



WWU Learning Environment Action Discovery (L.E.A.D.) Media Backgrounder

Press Contact: lead@wwu.edu

OVERVIEW

L.E.A.D. is an Associated Students club at Western Washington University. They have existed since 2000. They were founded on the joint ideals of improving their surrounding environment as well as helping Western students and Whatcom County residents to form community bonds. Their current work focuses on restoring natural biodiversity by removing invasive and dangerous plant species from the area. L.E.A.D. considers this work vital because invasive plant species either directly or indirectly damage the other species they are overtaking, and can completely destroy native habitats. They also focus on mulching, which promotes the health of native growths and discourages re-growth of weeds, and replanting with native plants. They have a total of three staff members. During the 2014 fall academic quarter at Western, L.E.A.D. had a total of 257 volunteers who participated in work parties for academic extra credit, and 28 non-credit volunteers. This number is an improvement in non-credit volunteers, but the club would like to recruit more non-Western and non-credit volunteers.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES

L.E.A.D.'s current and main activities consist of the frequent work parties they hold, not only **on Western's campus**, but all around Bellingham. Fall quarter of 2014, they held 17 work parties, which added up to 40 total hours of improving our local environment. These work parties exist in three categories: weeding

invasive plants, mulching and replanting with native plants. The three plants L.E.A.D. focuses most on are the Himalayan blackberry, English ivy, and English Holly. L.E.A.D. is currently trying to expand. They already partner with City of Bellingham: Whatcom Land Trust, Huxley, Outback, Arboretum, and the NSEA. In terms of this year, they want to begin sponsoring other activities to get students more involved outside of their required volunteer hours. They plan to do this by showing environmentally-themed movies in the dorms on campus, and by running a new beach cleanup project.

FACTS ABOUT INVASIVE SPECIES

Whatcom County

- In Sehome Hill Arboretum, English ivy was observed at 9.7% of observed points. English holly was observed more often.
- On January 21, 2013, the City of Bellingham and NSEA held a work party organized by four AmeriCorps members through Washington Service Corps. During this 3 hour work party, 158 volunteers removed over 3,200 pounds of invasive ivy, planted 350 native plants and spread the 310 yards of mulch. (*This statistic relates to how much can be achieved in a short time period.*)

Regional

- The Himalayan blackberry is regulated in Washington, Oregon, California, and Georgia.
- English holly is most commonly found in western Washington, western Oregon, parts of western California, and Hawaii. It is only regulated in California.
- English ivy has recently been listed as a noxious weed by the Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board.
- English ivy has been used extensively as groundcover in the Pacific Northwest

Global

- Ecological Biodiversity is defined by the National Wildlife Foundation as “**the diversity of ecosystems, natural communities and habitats.**” In essence, it’s the variety of ways that species interact with each other and their environment.
- **Genetic Biodiversity is defined by the National Wildlife Foundation as “the variation in genes that exists within a species.”**
- Approximately 42% of threatened or endangered species are at risk primarily due to invasive species, through competition for food and other resources or directly attacking them.
- The United States suffers from \$1.1-120 billion per year in economic losses due to exotic, invasive species.
- The English ivy threatens all levels of forested and opened areas by growing along the ground as well as climbing trees into the canopy level.
- English ivy has been confirmed as a reservoir for bacterial leaf scorch (*Xylella fastidiosa*) which affects a wide variety of trees.
- Removing groundcovers such as English ivy opens up the canopy and scarifies the soil, conditions that are ideal for the rapid establishment from seed of opportunistic species, a category that includes most invasive plants.
- Mulches help control weeds by excluding light and preventing seed germination and growth.
- When taking away growing space from invasive plants by replanting, it is particularly important to minimize the amount of interior and exterior edge of a forest (high light areas where invasive plants thrive) by encouraging native species growth in forest gaps and rounding off sinuous or concave edges.

BOILERPLATE

L.E.A.D. (Learning Environment Action Discovery) is an Associated Students club founded in 2000, which exists in the service category at Western Washington University. They strive to remove invasive species in order to protect native biodiversity. One of their main values is fostering connection between Western

students and outside members of the community in pursuit of their shared goals. There are currently 3 staff members. During the 2014 fall academic quarter at Western, L.E.A.D. had a total of 285 volunteers who participated in work parties. The current club president is Wendelin Dunlap. <http://www.wvu.edu/lead/>.

SOURCES

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