



Published: August 11, 2009 11:50 pm

Experts seek ways to tame invasive plants

BY KELLY URBAN

The Tribune-Democrat

Invasive plants are rapidly spreading across the state and causing major problems for natural ecosystems to the point that some are changing landscapes and overtaking native species.

To better address ways of controlling and managing invasive plants, the biannual Mid-Atlantic Invasive Plant Conference being held at Pitt-Johns-town offers participants the opportunity to hear the latest findings and research on the problem.

During the two-day conference, local and national experts are covering a wide array of topics such as invasive plant management, how to prevent invasions, predicting and identifying areas vulnerable to invasion, how to distinguish between native plants and invaders, the impact of deer on ecosystems and the impacts of climate change.

U.S. Rep. John Murtha, D-Johns-town, presented the introduction to the conference Tuesday.

Murtha said that when he was a kid, people didn't think too much about the environment and the impact it has on everyone's lives.

"Now we have to push to get things done, and we have to work to have a clean environment," he said.

He added that groups participating in the conference are making a real difference in combating the problem of invasive pests.

"What you do is not only a benefit to this area, but to the whole country," Murtha said.

The conference attracts people from six mid-Atlantic states – Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, West Virginia, Virginia and Maryland, said Kristin Sewalk, a board member of the Mid-Atlantic Exotic Pest Plant Council and director of National Biodiversity of Johnstown.

"The goal is to find ways to prevent invasive plants from destroying our natural heritage," she said. "There is still much we don't understand, so hopefully people can take the information they hear here and apply it to their own findings."

In addition to the lecturers, a guided walking tour of the UPJ campus will be held today so people can examine the flora on campus.

Sewalk encouraged people to get involved by volunteering with local conservation groups and educating themselves about invasive plant species.

"We really need more community involvement so we can have better management," she said.