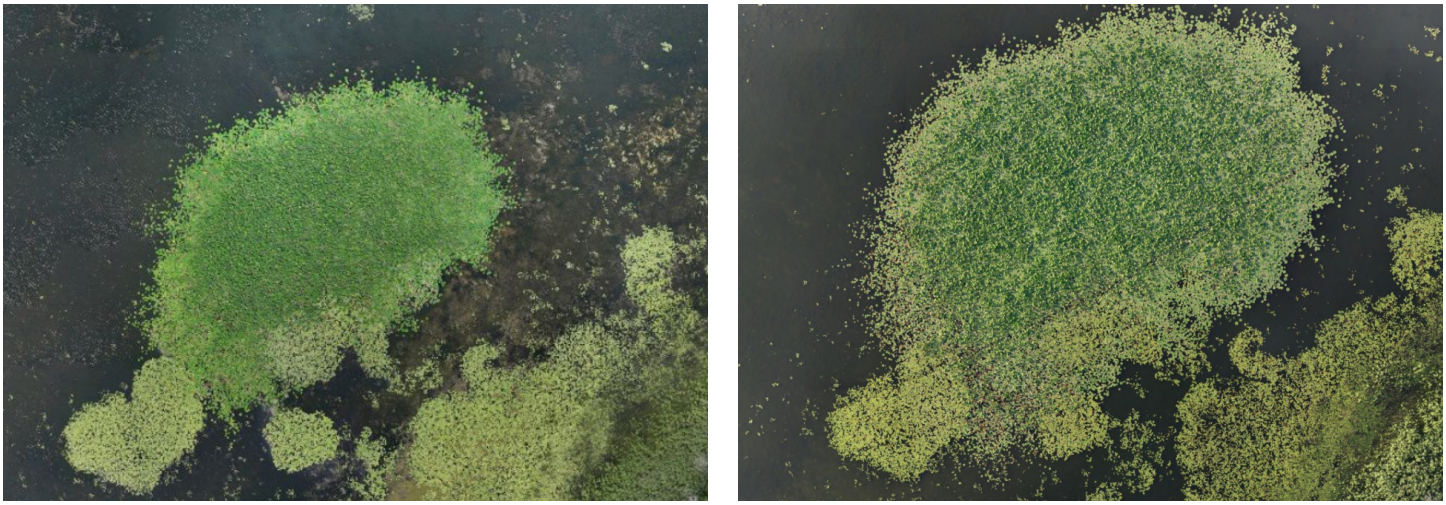
One of the most significant changes we observed through this year's imagery was the rapid expansion of an American lotus population on South Colwell Pond. While American lotus is native to parts of the United States, it is not native to this area and has the potential to form dense surface mats that can alter habitat conditions, reduce recreational access, and outcompete native aquatic vegetation.

SLELO PRISM first identified this population in 2024 and, in 2025, worked with volunteers to remove seed-filled flower heads to slow its spread and reduce future seed production. These efforts represented an important first step to manage the infestation and prevent further expansion. Unfortunately, despite these containment activities, the population continued to spread rapidly over the past year, as illustrated in the images below.

The patch measured approximately 0.9 acres in 2025 and expanded to 1.5 acres in 2026, representing nearly a 50% increase in size in just one year. Following our flight this season, DEC responded by treating the infestation with a mechanical eco-harvester, which you can read more about in the following article. We look forward to evaluating the effectiveness of this management approach and continuing to work with DEC on long-term strategies to control and contain this species.

Later this fall and winter, we will continue incorporating drone flights into our Forest Health Monitoring Program to track the condition of hemlock stands as hemlock woolly adelgid continues to spread throughout the region. In addition to manually reviewing drone imagery, we are excited to partner with Ducks Unlimited and other organizations to pilot image detection software that can help identify invasive species and analyze vegetation changes more efficiently.

These emerging technologies have the potential to improve monitoring efforts and provide valuable insights into how habitats are changing from year to year. Stay tuned for updates and results from this exciting work.



Drone images of American lotus in Lakeview WMA. Left, 2025 image, right 2026 image
© Carolyn Koestner, SLELO/TNC.

Eco Harvester Supports Management Efforts in SLELO

Jayla White, NYSDEC

This summer, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) added a unique new tool to its aquatic invasive species management program, called an Eco Harvester.

I like to think of the Eco Harvester as a lawn mower for the water. This large aquatic plant removal machine is powered by paddle wheels rather than a traditional propeller, helping reduce the risk of snagging vegetation while operating. Its pontoon design allows it to work in shallow water, and interchangeable attachments allow staff to either cut vegetation below the water surface or pull entire plants from the water.



Eco Harvester © Jayla White, NYSDEC.

Collected plant material is conveyed into an onboard storage bunk and later offloaded for composting. This season, all harvested material was composted on-site at Lakeview Wildlife Management Area WMA, Mud Brook.



Eco Harvester © Jayla White, NYSDEC.



Harvesting American lotus © Jayla White, NYSDEC.

Our primary target this summer was European water chestnut, an invasive aquatic plant that forms dense mats and crowds out native species. Equipped with a "puller head," the Eco Harvester removed plants by their roots in an effort to limit regeneration. Staff operated the machine throughout July and August, accomplishing work that would have taken a hand-pulling crew weeks to complete. A single full load was estimated to weigh approximately 713 pounds, and nearly 25,000 pounds of water chestnuts were removed from the landscape.

The Eco Harvester was also used to manage a non-native American lotus population that has expanded rapidly in recent years and begun limiting access at South Colwell Pond within Lakeview WMA. Using the harvester, staff removed an estimated 21,620 pounds of lotus, with an additional 92 pounds removed by hand after the machine experienced a mechanical breakdown in late September.

Overall, the Eco Harvester has proven to be a valuable addition to our aquatic plant management toolbox. By improving efficiency and increasing the amount of plant material that can be removed, it will help support invasive species management efforts for years to come.

Terrestrial Restoration & Resiliency Initiatives

Robert Smith, SLELO PRISM

Early Detection Surveys: The 2026 Invasive Species Surveys were recently completed. Surveys were completed at approximately 107 Highly Probable Areas (HPAs) on 6 Priority Conservation Areas (PCAs). Invasive species found included pale swallowwort, *phragmites*, invasive bittersweet, and invasive knotweed, but no tier 1 and 2 species were found. More details will be included in our annual report. Native species found around the Highly Probable Areas (HPAs) that we survey for invasives are reported to iNaturalist.



Chaumont Barrents Preserve ©SLELO PRISM/TNC.

Management Efforts: No herbicide applicator was available in May, so giant Hogweed management was manual treatment only using the root-cut method. Of the 48 sites surveyed, only 8 sites were found to have giant hogweed and managed (view report). Chemical Treatment for other invasives was conducted by Invasive Plant Control Inc. for swallowwort in July and phragmites, invasive knotweed, and invasive bittersweet in October at 61 HPAs on 12 PCAs.

Biocontrol Updates: In July and August, we released two species (1200 in total) of weevils approved as biocontrol for spotted knapweed at Deer Creek WMA to help protect the fragile dune ecosystem along Lake Ontario. These species are *Larinus spp.*, which target the flower/seed head, and *Cyphocleonus achates*, which targets the roots. This was the second year that releases were conducted at Deer Creek WMA for spotted knapweed. Last year, we released 400 of each species of weevil for a total of 800.

At Rice Creek Field Station, SUNY Oswego Staff and volunteers conducted emerald ash borer biocontrol establishment surveys from June-September. This was an additional survey year beyond the two required by the USDA. Potential *Testrastichus planipennisi* was found and sent to the USDA for verification.



Larinus Release at Deer Creek © SLELO PRISM/TNC.

Restoration Updates: With the support of 29 volunteers and partners from the NYS DEC, OPRHP, and NYNHP, more than 1,500 native plants were installed October 15th-17th at El Dorado Preserve, Selkirk Fen Preserve, and a new Founder Plot at our Pulaski field office. Eighteen native species were planted to increase site diversity, and the Founder Plot will serve as a source of seeds and plants for future restoration projects.



Invasive Plant Control Inc ©SLELO PRISM/TNC



Volunteer Restoration Planting ©SLELO PRISM/TNC

Aquatic Restoration & Resiliency Initiatives

Adrien Owens, SLELO PRISM

As another summer field season comes to a close, SLELO PRISM is reflecting on a season filled with time on the water, hands-on invasive species management, community learning, and new opportunities to strengthen the resilience of our region's freshwater ecosystems.

Surveys: Aquatic vegetation invasive species surveys were conducted at Lakeview Wildlife Management Area (WMA), Whetstone Reservoir, Wilson Hill, the Oswego River, and Upper and Lower Lakes. By spending time on the water looking closely at aquatic plant communities, this work supports our ongoing efforts to understand where invasive aquatic plants are present and helps inform future management and restoration priorities.

Aquatic Invasive Species Learning Experience (AISLE): Education was another important part of the fieldwork during our third season of AISLE. This learning series provided several ways for participants to build their aquatic plant species knowledge, beginning with a virtual plant identification training and continuing with an in-person workshop. Participants were then able to take that knowledge onto the water for a floating classroom experience, providing a hands-on opportunity to practice aquatic plant identification in the field. Together, these experiences help build the skills and confidence needed to recognize aquatic invasive species and support early detection efforts across the region. Learn more about this program and sign up to join us next season on our website!



2026 AISLE Paddle event © SLELO PRISM/TNC.



Volunteer at water chestnut pull © SLELO PRISM/ TNC.

Water chestnut pulls: It wouldn't be summer without getting our hands a little dirty! Water chestnut pulls took place on the Oswegatchie River, Lakeview WMA, and Guffin Bay. Removing water chestnuts is an important component of managing this invasive aquatic plant, and these events put hands in the water to support healthier aquatic ecosystems. It is truly inspiring to see volunteers join us over the years at these sites, and their hard work is paying off! Years of dedication has made a noticeable decrease to these water chestnut populations, making this work much easier now than it was at the start of our management efforts.

This year also marks an exciting new chapter as SLELO PRISM launches a pilot aquatic plant restoration initiative, expanding beyond invasive species management to support native aquatic vegetation and resilient freshwater habitats. We're grateful for another summer spent learning about, managing, and protecting the waters of the St. Lawrence Eastern Lake Ontario region.

SLELO PRISM is seeking a new team member to help advance aquatic restoration and resiliency efforts across the region. View job announcement.

Upcoming Events



Get Details & Register



Learn More



Get Details & Register

- December 1st-2nd, 2026: International Invasive Species Climate Change Conference
- December 15th, 2026, 9:30 AM- 4 PM:New York Forest Expansion Network Summit
  If you are currently establishing forests in New York and beyond, or you are planning to start, this summit is for you.
- January 5th-7th, 2027: Northeast Plant Management Society Meeting
- January 30th, 2027: Save the River Winter Environmental Conference
- February 2nd-4th, 2027: 2027 Invasive Species Forum
- Aquatic Invasive Species Learning Experience
- Volunteer Opportunities
- NYiMapInvasives Events & Trainings
- **PRISM Events:** SLELO APIPP Capital Region CRISP Finger Lakes LIISMA Lower Hudson Western NY

Jobs, Funding, and Notable Announcements

- SLELO PRISM Aquatic Restoration and Resiliency Coordinator
- A2A Ecological Connectivity Project Coordinator
- Aquatic Invasive Species Interjurisdictional Grants to the Great Lakes States and Tribes
- Great Lakes Protection Fund
- Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI): Great Lakes Restoration Community Grant Program

NY-NJ Trail Conference
CONSERVATION DOGS PROGRAM

Trained dogs aid invasive species early detection.

Learn More



Report Tree Pests & Diseases.

Learn More



Get the latest invasive species & climate change news and join the listserv.

Learn More

Request to feature your invasive species related articles, events, job and volunteer opportunities on our website, social media, or newsletters.

From the Director's Desk

Brittney Rogers, SLELO PRISM

Fall invites us to slow down, reflect on the season behind us, and express gratitude for the people, partnerships, and experiences that make our work possible. As we look back on the year, we are reminded that conservation is not the result of any single effort, but of many individuals coming together with a shared commitment to protecting the lands and waters that sustain our communities.

This autumn, we had the pleasure of celebrating one of the most important parts of that community during our first Volunteer Appreciation Event at Whetstone Gulf State Park. Volunteers are the driving force behind so much of our work, from habitat restoration projects and invasive species surveys to outreach events and community science initiatives. Their dedication, enthusiasm, and countless hours of service continue to make a meaningful difference across the region, and we are incredibly grateful for their contributions.



2026 volunteer appreciation event
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The event also marked the launch of our new Volunteer Engagement & Impact Program (VEIP), an initiative designed to recognize and celebrate the many ways volunteers contribute to conservation. Modeled after the growth of a thriving forest, the program features five achievement levels that acknowledge participation. As volunteers advance through the program, they are recognized not only for their service milestones but also for the impact that their stewardship efforts cultivate throughout our communities.

This season also provided an opportunity for reflection in another meaningful way. SLELO PRISM staff were honored to join members of The Nature Conservancy and be welcomed by the Tuscarora Nation for a gathering focused on Indigenous knowledge, culture, and connections to the natural world. Through storytelling, dance, and community engagement, we gained a deeper understanding of "two-eyed seeing" and the value of bringing together different ways of knowing.

A particularly moving experience was gathering at Niagara Falls for a tobacco ceremony led by Indigenous elders. Standing alongside one of the region's most powerful natural features served as a reminder that stewardship is about more than managing resources. It is also about honoring our responsibilities as caretakers of the lands and waters that support all life.

As we move into the winter months, we do so with gratitude for our volunteers and partners who share their knowledge, time, and passion to support our mission. Together, we continue to strengthen conservation efforts and build a deeper connection to the natural places that make our region special.

~Brittney Rogers

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SLELO is one of eight PRISMs in New York, learn more about the PRISM Network at NYIS.info.