# May Day, May Day…

## European Bird Cherry on the Move

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# Prunus

1. Identification and Invasiveness
2. Prunus is more than an urban pest
3. What can you do?

# Prunus

May Day tree, hackberry, hagberry, chokecherry, European bird cherry…

*Prunus padus* - European bird cherry

*Prunus virginiana* - chokecherry

# Identification

**Tree up to 35’ tall**, smooth gray to brown bark

Photo Credit: Lauren Holmes/ADN

Photo Credit: KWF

# ID

**Cluster of white flowers**

Photo Credit: Kallerna

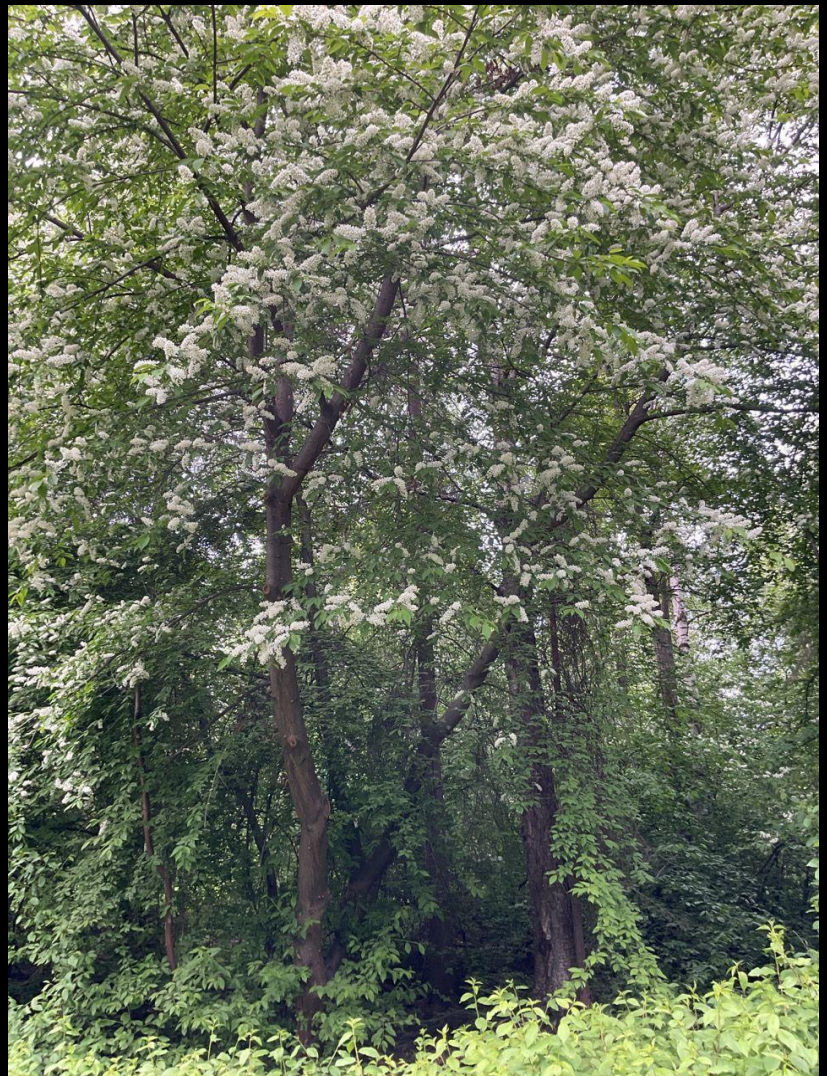
# ID

**Alternate leaves**

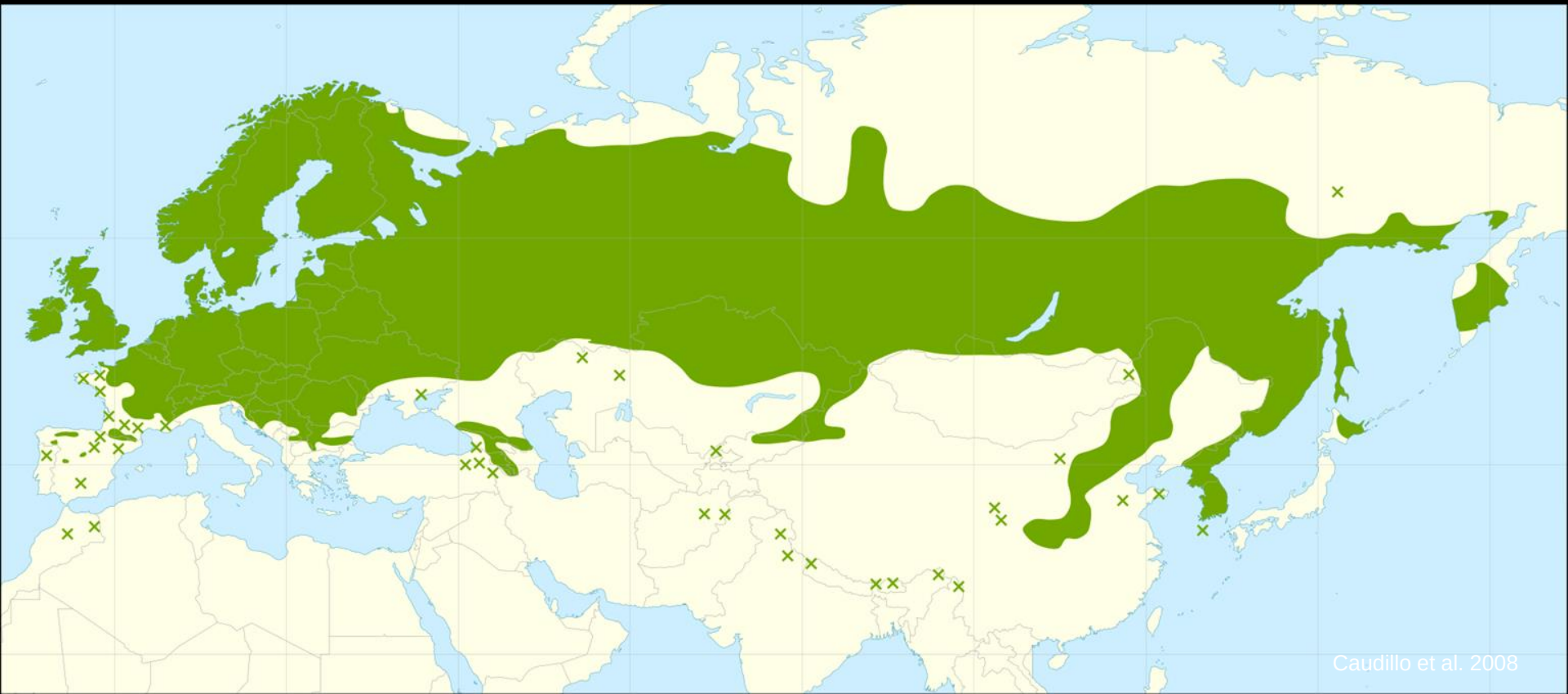
**Two small glands at the base of the leaf**

# ID

**Cluster of small black cherries**



# Origin



Caudillo et al. 2008

# Why does Prunus spread quickly?

- Browsing, pruning and cutting encourages growth, including suckers
- High seed production
- High germination success (85% in controlled setting)
- Birds transport seeds

Seed viability in the seed bank likely 5 years +/-

# The ‘So What?’

- Aggressively invades riparian habitat and natural forest

- Toxicity: cyanide found in various plant parts

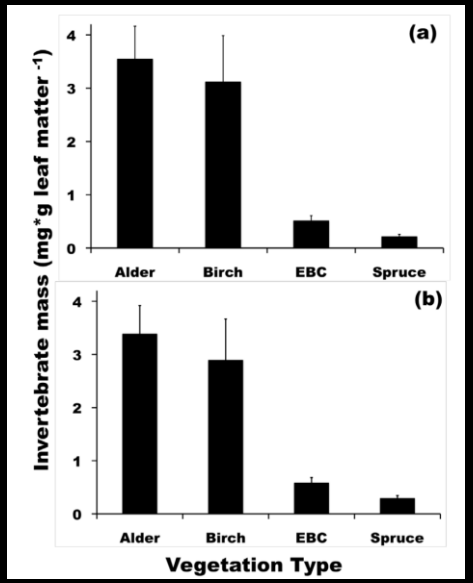
Cyanide-poisoned Moose
Ornamental Chokecherry Tree a Devil in Disguise

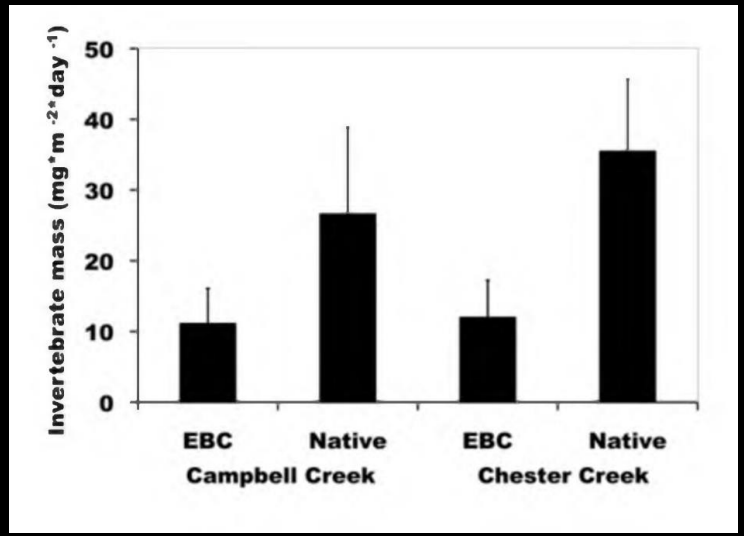
By Riley Woodford and Cathie Harms

One of the victims of chokecherry poisoning.

# The ‘So What?’

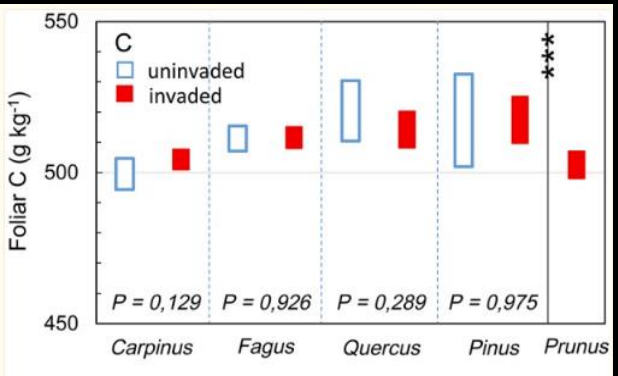
- *Prunus* can create dense thickets = change in plant community
  - Impacts are complex
    - Roon (2011) found lower presence of terrestrial invertebrates on *Prunus*

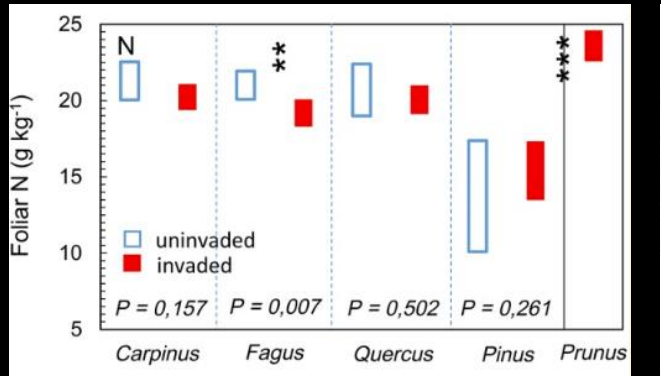


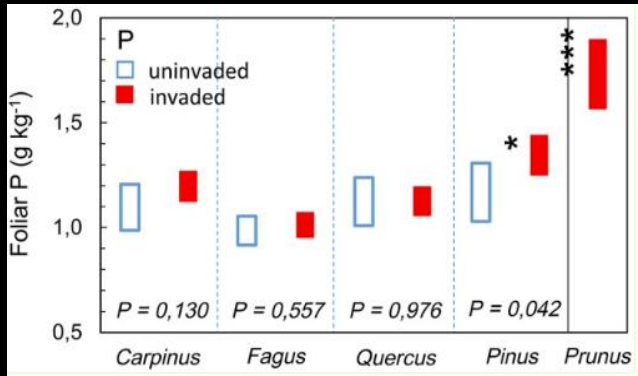



# The ‘So What?’

- *Prunus* can create dense thickets = change in plant community
  - Impacts are complex
    - Aerts et al. (2017) found that the presence of invasive *Prunus* decreased the foliar nutrient contents of co-occurring native trees species



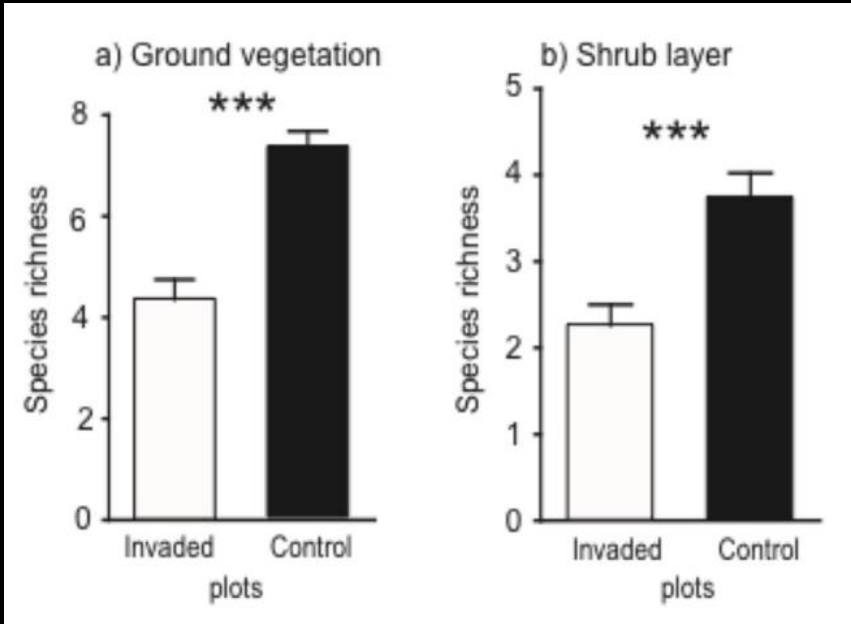



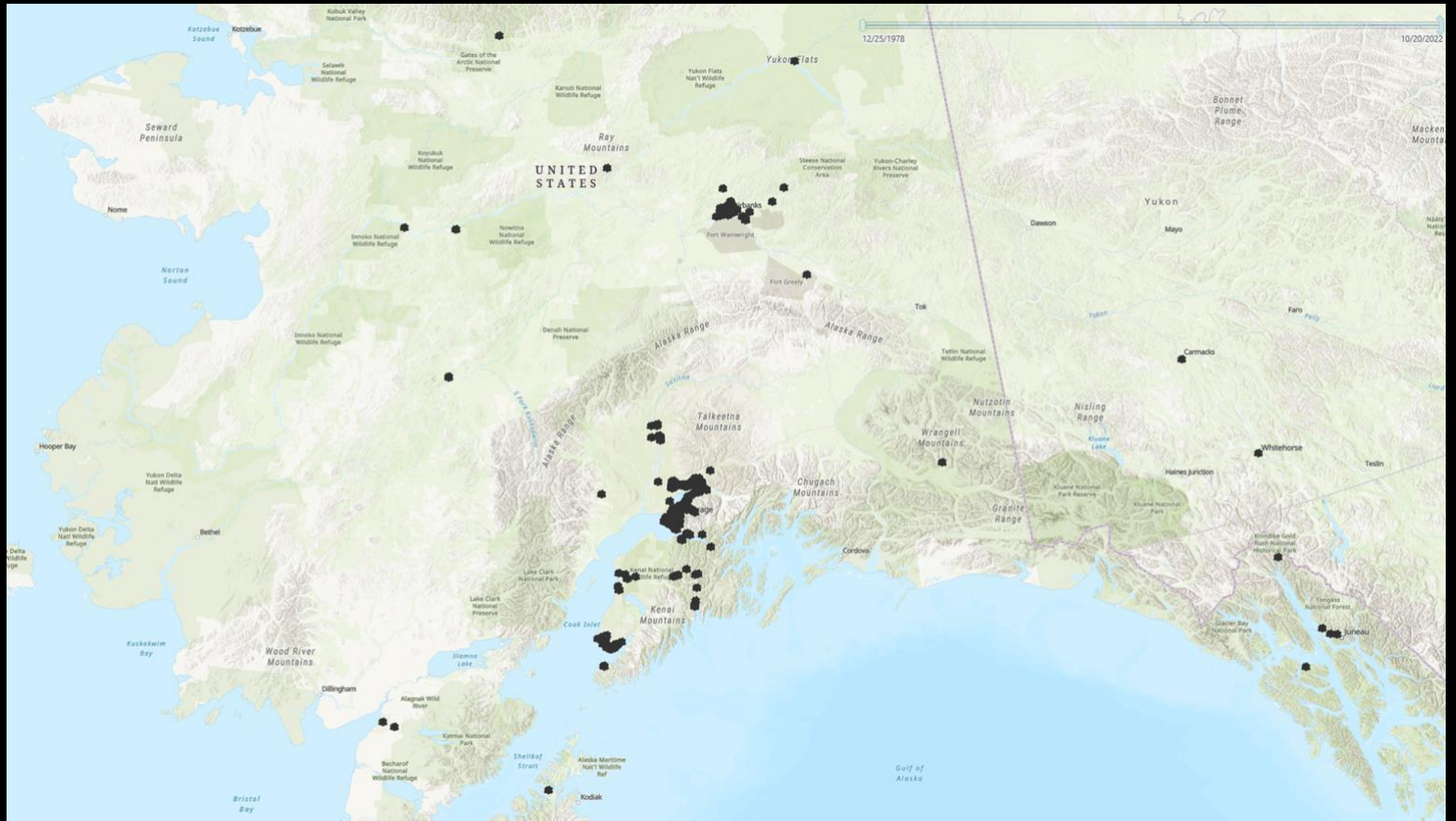
# The ‘So What?’

- *Prunus* can create dense thickets = change in plant community
  - Impacts are complex
    - Rusterholtz et al. (2018) found that the number of species decreased with Prunus present and that soil carbon was being moved through the ecosystem more rapidly,

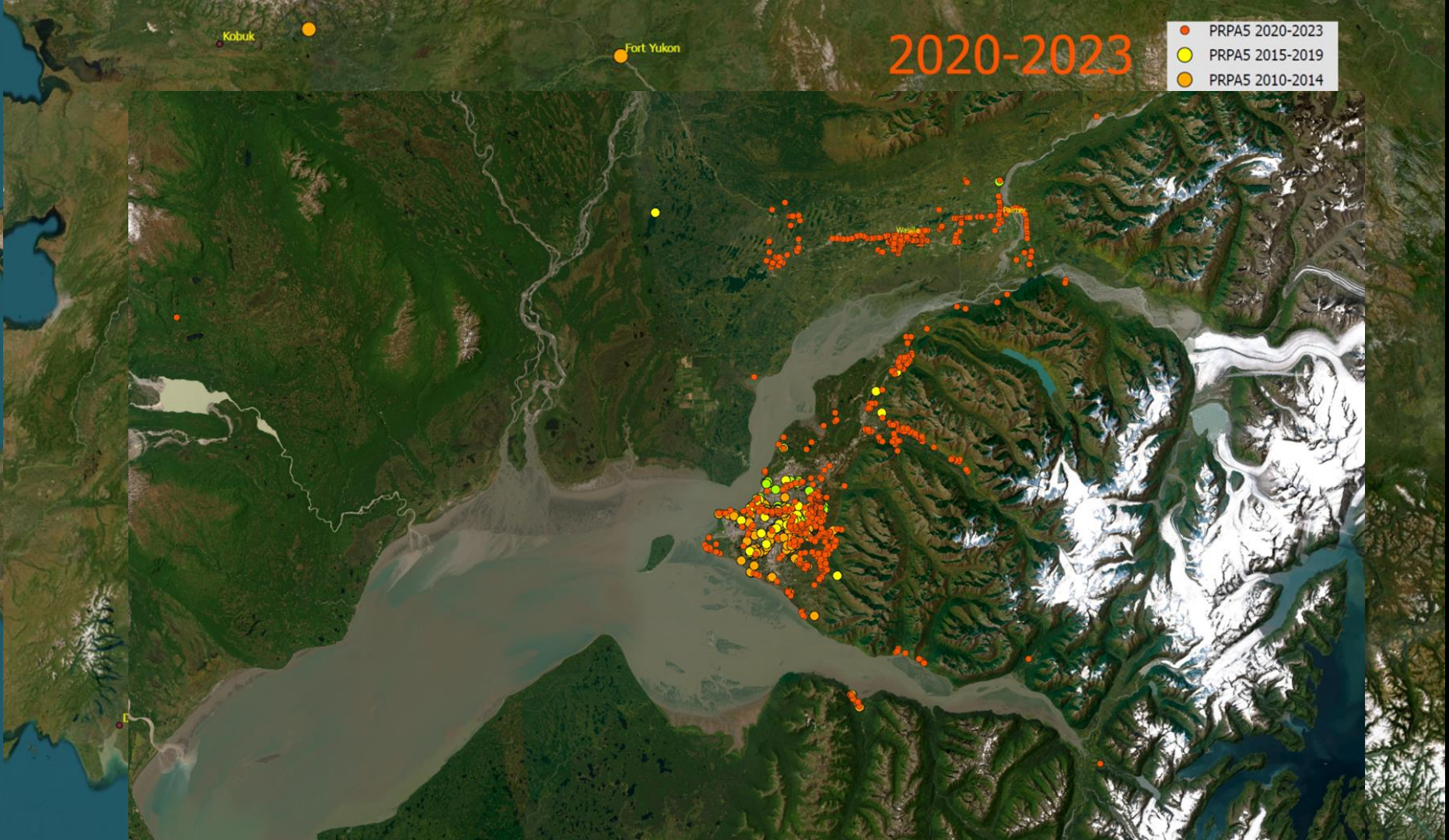
A loss of biodiversity decreases ecosystem resilience



# Where have you seen this tree?



# Trends over time


Kobuk
Fort Yukon
2020-2023
PRPA5 2020-2023
PRPA5 2015-2019
PRPA5 2010-2014
Palmer
Wasilla

# Anch CISMA

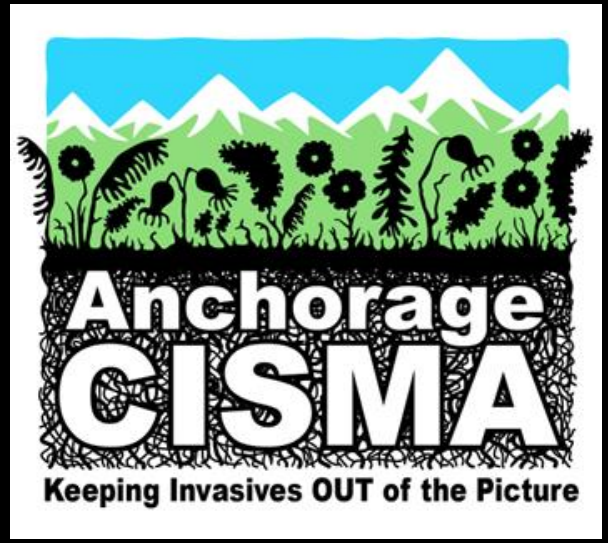
**C**ooperative

**I**nvasive

**S**pecies

**M**anagement

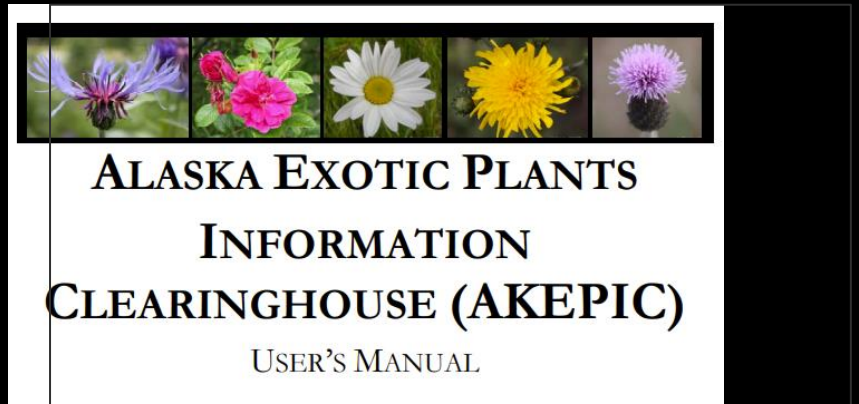
**A**rea



# Survey methods

- **Palmer SWCD**: surveyed roads, stopping every 0.25 miles to record invasive plants

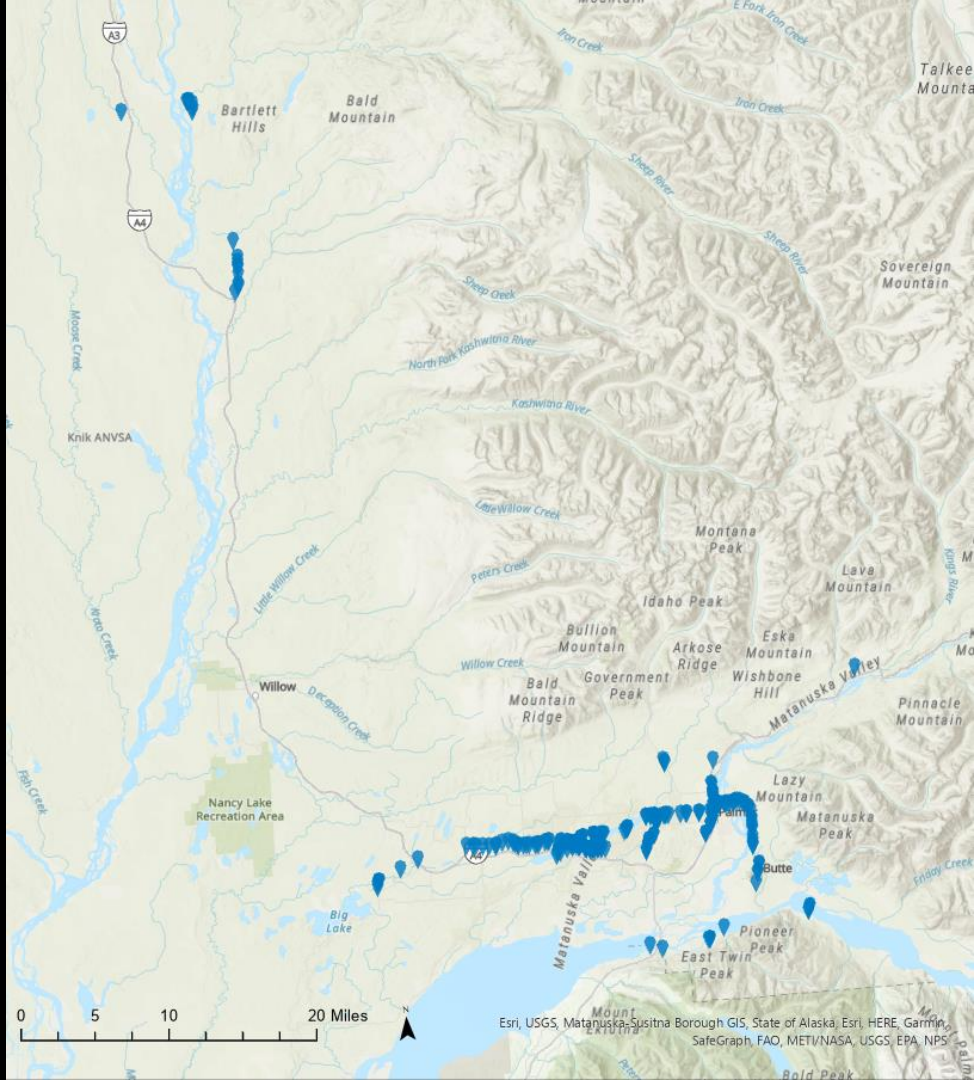
- **Anchorage SWCD**:
  - Citizen science, systematic surveys of creeksides



# Results

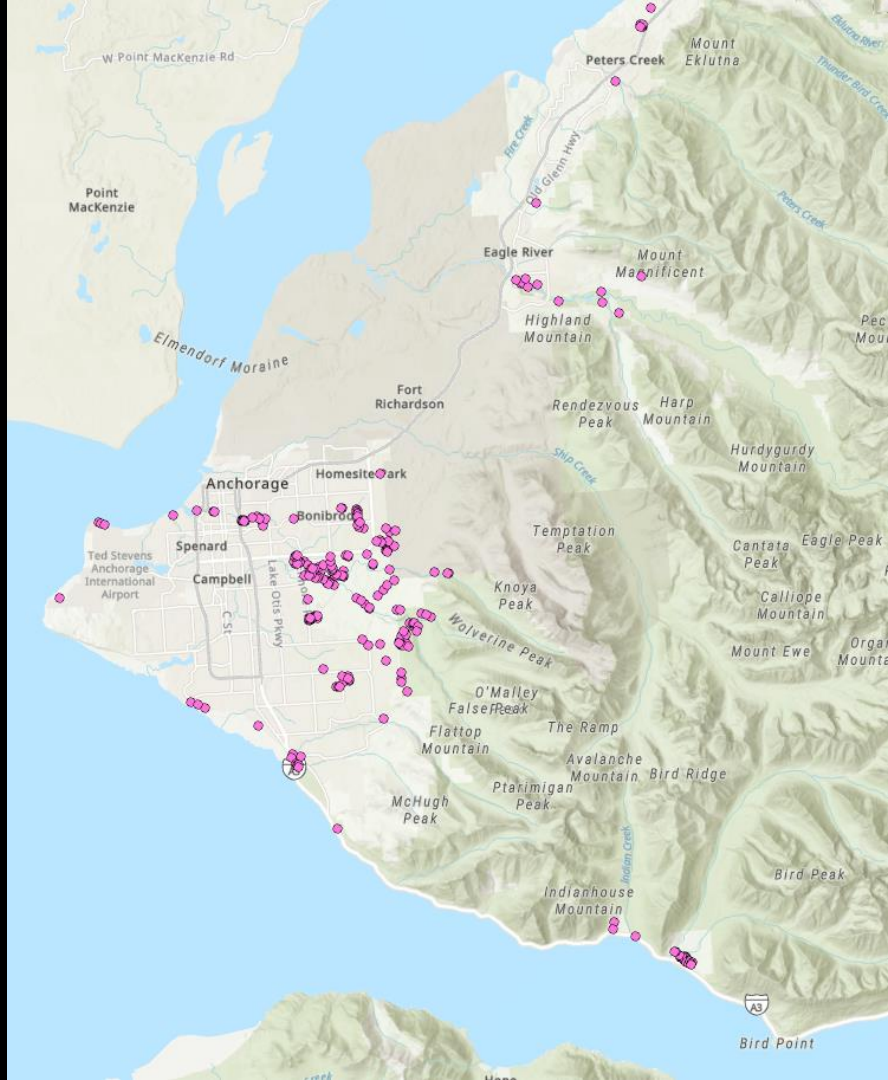
**Palmer**

219 documented locations



# Results

- Anchorage -
  - 45 new locations within Chugach State Park
  - Many urban locations



# Control Work Anchorage CISMA

Pursue all angles at once -

- treatments of mother trees in parks
- removal of trees on creeksides
- outreach to landowners

Feral *Prunus* is present along majority of creeks in Anchorage, lots of potential habitat exists in the Mat Su Valley

# Control work Kenai Peninsula CISMA

Removal of Prunus… in Homer, Soldotna, and Coopers Landing

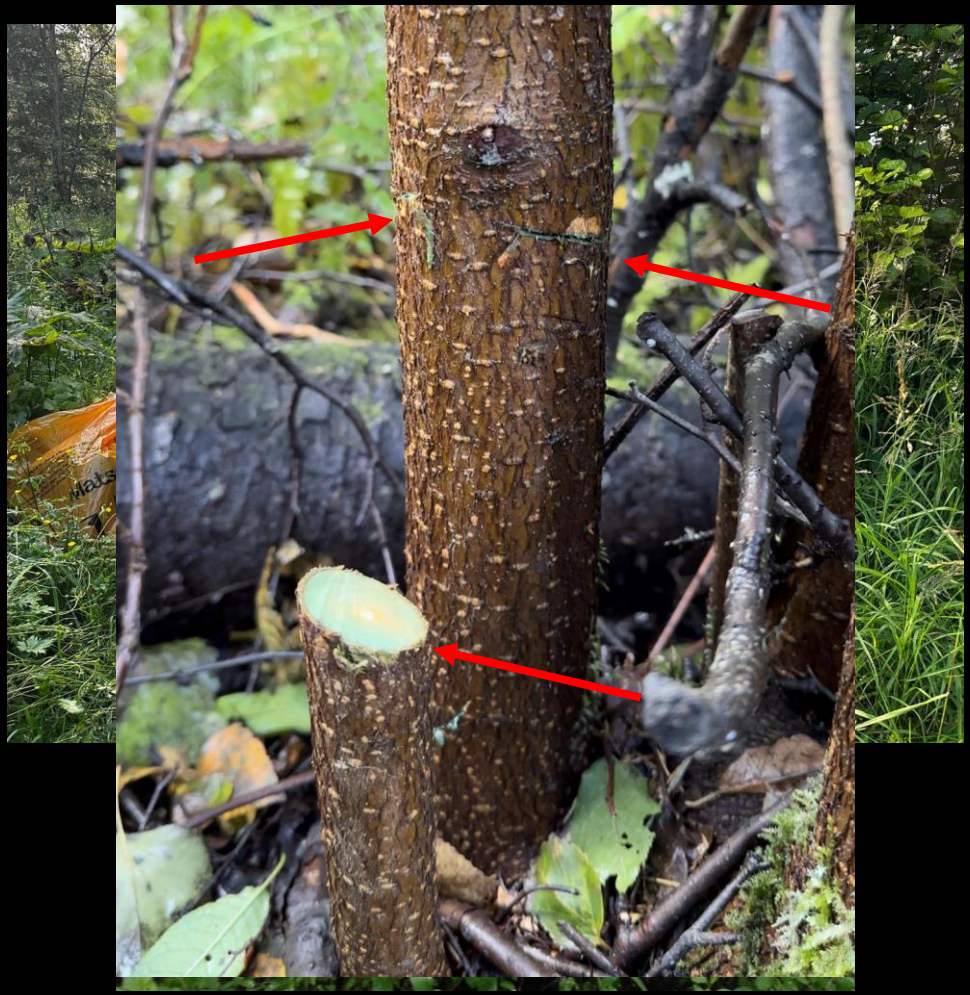
- Focusing on “Mother Trees”
- Pulling saplings

# Control

Mechanical - can be effective, can require much effort and follow up over time

Chemical (Herbicide)

- Frill
- Cut stump
- Injection
- Foliar



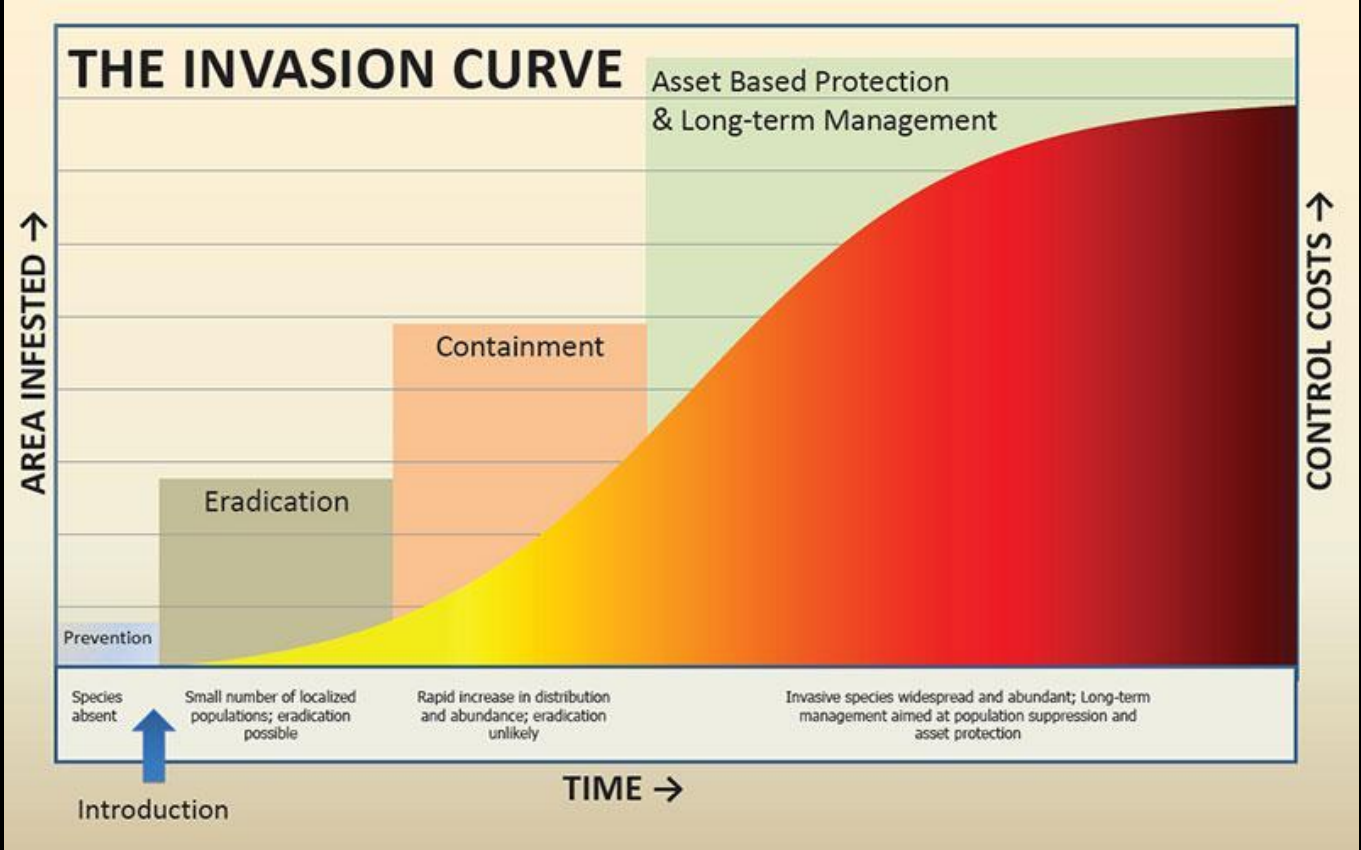
# Pull, bag and revisit…

If less than 3” diameter…

- Pull trees
- Around 5 years until fruit
- Get as much root as possible

Revisit! Trees will resprout

# What Can You Do?



# You Can REPORT!

AK Invasives ID app

IPM – Public Submission Form – AkPestreporter (mybluehost.me)

EDDmapS

Alaska Invasive Species Partnership

# Action…

- Include Prunus removal in riparian restoration projects
- Spread the word to landowners to remove *Prunus*

While Hiking, Hunting, Fishing -

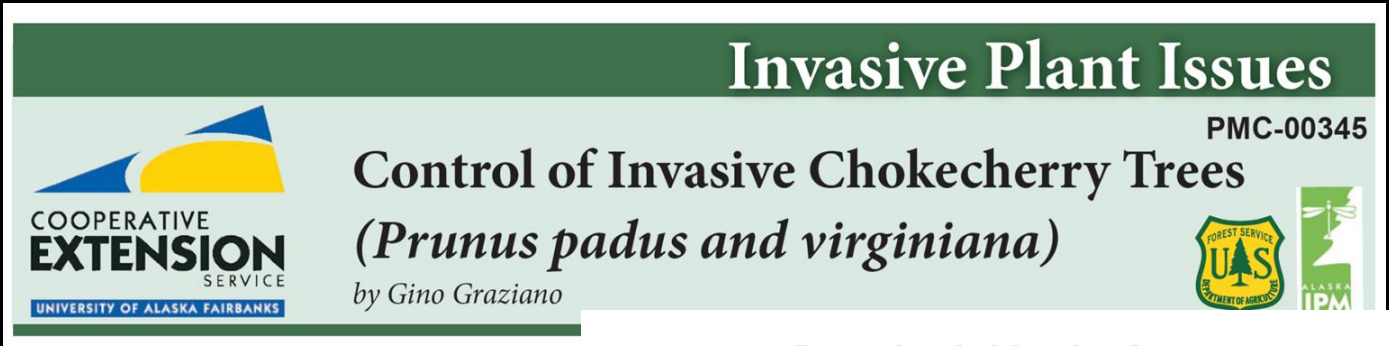
**Report rogue trees!**

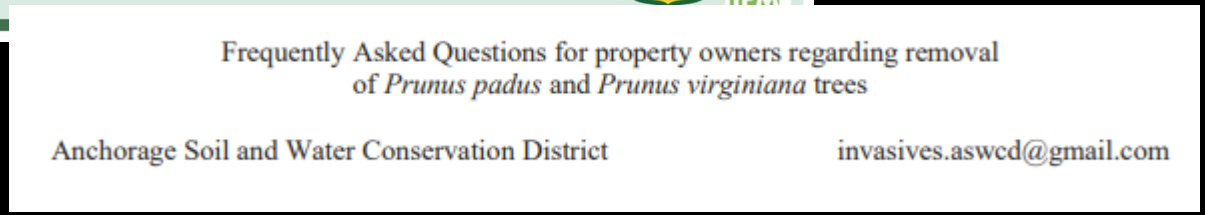
*Prunus virginiana* found 10 miles from boat launch on Little Su

# Resources

Control of Invasive Chokecherry Trees - Cooperative Extension Service
https://cespubs.uaf.edu/index.php/download_file/1544/

Chokecherry FAQ's http://anchorageswcd.org/Chokecherry%20FAQ.pdf



# Thank you!

TREE REPLACEMENT IN PROGRESS
To protect the health of our native ecosystems and ensure our public spaces remain enjoyable for all, we're replacing invasive European bird cherry (a.k.a. mayday) trees with non-invasive trees.
Together we can keep Homer free from harmful invasive species!
Scan to learn more about European bird cherry trees and what you can do about them
kenaiinvasives.org
plants.alaska.gov/invasives/europeanbirdcherry
WHY ARE EUROPEAN BIRD CHERRY TREES A PROBLEM?
Take over forest and streamside habitats, forming thickets where native plants once grew
Can be toxic to moose
Spread along salmon streams and alter the availability of prey for juvenile salmon
Homer Soil & Water Conservation District
Invasive Species Management Area