



Final Report

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Warren County Purple Loosestrife Management Program

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Warren County Purple Loosestrife Management Program

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Executive Summary

The goal of the Warren County Purple Loosestrife Management Program grant was to educate a diverse community on invasive species in the Lake Champlain Watershed, and to map and reduce the Purple Loosestrife populations in planned wetlands with Purple Loosestrife beetles (*Galerucella calmarensis* and *G. pusilla*) as a biological control. The health and biodiversity of our wetlands are extremely important in the Champlain Basin and its sub watersheds. Through the rearing and releasing of Loosestrife beetles into the chosen wetlands, the now established beetle populations are reducing the Loosestrife plant populations more every year, allowing native vegetation to fill back in and restoring the biodiversity.

During the two year project, the District and volunteers collected 890 Purple Loosestrife beetles from a historic release site in Essex County, then successfully reared and released approximately 12,200 beetles into three major wetlands of the Champlain Basin sub watersheds of Halfway Brook and Lake George. The Adirondack Park Invasive Plant Program (APIPP) instructed the District and our three volunteer organizations how to identify and collect the beetles at the collection site. Once the beetles and loosestrife plants were placed in the hatcheries our office constructed, the Lake George Association, Queensbury Parks & Recreation Department and three Glens Falls Middle School students cared for the hatcheries during the rearing process. Along with the educational field work, the District also held six presentations and created a Purple Loosestrife brochure that included additional wetland invasive plants commonly found in the Champlain Basin.

The process we took to ensure our Purple Loosestrife Management Program will continue was to work with eight different organizations to teach and train them on the program concepts and the ecological importance of managing invasive species. We passed on the tools to these organizations to be able to identify loosestrife plants in all seasons, to identify and collect loosestrife beetles, and to construct and care for the beetle hatcheries. These tools will allow for the establishment of loosestrife management programs outside the boundary of Warren County. The Warren County Purple Loosestrife Program will continue after the closure of this grant due to the established loosestrife beetle populations in the Meadowbrook Preserve wetland and Cronin/Quaker Road wetland along Halfway Brook. We also have the necessary tools for the program to continue which includes the aspirators for beetle collection and the hatchery supplies that include no-see-um netting, wading pools, stakes and plant pots. This grant has successfully reduced purple loosestrife in the treated areas of Warren County and will continue to expand and reduce the populations in adjacent communities with the in the field education with four environmental organizations.

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1 Project Introduction

As with many other counties in the Champlain Watershed, Warren County has had a tremendous explosion in its purple loosestrife population. Purple loosestrife beetles were collected by the Warren County Soil & Water Conservation District (District) and bred for dispersal along the wetlands of Halfway Brook and Lake George. A hatchery system was built with potted loosestrife to rear the beetles. These beetles were then used to reduce the loosestrife infestation. While working in the wetlands, the District completed GPS mapping of the invasive species for the Capital/Mohawk PRISM database. Our education and outreach portion included volunteers, presentations, and educational site visits.

In 2015 & 2016 District staff built hatcheries to rear beetles for release. The hatcheries consisted of five small wading pools with 10 potted plants placed in each pool. Seven of the plants were inoculated with beetles and the three that were not inoculated, were used as a food source if a plant started to deteriorate from beetle damage. This is caused when beetle populations in certain plants started to reproduce earlier than other plants and created the need for additional plant stalks for survival. As we planned for one target release date, all of the individual beetle populations needed to be as fully developed as possible.

In the spring of 2015 & 2016, loosestrife root wads were harvested, planted in three gallon pots and then placed in the hatcheries. The pots were then filled with amended soil for optimal growth. Water was added to the wading pools to create a consistent, saturated soil condition. APIPP trained the Warren, Essex and Saratoga County Soil & Water Conservation District (SWCD) staff on beetle identification and collection methods. Once the beetles were collected, seven of the ten plants in each pool were then inoculated with approximately 10-15 beetles each. The plants were then covered in a small meshed netting (i.e. no-see-um netting) to contain the beetles on the plants. The adult beetles fed on the leaves and the eggs were laid on the leaves and stalks hatching in 2-3 weeks. Larvae then travelled into buds destroying tissue and molted three times in a 2-3 week period. During the 3rd instar stage, larvae travelled down the stem, pupated in the top ½" of soil and emerged as adults in 2-3 weeks. We released approximately 12,200 beetles over the two seasons in the Town of Queensbury's Meadowbrook Nature Preserve, Cronin/Quaker Road 12 acre wetland preserve along Halfway Brook and the Lake George Dunham's Bay wetland. Our hatchery caretakers included Glens Falls Middle School students, the Lake George Association and Queensbury Parks & Recreation. We presented information to each volunteer on the care of the plants and beetles during the rearing process. Training assistance included an APIPP field presentation on beetle collection with volunteers from Essex County SWCD, Saratoga County SWCD and the East Shore Schroon Lake Association (ESSLA).

The Meadowbrook Preserve wetland and Cronin/Quaker Road wetland loosestrife populations were then mapped and the data was uploaded to ArcGIS. These beetle populations will continue to grow and reproduce, while feeding and reducing the loosestrife populations as we saw evidenced during year two of GPS mapping. Throughout the rearing and releasing process, presentations and educational site visits were held with students, community members and municipalities. Presentations on the Purple Loosestrife Program were given to Glens Falls High School ecology students, Queensbury High School Environmental students and Queensbury Town Planning Board. An educational display was also presented at the Lake George Invasive Species Week and at the SUNY Adirondack's Earth Day week.

2 Tasks Completed

Task 1: February-March 2015: Develop a QAPP that will maintain project performance and complete the approval process.

The QAPP was developed by District staff and sent to the LCBP for review and approval. The QAPP was followed throughout each task of the program. See report section "Quality Assurance Tasks Completed" for additional detail on the QAPP process throughout the grant.

Task 2: February-March 2015 & 2016: Complete the NYSDEC Beetle Release Permit paperwork and obtain the permit.

The NYSDEC Beetle Release Permit application was completed and a permit was obtained for 2015 and 2016. The permit was acquired from the NYSDEC Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources. We also provided permit information to all volunteer organizations with known areas of loosestrife infestations to encourage them to start a program of their own as NYSDEC is now shipping beetles at the request of submitted permits.



Staking & netting plants

Task 3: April 2015 & 2016: Build beetle hatcheries. First purchase wading pools, three gallon pots, soil, fertilizer, netting, stakes, rubber bands, tape, zip ties, waders, aspirators and rope.

The beetle hatcheries were constructed each year and were assembled during the planting of the root wads into pots. The hatcheries consisted of five wading pools with 10 potted purple loosestrife plants for each pool (50 plants total) and each pot was covered in no-see-um netting with a wooden stake to keep the netting off the plants. The netting was taped to each pot and zip tied at the top above the stake. We do not recommend using rubber bands to secure the plants as they photodegrade and break leaving an open net. The pools, stakes and some of the pots and netting (with repairs) were able to be reused in year two.



Beetle hatcheries

Task 4: April 2015 & 2016: Harvest purple loosestrife root wads from the Town of Queensbury's Meadowbrook Nature Preserve wetland. The purple loosestrife root wads will be used to rear the beetles in the hatcheries. The root wads will be grown in containers to support the beetles in the hatcheries.



Root wad harvest volunteers

Warren County Purple Loosestrife Management Program

During May of 2015 and 2016, 55 and 50 loosestrife root wads respectively, were collected from the Town of Queensbury's Meadowbrook Nature Preserve wetland. The root wads were container grown in the constructed hatcheries. The Lake George Association and Saratoga County SWCD volunteered in the harvest and we provided field identification of the dormant loosestrife. The root wads were transported in covered plastic bins back to our District office to be planted in the hatcheries.

Task 5: May 2015 & 2016: We will collect the beetles for the hatcheries in a historic release site in Essex County (Westport) documented by the Adirondack Invasive Plant Program. The beetles will be collected with aspirators and stored in small plastic containers. Each container will hold 15 beetles for ease of plant inoculation and documentation. We will document staff, time, date, location, photos and number of beetles collected.



Aspirator with beetles

On May 29th, 2015, APIPP trained our District staff and volunteers on beetle identification and collection. Volunteers included Essex and Saratoga County SWCD staff. A total of 540 beetles were collected from the Essex County historic release site in Elizabethtown and Hovey Pond Park in Queensbury (historic release site in Warren Co.). We inoculated 36 plants, each with 15 beetles. In 2016, our volunteers included Essex County SWCD and the East Shore Schroon Lake Association (ESSLA), and we collected 350 beetles from Elizabethtown and inoculated 35 plants, each with 10 beetles. It is important to note that beetle collection must take place during a sunny warm morning when they are most active and the beetles should be transported in a cooler with ice packs. We reduced the number of beetles per plant in 2016 in an effort to reduce plant damage and amount of feeding required by our office and volunteers. Only 35 plants were inoculated and the additional 15 plants were used as additional forage for the beetles.



Beetle in hand

Task 6: May-August 2015 & 2016: We will be working with the Lake George Association and other organizations for volunteers and to offer presentations on our management program, wetlands, Champlain Watershed issues and invasive species as well as help rear the beetles in the hatcheries.

The District was in a Post Star article about rearing loosestrife beetles with Glens Falls Middle School students. We created a trifold brochure to inform the community about loosestrife and other invasive plants in the Champlain Basin, and the impacts that can occur. We developed a presentation on loosestrife identification and water quality impacts to all of the volunteer groups that assisted us throughout the program. The District's Board of Directors also received a presentation on the program and impacts of loosestrife. In April 2015, the District had a display at SUNY Adirondack with information about the Loosestrife Program. In July 2015, we taught an invasive plant class to a Glens Falls



Beetle collecting volunteers

Warren County Purple Loosestrife Management Program

High School summer field ecology class at Hovey Pond Park on Halfway Brook in Queensbury. The students were able to identify loosestrife plants in the wetland and were able to harvest beetles using an aspirator. Additionally in July, two District interns had a display at the Invasive Species Week in the Lake George Village where they discussed loosestrife in the Champlain Basin and handed out our informational brochure. During a District presentation at the Town of Queensbury planning meeting in September 2015, we provided an overview of the Purple Loosestrife Management Program and the affects it is having on the Halfway Brook Watershed of the town. In June 2016, we had an invasive species display at the Feeder Canal Alliance Paddle in Queensbury.

Task 7: May-August 2015 & 2016: The District and volunteers will care for the beetles in the hatcheries by filling the wading pools with 6"-8" of water and adding purple loosestrife stalks as needed to increase the beetle population to 4,000.

- *Care for the beetle hatcheries include, filling the wading pools (not the plant pots) with 6"-8" of water everyday as needed to maintain that depth.*
- *Purple Loosestrife stalks will be cut from the three uninoculated plants in the wading pools and added to inoculated plants if additional feed is needed for the beetles.*
- *The adult beetles will feed on the leaves and eggs will be laid on the leaves and stalks hatching in 2-3 weeks. Larvae then travel into buds destroying tissue and molt three times in a 2-3 week period. During the 3rd instar, larvae then travel down the stem, pupate in the top ½" of soil and emerge as adults in 2-3 weeks.*



Hatchery care volunteer

In 2015, two eighth grade Glens Falls Middle School science students and the Queensbury Parks & Recreation Department had a hatchery to care for. At the beginning of July, the beetles required the addition of cut stalks every 2-3 days as the populations started to build. Several plants had limited beetle populations at time of release due to a lack of forage. In 2016, we reduced the number of beetles on each plant from 15 to 10 per plant, to reduce the amount of extra forage needed prior to release. In 2016, a student from the Glens Falls Middle School and the Lake George Association each cared for one hatchery. This left the District with three hatcheries to care for and keep a closer watch on plant health and the beetle populations. With those alterations, the beetle rearing was more successful and our volunteers did a terrific job keeping the plants and beetles healthy. By reducing the number of beetles per plant and receiving additional care, the number of beetles released in 2016 increased by approximately 600 from 2015. In 2015, of the 36 plants inoculated, only 29 plants survived producing approximately 5,800 beetles. In 2016, 35 plants were inoculated and 32 of the plants survived producing approximately 6,400 beetles.

Task 8: July-August 2015 & 2016: The District and volunteers will place the beetles and potted Purple Loosestrife plants in infested areas of the Meadowbrook preserve wetland, Cronin Road 12



Beetle release along Halfway Brook

acres wetland and the Dunham's Bay wetland. While we are in the wetlands, we will also have a GPS to document and map all invasive species found in the surrounding area. The District staff will always be with the volunteers in the field to train them on invasive ID and GPS data collection. Species that will be documented are Purple Loosestrife, Japanese Knotweed and Common Reed Grass. The District staff is trained in invasive plant ID.

- A data dictionary will be created in GPS Pathfinder Office 5.40. The data dictionary will be a polygon (point file used with plot size to have consistent data in areas that could not be walked) file to collect the size of purple loosestrife plots in the wetland. The dictionary will also include a photo and density of plants using the Daubenmire Scale. The dictionary will have a drop down menu following the Daubenmire Scale with the choices 0-5%, 5-25%, 25-50%, 50-75%, 75-95% and 95-100%.
- Once created, the data dictionary will be uploaded to the Trimble Juno SB GPS for field data collection.
- Once the purple loosestrife data is collected in the wetland, the data will then be post processed in the office with differential correction in Pathfinder and then converted to a shapefile to be used in ESRI ArcGIS.
- In 2016, the same data collection process will occur to log the progress the beetle release is having on the purple loosestrife population in the wetland.
- The data collection layers from 2015 & 2016 will then overlay on a GIS map to track and see the progress of the beetle release on the purple loosestrife population of the wetland.

We created a data dictionary for our GPS Trimble Juno that was utilized to collect data and map the loosestrife populations in the Meadowbrook Preserve and Quaker Road wetlands. In July 2015, we picked up the beetle hatcheries from the Glens Falls students and Queensbury Parks & Recreation staff and released approximately 5,800 beetles in the two wetlands. All of the GPS data was plotted on a GIS map and the data was converted to shapefiles.

The loosestrife wetland GIS mapping was submitted to the Capital/Mohawk PRISM, following a meeting with the coordinator. In 2016, we GPS mapped loosestrife populations in the Cronin Road wetland on Halfway Brook. We attempted to map the Dunham's Bay wetland by canoe, but it was not achievable due to the lack of canoe access. We were able to canoe into Dunham's Bay but with the depth of water and thickness of vegetation, we were unable to get close enough to accurately record the loosestrife populations. In year two, we GPS mapped the loosestrife populations in the Halfway Brook Quaker Road wetland and the Meadowbrook Preserve wetland where beetles were released in 2015. From the GPS field data recorded, we created maps of the Loosestrife populations in GIS for 2015 and 2016 data.

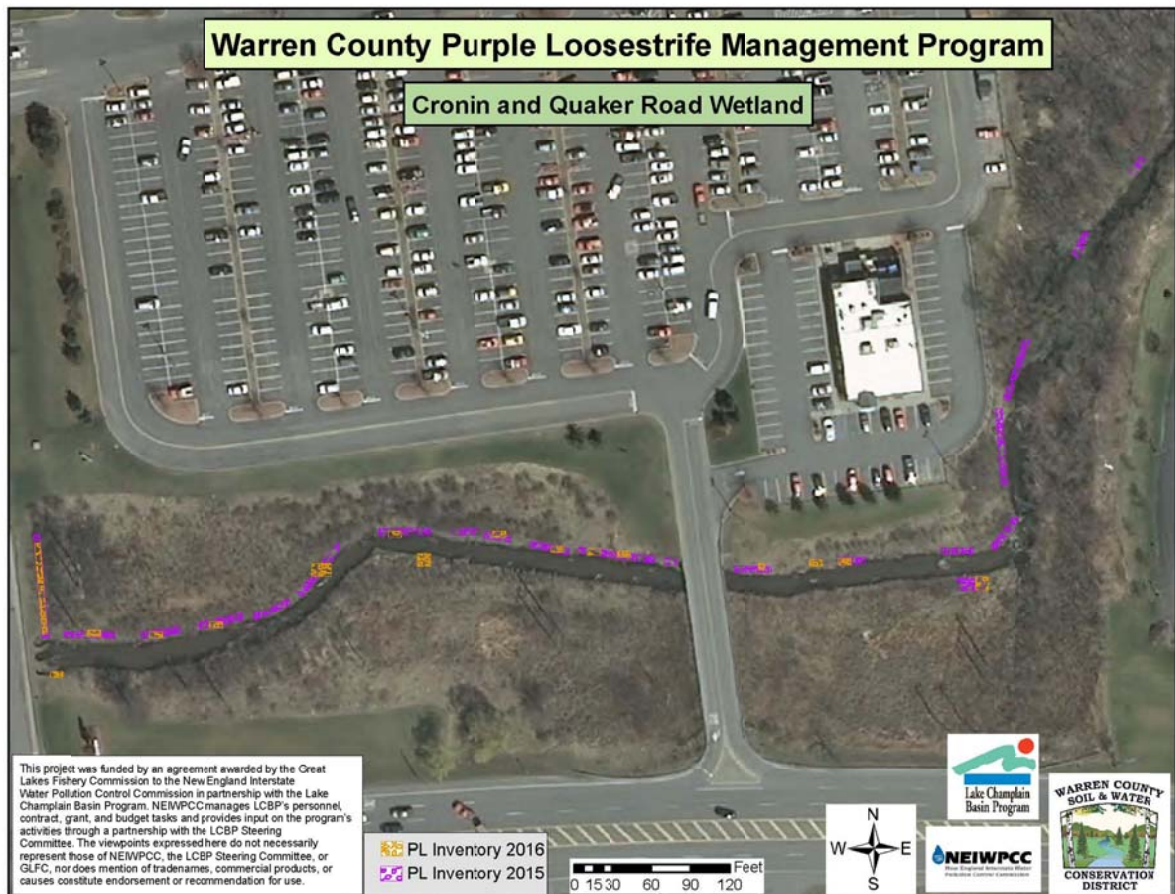
The adjustment to Task 8 included mapping the Dunham's Bay wetland which was not possible due to the depth of water and access with a canoe through very thick vegetation. We were able to see numerous plants from a distance so beetles were still released in this location. The second year of loosestrife mapping in Halfway Brook Quaker Road and Meadowbrook Preserve was more difficult due to lack of flowering from severely beetle damaged plants in both locations (a sign of success). As previously noted in 2015 an estimated 5,800 beetles were released and in 2016 an estimated 6,400 beetles were released.



Flower identification

Task 9: December 2016: The District will compile a project summary, plans, maps, articles and photos to complete the final report.

The District collected photos throughout every step of the grant including volunteer assistance. We also submitted all quarterly reports, designed GIS maps with the collected loosestrife population GPS data and saved articles and social media posts about the program. This final report has detailed steps, tasks and adjustments needed for an organization or group to follow and start their own loosestrife management program.



3 Methodology

The goal of the Purple Loosestrife Management Program was to reduce the spread of purple loosestrife in the Lake Champlain Basin of Warren County while providing invasive species education to the public. This was achieved through working with volunteers and organizations to collect, rear and release loosestrife beetles in infested wetlands, while collecting data and mapping loosestrife populations.

We achieved our educational component while working with school students, community volunteers and local organizations as well as informing other Soil & Water Conservation Districts. Our community outreach component was met with presentations to municipalities and schools as

well as utilizing our District Facebook, local newspapers and handing out our Loosestrife brochure at community events.

We achieved a reduction in Loosestrife populations through the collecting and rearing of loosestrife beetles in the constructed hatcheries. Once the beetles were reared to produce a larger population, we released them in infested wetlands to reduce the loosestrife populations in the Champlain Basin of Warren County.

Our data collecting methodology followed a QAPP (see section below) and utilized a Trimble GPS unit to collect data on Loosestrife locations and populations. The data was then displayed on aerial photos in ArcGIS maps.

4 Quality Assurance Tasks Completed

****For projects with approved QAPPs only ****

The quality control tasks were completed as required throughout the program. A few slight variations were made for improvements of beetle rearing and one release site was inaccessible for accurate GPS mapping of the purple loosestrife populations. The improvement changes to beetle rearing included the number of beetles that we initially inoculated each plant with. In 2015, we inoculated each plant with 15 beetles which caused the plants to be totally consumed prior to release. Not every plant's beetle population hatched at the same time, causing some of the earlier hatching beetles to damage plants very quickly, requiring extra time for continuous feeding. It is assumed that some of the volunteer's beetle populations were lower due to that issue. The change made in 2016, was to initially inoculate each plant with 10 beetles instead of 15. Along with reducing the number of beetles per plant, we also had better oversight, leading to an overall increase in the population of beetles, even though less beetles per plant were initially utilized.

As for a reduction in the overall GPS field mapping of loosestrife plant populations, a site on Lake George in the Dunham's Bay wetland was unable to be accessed. As mentioned in the Tasks Completed (Task 8) section, we canoed into the channel of the wetland to map the plant populations but with the thickness of the wetland plant population and depth of water in the channel, we were unable to get close enough to the visible loosestrife plants to accurately GPS map the populations. We were still able to identify loosestrife, so as planned, beetles were released in this location. The two wetlands where beetles were released in 2015 and mapped in both years were the Meadowbrook Preserve wetland and Cronin/Quaker Road wetland. We have a GIS map of the Loosestrife population data for both years. During the 2016



Beetle damaged plants

mapping of these wetlands, severe plant damage by beetles was observed in both wetlands, causing limited flowering and making it much more difficult to map loosestrife plants in this area. The mapped loosestrife locations were submitted to the Capital/Mohawk PRISM.

5 Deliverables Completed

The deliverables for each task in the work plan have been completed throughout the two years of the program. In Task 1, we worked very closely with the LCBP staff to develop and finalize a QAPP in the late winter of 2015. The deliverables for Task 2 required a NYSDEC Beetle Release permit which was obtained for 2015 and 2016. The permit requires release locations and number of beetles released as well as organizational information to be submitted to the Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources. The Task 3 deliverables were to build the beetle hatcheries each year to rear the collected beetles. This was done each spring prior to the root wad harvest so they could be planted in the wading pools. Task 4 required the harvest of 50 loosestrife root wads each year and photos of the plant growth in the hatcheries. In 2015 we collected 55 root wads and in 2016 we collected 50 with volunteer organizations assisting in the harvest. The entire process was photo documented from root wad harvest to full mature hatcheries with beetle populations. In Task 5, the deliverables were to collect 500 to 600 beetles and inoculate the hatcheries. In 2015, 540 beetles were collected and 36 plants were inoculated with 15 beetles each. In 2016, the number of beetles inoculated per plant was reduced to 10 beetles (350 total beetles) to allow for a better survival rate of beetles on the inoculated plants prior to release. Reducing the number of beetles per plant lead to a better survival rate of the inoculated plants and an increase in the population of beetles at the time of release. Task 6 was educational outreach and the deliverable was to track the number of organizations, volunteers, presentations and participants. During the program we partnered with 8 organizations, held 6 presentations, utilized 21 volunteers and educated 436 participants. The deliverable for Task 7 included, reporting the number of beetles reared and released in both years. In 2015 we reared approximately 5,800 beetles and in 2016, we reared approximately 6,400 beetles with volunteer assistance both years. Task 8 required mapping of the loosestrife infested wetlands. We mapped the Cronin/Quaker Road wetland and the Meadowbrook Preserve wetlands in both 2015 and 2016. The Task 9 deliverable is the completion of the final report.



Purple loosestrife mapping

6 Conclusions

The Warren County Purple Loosestrife Management Program has had great success in not only the Warren County portions of the Lake Champlain Watershed, but also in Essex County. Through the presentations and outreach, numerous Soil & Water Conservation Districts and lake associations have



Beetles ready to be released

contacted us to get the methodology of the program. This success and momentum will allow this program to grow and continue throughout the Lake Champlain Watershed and other watersheds as well. Now that our District has the supplies and equipment, we plan on continuing to implement the program, to maintain the health and biodiversity of our wetlands.

The program components that we saw the highest success in were the hands on field experiences. Getting the Glens Falls High School and Middle School students involved in the rearing and field education allowed them to have a great understanding of invasive plants, biological controls and the importance wetland biodiversity. The presentations and overall interest in the program has led to the spread of the program over multiple counties and throughout the watershed. Based on public feedback, the success and expansion of the program was due in part to the ease at which the basics of the program can be replicated by other organizations once the aspects are understood, and that the program strongly lends itself to the use of volunteers and school students. The main details for a successful program include identification, timing and location for root wad harvest, beetle collection (technique) and beetle release. The organizations and associations that volunteered with us acquired these skills, techniques and details to start their own loosestrife management programs. The program learning curve from 2015 to 2016 included reducing the number of beetles inoculated per plant, having good volunteers to care for the plants and beetles during the rearing process and finding out that not all wetlands are accessible for accurate GPS mapping.

OFA Task 6.8.3 deals with restoring communities of native plants which was accomplished by releasing the beetles to reduce the loosestrife infestations allowing for native plants to fill back in the wetlands of these high-priority habitats (OFA Task 6.8.3). Volunteers assisted in the care of the plants and beetles during the rearing process. The District completed GPS mapping of Loosestrife in the wetlands and released the reared beetles which addressed OFA Task 7.2.7 & Task 7.2.8 which is "Reduce the spread of aquatic invasive species within the Lake Champlain Basin". The plants with the adult beetles were then placed in the loosestrife infested areas of the wetlands where the beetle populations will continue to grow and reproduce, while feeding and reducing the loosestrife plant populations in the wetlands. Throughout the rearing and release process, presentations and educational field trainings were held that addressed OFA Task 7.5.5 which is "Support education and outreach efforts related to aquatic invasive species" and Task 3.5.6 which is provide local groups the resources to implement OFA. OFA Task 3.1.10 is "Enhance educator and student learning about watershed issues" which the District addressed through presentations to high school and college groups about the issues the Lake Champlain watershed is currently dealing with.

The District worked and trained four organizations on all of the aspects of this program that are required to start their own Purple Loosestrife Management Program, which encourages the program to grow and manage infestations outside of Warren County. This will further the District's goal of reducing the spread of invasive species and restoring native plant habitats through education and outreach efforts. Our program also provided hands on education to two schools in the Champlain Basin which included presentations on watershed issues and students rearing beetles throughout the summer to reduce the spread of purple loosestrife in our wetlands.

7 References

8 Appendices

Appended Documents:

Warren County Purple Loosestrife Management Program

Attach any articles, press releases (which should acknowledge partnership with LCBP), a list of acronyms and published documents pertaining to this project

Photos: Email or mail a CD to your Project Officer with any photo documentation you have of your project with proper photo credit that LCBP can use in future publications.

Electronic Data: Email or mail a CD to your Project Officer with any electronic datasets you have generated through your project.