

## **Service Learning Project through the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey and the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge**

Through a grant-funded program called Ordinary Lives of Engagement at Richard Stockton College, 12 freshman students selected to perform community service at the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge.

Refuge staff decided that the students' services would be helpful in the control of invasive plants. Students are allowed flexible work schedules so that the control work doesn't interfere with classes. The program requires each student to work 20 hours and maintain an online "blog" of their experiences.

Each student was interviewed by refuge staff, and the necessary paperwork was completed (Volunteer Service Agreement and required Stockton College paperwork). Thereafter, refuge staff offered two training sessions (one Saturday and one weekday afternoon) where the students were given an explanation of the project, the importance of it, and were taken to the area in which they will be working. Each student also received written instructions and photos of the plants for easy recognition. Students were given a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Volunteer t-shirt and work gloves (to prevent skin irritation), and shown where other equipment is stored. Their work will be monitored and photographed by refuge staff.

The primary invasive plant that is being pulled is Chinese bush clover, an aggressive plant that dominates and out-competes native vegetation. By removing this unwanted plant, vegetative diversity will improve which will in turn be beneficial to wildlife and the surrounding habitat. Chinese bush clover is just one of many invasive plants that inhibit the refuge lands. Invasive plant control is an important habitat management action that more National Wildlife Refuges are embracing.

The refuge hopes to have future students participate in other aspects of invasive plant management such as mapping plant locations with GPS units.

