

Boots on the ground: FIELD joins the war against Yellow Star Thistle



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CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The Farmworker Institute of Education and Leadership Development (FIELD) recently joined forces with the Tehachapi Cummings County Water District and the Tehachapi Resource Conservation District to identify and map the invasive Yellow Starthistle in the Tehachapi Valley area. Yellow Starthistle is one of the most widespread invasive broadleaf weeds on rangeland and natural areas in the U.S.

Braving the cold and wind on a blustery and overcast October day, ten youth enrolled in FIELD's high school charter

school for students 18-25 conducted a biological survey of the Antelope Run Bicycle Path and the Brite Lake Recreation Area for Yellow Starthistle late blooms and skeletal remains. The students were clad in chaps to protect against the spiny yellow flower heads.

The actual mapping occurred between Oct. 23 and Oct. 26. Using the free smartphone application Calflora Observer to locate the exact GPS coordinates of the YST infestation, FIELD corps members identified how substantial the infestation was in each identified parcel, whether single plants, scattered plants or large and thick groupings. Notes were included about the infestation as well as a picture of the infested area. Corps members learned how to utilize applied mathematics to approximate the square footage of infested areas, bridging the gap from theoretical math in the classroom to practical on-the-job skills.

The water district lent its expertise about the pesky weed to help plan future eradication. The importance of the mapping process was emphasized by Joseph Sasias, Pipeline Maintenance/Safety Coordinator for the district.

"The chemical (herbicide) used to kill the plant, Transline®, is expensive. Having boots on the ground to map the locations of the [Yellow] Starthistle is critical to

applying the right amount in the right places," he said.

Though the mapping project of Yellow Starthistle is complete in Antelope Run and Brite Lake, it is only the first step towards control and eradication of the weed due to its prodigious ability to multiply and persist. Individual plants can produce more than 100,000 seeds. Unchecked, Yellow Starthistle will quickly overrun desirable native forage plants, depriving both domestic livestock and natural grazers such as deer, of nutritious feed. Yellow Starthistle is also a deadly neurotoxin to equine species. If proper

maintenance is kept up, however, this work and partnership between the partner agencies will benefit the whole community.

Julia Barraclough, associate director of Tehachapi Resource Conservation District, praised the corps members and the partnership between agencies.

"We look forward to continuing this partnership in our ongoing effort to eradicate Yellow Starthistle," she said.

To learn more about FIELD and its Service and Conservation Corps (KSACC) please visit FIELD's website at www.farmworkerinstitute.org.



PHOTOS BY CM TENA, FIELD DEVELOPMENT SPECIALIST

Boots on the Ground: FIELD students BreeAna Simmons (left) and Carmin Patino (right) pace out the approximate square footage of Yellow Starthistle along the Antelope Run Bicycle Path.



Technology meets Math: FIELD students, Troy Gilley (left) and Shanice Galo (right), use a smartphone to find the GPS coordinates for a patch of Yellow Starthistle and calculate its square footage.

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