

ISN 2021 Annual Report

2021 continued to carry on some ‘firsts’ for the Northwest Michigan Invasive Species Network (ISN) as we continued *protecting, enhancing, and promoting northwest Michigan’s natural communities through terrestrial invasive plant management and outreach*. Our projects for the fiscal year (October 2020–September 2021) have been successfully completed, with work in Benzie, Grand Traverse, Leelanau, and Manistee counties. Funding through the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative administered by the US Forest Service and the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program (through the Quality-of-Life departments MDNR, EGLE, and MDARD), and the Good Neighbor Authority, a partnership between the US Forest Service and Michigan DNR, enabled ISN to accomplish a lot in spite of continuing challenges amidst a pandemic and loss of staff. Donations, cost-share funds, and providing fee-based services made even more projects possible. Thank you to those who worked with, volunteered, or cheered ISN on this last year!

THIS YEAR ISN HAS:

- Surveyed over 4470 acres of high-quality habitats for invasive species
- Treated over 600 acres of high-priority invasive species at over 200 sites
- Coordinated 5 workbees and 12 other opportunities
 - Engaged nearly 150 volunteers
- Contacted over 3,600 people and over 650,000 through our website & social medias
 - Nearly 400 people contacted ISN for the first time to have their questions answered
- Gained 10 new *Go Beyond Beauty* participants!
 - 8 utilized Achievement Levels
- 292 Japanese barberry plants properly disposed of during Japanese Barberry Trade-Up Week
- Responded to Early Detection species:
 - Black swallow-wort populations treated in Kingsley
 - Hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) discovered in Benzie county



HWA Technician, Keith Ferguson, surveying for hemlock woolly adelgid

ISN started out 2021 with hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) surveys again! For the third year in a row, Invasive Species Specialist Audrey Menninga and returning HWA Technician Keith Ferguson surveyed over 230 sites and almost 1,200 acres for HWA. This year, the first positive identification of HWA in ISN’s service area was discovered, located by ISN’s partners at Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore. In early February, HWA was confirmed by MDARD at the Platte River Campground in Benzie County on a tree at a campsite. In a display of amazing collaboration, the Michigan DNR, MDARD, West Michigan Cisma, Sleeping Bear Dunes, and ISN were able to move quickly, conducting thorough surveys within park property to establish that HWA hadn’t spread to any other areas nearby. Fortunately, all surveys concluded that only the one tree originally found had HWA! Treatments were conducted in May, and the campsite was shut down. A sub-grant with the Mason-Lake Conservation District will extend surveys into 2022 and 2023, on both private and public land. Keep an eye on our [website](#) and social media to hear about who qualifies for an HWA survey and how to request one!

As in previous years, ISN hosted garlic mustard workbees in all four counties within our service area. We were also able to continue working with regional partners and the US Forest Service to place garlic mustard dumpsters in every county in ISN’s service area for landowners to safely dispose of the invasive plant outside of workbee times. 45 volunteers helped pull more than 140 bags of garlic mustard this year. Thank you to the City of Frankfort, Lake Township (Benzie), Leelanau Conservancy, Manistee Conservation District, and Grand Traverse Conservation District for hosting those dumpsters and for the community members that joined us!

Additional workbees continued throughout the summer, partnering with the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy to focus on baby’s breath at Elberta Beach in Benzie County. This effort is now in year six and the improving health of the beach and dune is visually evident (see below).



Outreach Specialist, Emily Cook, giving a baby’s breath demonstration



ISN 2021 Annual Report

This year ISN was fortunate to be able to hire another seasonal treatment crew, thanks to the Michigan Invasive Species Grant Program (MISGP). Our two treatment technicians, Kat Arnold and Carter Payne, were an immense help in treating garlic mustard, invasive knotweeds, baby's breath, invasive bittersweet, butterbur, black swallow-wort, Himalayan blackberry, and phragmites all over Grand Traverse, Benzie, Manistee, and Leelanau Counties. Working with private landowners and partner organizations, ISN was able to conduct treatments on all our dedicated sites, plus 44 new sites. We were also able to help with some high-visibility treatments, including treating invasive knotweed along the Manistee Riverwalk (you can find an article about that [here](#)).



Treatment crew Carter Payne (left) and Kat Arnold (right) treating Japanese knotweed in August



Survey crew Zack Seguin (left) and LeighAnna Peck (right)

In a change of pace, ISN was also able to hire our first seasonal invasive species survey crew since 2017, thanks again to MISGP. Survey technicians LeighAnna Peck and Zack Seguin were kept very busy out in the field, surveying public and private lands, working with partners, community members, and various associations to survey for early detection and high priority invasive species. Together they surveyed over 4,160 acres and were able to survey 148 sites. No new state-listed watch species were found during the survey season (interested in what Michigan is on the look-out for? Look at the list [here](#)).

While taking all the necessary steps to ensure everyone remained safe during the COVID-19 pandemic, ISN was finally able to host in-person trainings, workbees, and presentations this year. Outreach Specialist Emily Cook, presented to a variety of groups, including school kids, garden professionals, country clubs, and lake associations. ISN also held our yearly events, such as herbicide training for partners, public knotweed and autumn olive treatment workshops, as well as invasive ID trainings for partners, led by Coordinator Katie Grzesiak.



ISN Coordinator, Katie Grzesiak, leading an invasive species ID training



A Go Beyond Beauty social media post comparing look-alike invasive & native species

Our Go Beyond Beauty Specialist, Shelly Stusick, spent the year growing the Go Beyond Beauty (GBB) program at home and working with an advisory committee to decide how the program should expand statewide. After joining ISN in late 2020, Shelly met with GBB partners, participants, and interested collaborators over the course of the year, with the aim of growing Go Beyond Beauty in our service area. Overall, ten new GBB Community participants were added to the program, with eight utilizing Achievement Levels, making it a busy summer with site visits! Additionally, two social media accounts were created for the program to highlight businesses specifically and educate about ornamental invasive and native species in gardens (check out GBB's [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#)).



ISN 2021 Annual Report



Invasive Species Specialist, Audrey Menninga helping with Japanese Barberry Trade-Up Days

After skipping 2020, Japanese Barberry Trade-Up Days returned in June and were a success, with nearly 300 plants properly disposed of and over 130 \$5 coupons were distributed for a non-invasive alternative from the 6 participating *GBB* businesses. A big thank-you them and to the Manistee Conservation District for being our second Trade-up site this year!

This winter, *Go Beyond Beauty* will soft launch state-wide, starting with trial Hubs, or organizations posing as an area's center for *GBB*. We are excited to partner with Friends of the St. Clair River to iron out some wrinkles before fully offering the program to everyone who is interested statewide. To learn more about *GBB* or keep up with the program's growth, visit our website or contact Shelly Stusick directly.



Best of luck to Outreach Specialist, Emily Cook (left), Coordinator Katie Grzesiak (middle), and Habitat Management Specialist Fields Ratliff (right) in their new endeavors!

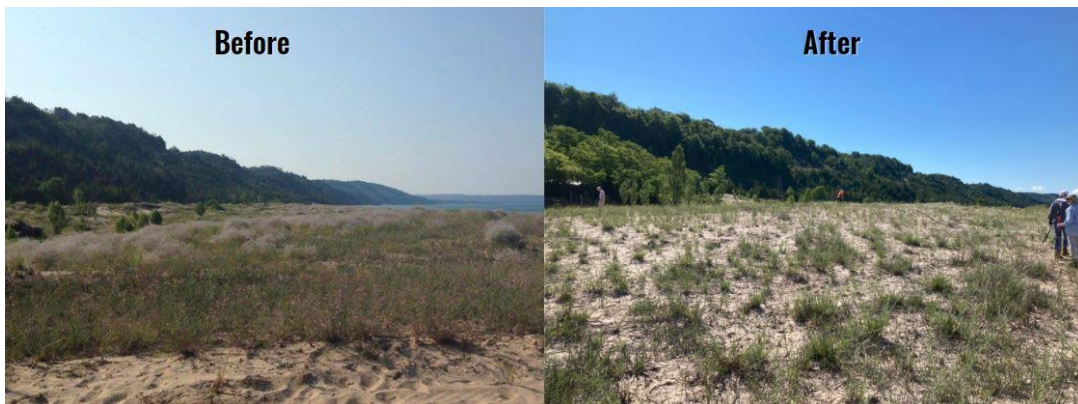
As many of you may be aware, 2021 was a year of big change for ISN. In summer, our inspiring Coordinator, Katie Grzesiak, left ISN. In the fall, both Outreach Specialist, Emily Cook, and Habitat Management Specialist, Fields Ratliff also left to move onto new opportunities. All three were fantastic long-time ISN employees and we miss them all greatly—please join us in wishing them luck on their next adventures! In a shining silver lining, Invasive Species Specialist Audrey Menninga has transitioned into the role of ISN Coordinator this December. ISN will be looking to hire new employees in early 2022 to fill in the gaps. We thank everyone for their patience while we go through this transition and hiring process as we try to respond to incoming inquiries and requests.

SINCE 2013, ISN HAS:

- Contacted **22,809** people directly through outreach
- Worked with **739** volunteers
- Surveyed **34,423.5** acres
- Treated **11,536.5** acres
- Restored **72** acres with native plants
- Worked with **11** nurseries, **20** landscapers/designers, and **38** other participants as a part of *Go Beyond Beauty*

Remaining ISN staff and partners are already looking forward to the next round of surveys, presentations, treatments, and events for 2022!

If you have any questions or want to get involved, visit www.HabitatMatters.org, or contact Audrey Menninga, amenniga@gtcd.org or (231) 299-0786, or Shelly Stusick, sstusick@gtcd.org or (231) 299-0805.



Before & After: Once densely covered in baby's breath, native dune grass, threatened Pitcher's thistle, and other natives have been filling in at Elberta Beach after 5 years of efforts.