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Department of
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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

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Grants available to help eradicate chokecherry trees in Alaska

Trees may be pretty and smell nice but they pose a threat to ecosystems

(Anchorage, AK) – Once considered desirable landscape trees, chokecherry trees across Alaska are now the target of widespread control efforts aimed at reducing the impact of these prolific flowering trees because of the threat they pose to moose, salmon and native plant species.

The USDA Forest Service and the Alaska Division of Forestry are teaming up to offer grants to local governments and non-profit organizations to remove two types of invasive chokecherry trees from Alaska.

Both *Prunus padus*, commonly known as European bird cherry, chokecherry, or mayday trees, and *Prunus virginiana*, commonly known as Canada red, or chokecherry, were originally introduced in Alaska as attractive ornamental trees. Since their introduction the harmful nature of these trees has become apparent, and both species have the potential to significantly affect native ecosystems in Alaska.

“While chokecherry trees are a springtime favorite of many Alaskans for their beautiful and aromatic blossoms, they are becoming what some ecologists call ‘rogue ornamentals,’ “said Jim Renkert, manager of the Division’s Community Forestry Program. “The pretty tree in our yards has gone feral in Alaska greenbelts and parks. In many areas it is aggressively outcompeting our native species and changing the habitat.”

Now rapidly invading riparian and natural forest areas in Fairbanks, the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, the Municipality of Anchorage, the Kenai Peninsula Borough, and Juneau, *Prunus padus* is especially aggressive and poses several different hazards:

- *Prunus padus* can take over the understory of forests, and form thickets where native plants once grew.
- There are documented cases of moose dying of cyanide poisoning from consuming *Prunus padus*.

- Future salmon populations may be smaller due to increasing streamside growth of *Prunus padus*, which produces less of the insect biomass that falls into water to provide food for juvenile salmon.

The grants are offered to help recipients identify and remove prominent stands of these two *Prunus* species from Alaska, and to train additional certified pesticide management consultants and applicators.

Approximately \$100,000 is available in grants of up to \$25,000 each. Grants will be awarded to applicants with knowledge and commitment to removing *Prunus* species from their communities. The application deadline is March 11, 2022.

Additional information is available in the request for proposals and grant application form at <http://forestry.alaska.gov/community/grants>

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Originally introduced in Alaska as attractive ornamental trees, Prunus padus (AKA European bird cherry, chokecherry, or mayday trees), and Prunus virginiana (AKA Canadian red, or chokecherry), have gone feral in our greenbelts and parks and are outcompeting native species.