



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Event Date – May 14, 2008

CONTACT- Jeffrey Potter, Director of Communications
jeffrey.potter@wisconsin.gov and (608) 261-4392

**NATURAL RESOURCES FOUNDATION AND AMERICORPS
JOIN FORCES FOR LARGEST INVASIVE PLANT BATTLE IN WISCONSIN**

(Madison, WI) Wisconsin has already been invaded. While our liberties are safe, our gardens, parks, wetlands, lakes and rivers are not. The invaders are not foreign troops, but non-native plants that threaten the beauty and vitality of Wisconsin's natural environment. Fortunately, a battalion of more than 450 AmeriCorps members is joining forces with the Natural Resources Foundation and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) for a day long assault on invasive plant species in Sauk County on May 14th.

“From what we can tell, this is going to be the single largest one-day volunteer event to combat invasive species in Wisconsin history,” noted Kelly Kearns, Plant Conservation Manager for the DNR. “Invasive species don’t just threaten the beauty of Wisconsin’s lands and waters, they also cost us millions of dollars each year,” she continued. Responding to that threat, Governor Jim Doyle has declared June to be Invasive Species Awareness Month in Wisconsin and Kearns is excited to use the AmeriCorps service day as the “kick-off” event.

Kearns mentors Brendon Panke, a key organizer of the service day and one of the first members of the Natural Resources Foundation’s new AmeriCorps program - the Wisconsin Natural Heritage Corps. The Foundation’s program places AmeriCorps members in non-profit and government agencies that focus on protecting the state’s natural resources. The year-old program is the first of its kind in Wisconsin. Currently, the Foundation has sixteen Natural Heritage Corps members working throughout the state.

Panke enjoys working on invasive species issues with the DNR, but notes some challenges. “We can’t just control the problem,” he noted. “We have to prevent new species from entering the state and make sure that folks are educated about both the threats and the solutions,” Panke concluded. Participants in the service day will learn to identify, control and prevent several invasive plant species in Wisconsin, including garlic mustard, buckthorn, and honey suckle.

AmeriCorps members will be working on public land sites in Sauk County, including Devil’s Lake State Park, Parfrey’s Glen State Natural Area, the former Badger Ammunition Plant, and fifteen other sites. In most cases, removal of invasive species will require physical labor. Plants will be pulled, bagged and removed to prevent any seeds from escaping to return next year.

This is the first year that AmeriCorps has focused its day service on the environment. “We were thrilled when the Natural Resources Foundation suggested a conservation theme for this year’s service project,” noted Tom Devine, executive director of Serve Wisconsin, the state’s AmeriCorps program. “The conservation theme has attracted a lot of interest from our members throughout the state and the turn-out may be our largest ever,” Devine concluded.

Panke and Kearns both encourage every Wisconsinite to get involved. “People who care about Wisconsin’s environment can really make a difference on this issue,” noted Kearns. “Each of us can take small steps to control and remove invasive species on our property,” she concluded. The DNR, and many non-profits, offer tips online to help prevent the spread of invasive species on Wisconsin’s lands and waters. The DNR Web site, <http://dnr.wi.gov/invasives/action.htm>, offers advice for boaters, campers, gardeners and more.

Editor’s Note: The day of service will commence at 9am on May 14th at Devil’s Lake State Park, with AmeriCorps members moving to 17 other nearby sites in Sauk County at 9:30am. DNR Secretary Matt Frank has been invited to offer opening remarks.

Reporters and photographers are welcome for any part of the day’s activities, but those planning to attend are asked to contact Jeffrey Potter at the Natural Resources Foundation (608-261-4392) for details on the work sites, parking and the full day’s schedule.

###

The Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin is a 501c-3 non-profit organization based in Madison, Wisconsin. For more than twenty years, the Foundation has worked with citizens, businesses, non-profits and the government to promote the protection and enjoyment of Wisconsin’s public lands, waters and wildlife. Learn more and donate online at www.wisconservation.org.