

# Kentucky Celebrates Invasive Plant Awareness Month

by Joyce Bender, KY EPPC President

Kentucky's Invasive Plant Awareness Month was kicked off with a presentation of Governor Steve Beshear's proclamation in the Capitol rotunda on August 24th. Representing the governor was Leah MacSwords, director of the Division of Forestry. Receiving the signed proclamation was Kay Fisher, current president of the Garden Club of Kentucky and Ann Fiel, past president and avid supporter of KY EPPC's efforts to bring invasive plants to the public's attention. The month-long awareness campaign was planned jointly between the Garden Club of Kentucky and the KY EPPC as a follow-up to 2007's Weed Awareness Week.

Events to raise public awareness were scheduled from Mammoth Cave National Park to the Daniel Boone National Forest and on state and private natural areas in between. The public was invited to participate in weed pulls, weed identification hikes and attend presentations on invasive species. The mayors of three cities, including the capitol city of Frankfort, declared September Invasive Plant Month as well. The month ended on a high note with the Capitol Grounds Makeover. In an unprecedented effort, several massive bush honeysuckle (*Lonicera maackii*) shrubs were removed from an area near the governor's entrance to the state capitol and replaced with native fringe trees (*Chionanthus virginicus*). The Kentucky Native Plant Society donated the shrubs and the effort was supported by the Frankfort Garden Club and the South Frankfort Neighborhood Association. Removal of the honeysuckle and site preparation was provided by the staff from the Finance Cabinet's Department for Facilities and Support Services. The work crew was so enthusiastic that they also removed a nearby burning bush and the privet hiding behind it. The Department's Deputy Commissioner, Jerry Graves even stepped in to help plant the first fringe tree.

Alan Nations, the president of the Kentucky Native Plant Society presented a pen and pencil set made from bush honeysuckle wood to Steve Meredith, an official from the Finance Cabinet and asked that it be presented to the governor to thank him for declaring the month for invasive plant awareness. Nations explained his organization's donation of the fringe trees saying, "Our organization wanted to support Invasive Plant Awareness Month in a way that will last beyond September. Kentucky has so many native plants that work well in landscapes, what better place to start than planting on the Capitol grounds to remind everyone that they can have beauty and benefit our environment at the same time. Urban



Barbara Hadley-Smith, Jerry Graves, Joyce Bender and Alan Nations begin the Capitol Grounds makeover by planting a fringe tree where a bush honeysuckle was removed.

efforts such as this are instrumental in stopping the spread of invasive plants to Kentucky's diverse and beautiful natural areas."

Peggy Dungan, local member of the Frankfort Garden Club has been trying for many years to get the non-native plants that are taking over Frankfort's landscapes and the natural areas of Franklin County on people's radar. "The Capitol grounds were my playground as a child. They have been my front yard all my life. I feel very strongly about preserving their beauty for all Kentuckians to enjoy and to be a source of pride. I also feel very strongly that these grounds should set the example for all gardeners in Kentucky by utilizing native plants and removing invasives. I am very happy to know that finally we have the attention of the folks looking after the Capitol. I hope we can continue to remove the plants up there that are overwhelming our beautiful native flora and making it hard on the wildlife to find food."

Steve Meredith indicated that the Finance Cabinet would be willing to work with KY EPPC, the Garden Club of Kentucky and other interested citizens to continue removing invasives and replacing them with native plants. He asked for an inventory of the invasives on the Capitol grounds and a location map. Joyce Bender said that KY EPPC would work with local master gardeners and members of the Kentucky Native Plant Society to provide the inventory and map. She also said that there will be interpretive material developed to keep visitors and legislators apprised of the project as it proceeds.

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