

Bulletin



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The European Buckthorn Control Program in Winnipeg

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The following report will bring MNS members up-to-date on the progress of the European Buckthorn Control Program, a long-term project of the Urban Environment Committee.

European buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica* L.) is an invasive exotic plant that threatens Winnipeg's natural areas by crowding out and replacing native vegetation. European buckthorn is a deciduous shrub native to Europe, Asia and North Africa introduced into the City of Winnipeg in the late 1800s as an ornamental shrub. It is a very hardy plant capable of inhabiting a large range of terrestrial ecosystems.

European buckthorn leafs out early in spring and does not lose its leaves until late autumn, giving it a longer growing season. When combined with a rapid growth rate and high seed production, it quickly chokes out and replaces surrounding vegetation. Once European buckthorn has established itself, it becomes extremely difficult to eradicate. Our city is losing valuable native habitat in a number of areas, due to the aggressive nature of this plant.

In 1998, the MNS and the City of Winnipeg's Naturalist Services Branch initiated research on European buckthorn in Winnipeg's natural areas. The research

provided baseline information on the densities of European buckthorn across the city. The research also explored various control methods such as herbiciding using glyphosate capsules, cutting and painting stumps with liquid herbicide, and girdling. In 2002, with support from the Coalition to Save the



European buckthorn plant. Photo taken by: Helen Fabbri (1999)

Elms and the Friends of Omands Creek, the MNS and the Naturalist Services Branch began a five-year European Buckthorn Control Program in Winnipeg, with special emphasis on Assiniboine Park where densities are highest. Funding for the project was made possible through Environment Canada's 'EcoACTION Community Funding Program'.

From the initial inventory, 17 sites were found along both the Assiniboine and Red Rivers containing varying densities of European buckthorn. These sites include natural areas, city parks and golf courses. In 2002, 16 sites were treated and 4 parcels of forest were treated in Assiniboine Park – a success rate of 85% or better resulted at treatment sites. In 2003, the sites treated in the previous year were monitored and re-treated as necessary.

In 2004, efforts will be directed toward further monitoring of previously treated sites, treatment of new parcels within Assiniboine Park, exploring new techniques for the treatment of small seedlings, and broadening public knowledge of European buckthorn. Interpretive signage explaining the issue of European buckthorn is in the works for higher profile areas within Assiniboine Park.

In addition, European buckthorn brochures are available from the MNS and the City of Winnipeg's Naturalist Services Branch.

The European Buckthorn Control Program is embarking on its third year and, based on results from the last two years, significant progress has been made. Our goal is to eliminate, or at least limit, the spread of European buckthorn across the city, to conserve Winnipeg's unique natural heritage areas for wildlife and humans alike, and to increase public awareness of the need to actively manage natural areas subject to human disturbance.