

ALASKA

Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry & Fire Protection



The Alaska Department of Natural Resources Division of Forestry, Alaska Community Forestry (ACF) program received a grant from the USDA Forest Service in 2019 to remove the invasive tree species *Prunus padus*, commonly known as European bird cherry (EBC), chokecherry or mayday trees and *Prunus virginiana*, commonly known as Canada Red or chokecherry. Introduced in Alaska as attractive ornamentals, *Prunus padus* and *Prunus virginiana* are now considered invasive trees that can affect native Alaska ecosystems, negatively impacting their resiliency by creating monocultures that are impacting fish and game. As of 2022, three rounds of grants have been awarded to organizations in Alaska. The ACF program has also used part of the grant for multimedia educational material.

Both *Prunus padus* and *Prunus virginiana* were originally introduced in Alaska as attractive ornamental trees. Since their introduction, they have gone feral in Alaska community forests, parks, greenbelts, and riparian zones, or as the Society of American Foresters described in the spring 2020 issue of *Western Forester*, they are now “rogue ornamentals.”

As invasive trees, *Prunus* has the potential to significantly affect native ecosystems in Alaska.

- It can take over the understory of forests, and form monoculture thickets displacing native trees, seedlings, shrubs, and forbs.
- Young moose have died from cyanide poisoning from eating *Prunus padus*.
- One study has indicated that due to the increasing streamside growth of *Prunus*, the insect biomass that falls into the water to provide food for juvenile salmonids has decreased.

The ACF program offered grants to help recipients identify and remove prominent stands of the two *Prunus* species from Alaska, and to train additional certified pesticide management consultants and

applicators. The efforts to remove this invasive were also a great opportunity to encourage tree planting, tree care, and community forestry in general.

Grants were issued to the Fairbanks, Palmer, Wasilla, Homer, and Anchorage Soil and Water Conservation districts, the Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition in Juneau, the Talkeetna Community Council, the Anchorage Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area, the Municipality of Anchorage Parks and Recreation Department, and the University of Alaska Anchorage.

Some of the grant monies were also used for the brochure “[This Beauty Is A Beast](#),” and a public service announcement on the Alaska Public Radio Network.

In 2021, the ACP program launched the “Remove and Replace” program using funding from the USDA Forest Service. Partnering with four local nurseries in Anchorage, ACF designed the program to award homeowners a \$100 voucher for a new tree from a partnering local nursery upon removal of their *Prunus* species. Even though there was a limited amount of funding available for this program, it attracted interest from the public and media. Stories featuring ACF

staff were aired on local television, and a story featuring a state biologist and a local citizen invasive weed warrior was featured in the Anchorage Daily News, Alaska’s largest newspaper.



Header: *Prunus padus* can produce monoculture thickets. Photo: Homer Soil & Water Conservation District. **Top:** Photo of a mature *Prunus padus*. All those white flowers produce a lot of berries! Photo: Patricia Joyner. **Bottom:** Cut stump treatment of *Prunus* with a systemic herbicide. Photo: Homer Soil & Water Conservation District