



Leadership in Botany Recognized on the Wayne NF

Cheryl Coon's and Chad Kirschbaum's strong natural resource leadership has resulted in the Wayne National Forest being recognized as having one of the strongest Botany Programs in the Eastern Region.



Chad Kirschbaum and Cheryl Coon receiving their awards at the Regional Honor Award Ceremony.

Wayne National Forest botanist Cheryl Coon and Ironton District botanist Chad Kirschbaum were recently awarded an Eastern Region Honor Award for Natural Resources Leadership in recognition of their work in establishing a strong partner-based botany and non-native invasive species program.

"The Wayne has been very fortunate to have the leadership of two such instrumental managers in our botany program," said Becky Ewing, Forest Biologist. "They have made an incredible difference in the last few years and we are very pleased that they were recognized for all the extraordinary work that they have done."

Ewing notes that their efforts over the past couple years have led to such accomplishments as the completion of an environmental assessment for control of non-native invasive species. The selected alternative allows for rapid response to newly discovered NNIS infestations, which eliminates the need for full-blown site-specific analysis for each treatment. This is significant in that it reduces the expenditure of funds for analysis and makes them available for knocking out NNIS before they can establish themselves into large areas of the Forest.

Kirschbaum led an effort to establish the Iron Furnace Cooperative Weed Management Area (CWMA) in 2006 and organized a steering committee of partner agencies, organizations and landowners in 2007. The CWMA encompasses all of the Ironton Unit and will enable partners to work together to more efficiently control the spread of NNIS, on both federal and non-federal lands. Coon initiated meetings with interested people in 2007 with the intent on establishing a second CWMA that would improve NNIS control efforts in the vicinity of the Athens and Marietta Units in 2008.

Both have initiated efforts to replace non-native landscaping at the Wayne's administrative offices with native plants and shrubs. They are actively working to further

efforts to establish native plant and seed sources for use on the Wayne. In addition to annual seed and plant collecting efforts, Coon has developed and maintained an important partnership with the Rural Action Appalachian Resource Center, a local organization that promotes economic and environmental sustainability in Appalachian Ohio. Rural Action and the Wayne hosted several "Plant Saves" - the goal was to rescue as many native woodland plants from the future U.S. Highway 33 Bypass corridor prior to construction. These plants are planted at the Wayne's Supervisor's Office and will then be replanted along the Bypass after construction to give the landscape a more natural appearance, and to reduce the spread of non-native species.

Ewing notes that both Kirschbaum and Coon have developed relationships with Forest Service and university researchers to help address native and non-native plant issues on the Wayne. Both have assisted researchers with grant applications to study botanical resources on the Wayne and continue to establish relationships with botanical experts throughout the region, such as the Ohio Moss and Lichen Association. Working with Coon and Kirschbaum, these expert lichenologists and bryologist recently discovered a biodiversity hot spot on the Forest that is being recommended for Special Area status.

As with all good leaders, Coon and Kirschbaum do their share of mentoring. Each year they each have several students enrolled in the Wayne's Student Temporary Employment Program. They provide the students with opportunities to experience all facets of working for the Forest Service. In 2007, they had 18 high school and college students working on such projects as NNIS control, native seed collection, monitoring of Research Natural Areas and Regional Forester Sensitive Species populations, biological data collection in areas where future landscape restoration projects will occur, and development of native plant and pollinator gardens.

Both are involved in several botany-related organizations outside the Forest Service, such as the Ohio Invasive Plant Council (OIPC). Coon serves on the management subcommittee and Kirschbaum is co-chair of the research subcommittee that organized the 2007 Ohio Invasive Plant Research conference. Both were involved with organizing and leading OIPC invasive plant workshops for landowners and interested citizens in southern and central Ohio in 2007. Kirschbaum is also a leader in the West Virginia Native Plant Society (WVNPS) and leads plant hikes in southern Ohio, northern Kentucky and West Virginia. Recently, he organized a winter lecture series on botanical topics for the WVNPS. Coon is an active member of the Athens Forest Stewardship Group that involves community members in NNIS control, and a member of the Natural Resources task force for the Athens County Regional Planning team. Outside of work, she has completed the Master Gardner program, which has led to more and stronger relationships with other community members who are interested in native plant propagation and conservation.

"As a team, Cheryl Coon and Chad Kirschbaum have made significant strides in the development of the Wayne National Forest's Native Plant Program over the past two years," said Ewing. "Cheryl and Chad provide strong botanical leadership and knowledge to other agencies, foster partnerships with local communities and organizations, mobilize local volunteers as stewards of the Forest, and provide career building opportunities for aspiring botanists. They are inspirational leaders who have made a difference in the management of natural resources on the Wayne!"

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