



# Connect with your environment

Learn about environmental issues, in your community and how you can get involved.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

From left, Brooke Gibbs, Kourtne Nitschke (sitting), Katelyn Kuzma, Ashley Higley, Jordan Biehl and Aurianna Cubero are among the Union City School students who helped reduce trash.

## Recycling reduces trash, cuts bill

By ANNA McCARTNEY  
Contributing writer

Students in Racquel Gray's science classes cut the trash pickup in the Union City Schools from three times to two times per week, saving the district \$152.42 a month.

They started a recycling program to reduce trash. Signs they made about key recycling facts and why it's important were posted in the cafeteria and each of the recycling bins at both the middle/high school and elementary school.

The third-block class rotated positions during all four lunches to help facilitate the process in the cafeteria. The first-block class collected the recycling from all classrooms and made sure that it was placed into the proper trash container. They also talked to each of the classrooms about what items students could recycle during the school day and the breakfast program. Students also presented the project progress to the middle/high school at an assembly.

On Friday, they presented their efforts at the research symposium at Allegheny College and will be sharing their results at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania on May 22. Finally, they will make a presentation to the Union City School Board about their success and what they hope will be done with the money saved.

Gray and her students have also participated in the International Coastal Cleanup and have planted trees to reduce marine debris and stormwater runoff problems. She is one of eight teachers participating in the Pennsylvania Sea Grant Great Lakes, Great Stewards project, which provides funding and support for field trips and stewardship activities through the Center for Great Lakes Literacy (CGLL), a partnership of the Great Lakes Sea Grant Network and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Great Lakes National Program office. For more information about

CGLL, contact Marti Martz at mam60@psu.edu or 217-9011, extension 104.

This is what the students had to say about their recycling efforts:

"We need to change the world with our actions because actions speak louder than words. By the way, recycle."

— Andrew Gross

"Every morning we pick up the recycling from every classroom in the high school to help as much as we possibly can. Hopefully this will get more people to start recycling at home."

— Courtney Brumagin

"Help save the world by recycling at school and at home."

— Kenny Kerstetter

"Recycling isn't just a goal; it's also an accomplishment!"

— Brooke Gibbs

"It is our generation who needs to live in this polluted world. We need to make a difference and recycle."

— Renee Stolz

"I was extremely motivated and ready to explore and persuade people to recycle. I am one of the people going to Allegheny College to discuss what we have done in our school and I couldn't be any happier. Thank you, everyone! Please, recycle!"

— Ashley Higley

"Recycle to keep this planet healthy."

— Kyler Brown

"The reason we should recycle is because it helps keep the Earth clean and every thing alive and healthy."

— Dallten Brown

"Only we as humans can make that difference. Start recycling today."

— Sara Dix

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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Private landowners can help in the effort to keep invasive plants from damaging the unique native ecosystems in the Lake Erie watershed by identifying and removing them on their property and eliminating their use in landscaping projects. Pulling garlic mustard, above, in the early spring before it flowers is an effective way to control this plant that invades shaded areas and releases potent chemicals that inhibit seed germination of native plants.

# Good riddance

## How invasive plants harm environment

By ANNA McCARTNEY  
Contributing writer

Did you know that invasive plants pose the second greatest threat to native plants and wildlife? (Habitat destruction caused by development is the greatest threat.)

Many invasive plants, most of which were brought here from other continents, were introduced intentionally as landscape plants before anyone realized the damage they cause. Because these invaders have no diseases or pests to control them and they offer little or no food value to wildlife, they grow aggressively and spread quickly. They are an increasing problem on roadsides, forests, wetlands, farms and anywhere they claim as home.

These aliens inflict serious ecological harm by disrupting natural succession and the water cycle and reducing biodiversity.

They damage habitat and replace plants that are important wildlife food sources. Furthermore, misuse of pesticides by many homeowners to combat weeds threatens water resources. These plants also cause economic problems by harming agriculture, tourism, fisheries and recreation industries, including hunting, fishing, camping, hiking and boating.

Involving private landowners and helping them identify invasive plants and the damage they can cause is essential to stopping their spread. It is crucial to track the locations of invasive plants and remove any that are found. Their use must also be eliminated in landscaping and restoration projects.

The Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and Pennsylvania Sea Grant are coordinating efforts to control invasive species in the Lake Erie Watershed Cooperative Weed Man-

agement Area (LEW-CWMA). They are looking for individuals, school groups, clubs, land trusts, organizations and corporations to help them. If your group or organization owns land and would like it to be considered for a LEW-CWMA project or you would like to get involved in the program, they would like to hear from you. You can also participate by volunteering to pull and remove weeds when sites are being prepared for further control. Contact PA Sea Grant Coastal Outreach Specialist Tom Cermak at 217-9011, extension 106.

Targeted plants listed in the LEW-CWMA five-year plan include phragmites, narrow leaved cattail, exotic bush honeysuckles, Canada thistle, garlic mustard, purple loosestrife, oriental bittersweet, spotted knapweed, Japanese knotweed, multiflora rose, Japanese stiltgrass, giant hogweed and reed canary

grass. Organizing information about these plants in one location supports early detection of new populations and analysis of the management strategies needed. An online tool called iMapInvasives provides such a system to collect and track invasive species. To learn more about iMapInvasives, visit [www.imapinvasives.org](http://www.imapinvasives.org) or e-mail [imapinvasives@paconserv.org](mailto:imapinvasives@paconserv.org).

However anyone can help keep non-native invasive plants from damaging the unique native ecosystems in the Lake Erie watershed. A few of the worst offenders are pictured on this page. Look for them on your property and start pulling.

Next week: Go native

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**Large reed (Phragmites australis):** This tall perennial grass reaches up to 15 feet and can rapidly overtake wetland communities, outcompeting native vegetation and altering wildlife habitat. It emits a toxin that helps it to turn biologically diverse wetlands into monocultures.



BOB HARRIS/Contributed photo

**Oriental bittersweet (Celastrus orbiculatus):** Grows vigorously, climbing over and smothering native vegetation and keeping sunlight from reaching them. Its weight on trees can lead to uprooting during high winds and heavy snowfalls.



BOB HARRIS/Contributed photo

**Japanese knotweed (Polygonum cuspidatum):** Emerges in early spring and grows quickly and aggressively, forming dense mats that crowd out native plants and grasses along creeks. This makes riverbanks less stable and more likely to shear off during flooding.



BOB HARRIS/Contributed photo

**Purple loosestrife (Lythrum salicaria):** Originally planted for its brilliant display, its attractiveness does not outweigh the serious threat it poses. It outcompetes and replaces native grasses and other flowering plants that provide high quality food and habitat for wildlife



### LEARN MORE

**What:** Presque Isle Bay Public Advisory Committee Public Meeting. There will be a short presentation on phosphorus reduction activities occurring on Lake Erie, as well as updates for sampling and assessment plans for Presque Isle Bay's sediments and watershed.  
**Where:** Tom Ridge Environmental Center, room 112  
**When:** Monday, May 4, at 9:30 a.m.

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Check out these websites to learn more:

[www.fws.gov/invasives/](http://www.fws.gov/invasives/)  
<http://waterlandlife.org/346/what-we-do>  
<http://paseagrant.org>

Invasive plants are another example of how people have changed the natural environment. Have you seen any of the invasive plants listed today in your garden or neighborhood? Are you doing anything to help control invasive plants? What could you do to educate others about this problem? Write a letter for "your space" to convince others to get involved in early detection and rapid response in your community. Be sure to include facts to support your position. E-mail your letter to [axm40@psu.edu](mailto:axm40@psu.edu) for possible publication in the "your space" feature.

