

Craftsbury Conservation Commission Japanese Knotweed Control Project

2025 Newsletter

In 2017 the Craftsbury Conservation Commission began a Japanese Knotweed (JK) demonstration project in order to show landowners various ways to eradicate or at least control this non-native invasive plant.



Knee-deep gully

Sterling College students helped cut the JK forest growing along TH 19. This student is knee-deep in a gully which the JK roots couldn't stop.

The site for the project, across from the Little Hosmer fishing access in Mill Village, is owned by the Dept. of Environmental Conservation under the administration of the VT Department of Fish and Wildlife. We chose it because of its roadside visibility at a well-traveled intersection. In 2018, a licensed herbicide applicator demonstrated injecting large stems of JK with glyphosate, but this method was costly, time consuming, didn't control as completely as expected, and there are always apprehensions on using herbicide. So we abandoned this method. Other methods shown were pulling, cutting, mowing, and smothering. We demonstrated how to dry stalks with and without roots.



After cutting JK, erosion shows

In 2024 the Craftsbury Conservation Commission received a Watershed Grant from Vermont Fish & Wildlife to start a new experiment using erosion fabric, plantings and fascines to stop erosion flowing from the gravel road into the Little Hosmer Pond outlet stream.



Native plants in slits in the fabric

The Conservation Commission, with volunteer help (more than 999 hours of it in both 2024 and 2025) from Craftsbury residents, Sterling College students, and Craftsbury Outdoor Center athletes, dug up a large eroding area of JK adjacent to TH19 and covered the area with the erosion fabric to smother the JK roots. We also anchored fabric over the steep slope which had eroded in the previous summer's flooding. In May of 2025, we planted more than 200 Vermont native bare root shrubs in slits in the fabric along TH19. The plants were chosen for their ability to thrive under dry, sunny conditions; to grow a thick root cover from their rhizomes to hold soil in place and outcompete knotweed; and to attract pollinators, birds, and other wildlife. Will the fabric and the plants control erosion from the road, smother the JK, and help crowd it out?



Staking fascines into the stream bank

For more erosion control, Sterling College students and their instructor staked fascines (willow bundles which grow rapidly) into the stream bank.

This fall of 2025, we planted native grass seed with asters to control erosion at the road shoulder.

You may ask why a large impenetrable forest of JK lets erosion happen--it seems as if it would prevent erosion and at first that was expected. But it doesn't. It doesn't have a tangle of fine roots as many native plants do, so soil moves easily between the widely spaced roots. JK roots are also brittle and break off into the moving soil to be carried into the stream, float down, and take root in a new spot. You probably have seen streams and rivers in Vermont edged thickly with JK for long stretches.

When JK covers large areas and crowds out our native plants, we lose wildlife including pollinators. Birds don't nest in it and it doesn't produce berries for wildlife food. Bees use it only when it's in bloom. But they need an assortment of flowering, nectar bearing plants all spring and summer, not just one spread of all the same blossoms in late summer only.

Both Hyde Park and Waitsfield/Warren/Fayston (WWF) are proving that mechanical control of JK is working. I visited WWF last summer and was amazed at how much they have accomplished in clearing large areas of JK. Hyde Park says “repeat cutting of [JK] absolutely works to deplete the plant’s energy. You have to be realistic about the work required: it takes time and persistence over many years.” So true. Our job in 2026 will be to keep pulling as we know knotweed doesn’t give up easily. But each pull weakens it and eventually it *will* give up.

Here's a quick calendar of our work in 2025:

4/7 Sterling College students dug JK on the stream bank and installed willow fascines

4/30 we picked up native shrubs at Intervale nursery in Burlington

5/1, 2, 3, 5 volunteers planted the shrubs which are nearly all doing well.

5/2 Sterling College dug JK and planted native shrubs

Five days in the summer there was more Sterling College and Craftsbury Outdoor Center help

Every Thursday, which was our scheduled work day, and a few other times besides, one and sometimes even three Sterling College interns helped out

The Craftsbury Conservation Commission sends a big thank you to everyone who helped with this important project.

Elinor Osborn-- for the Craftsbury Conservation Commission