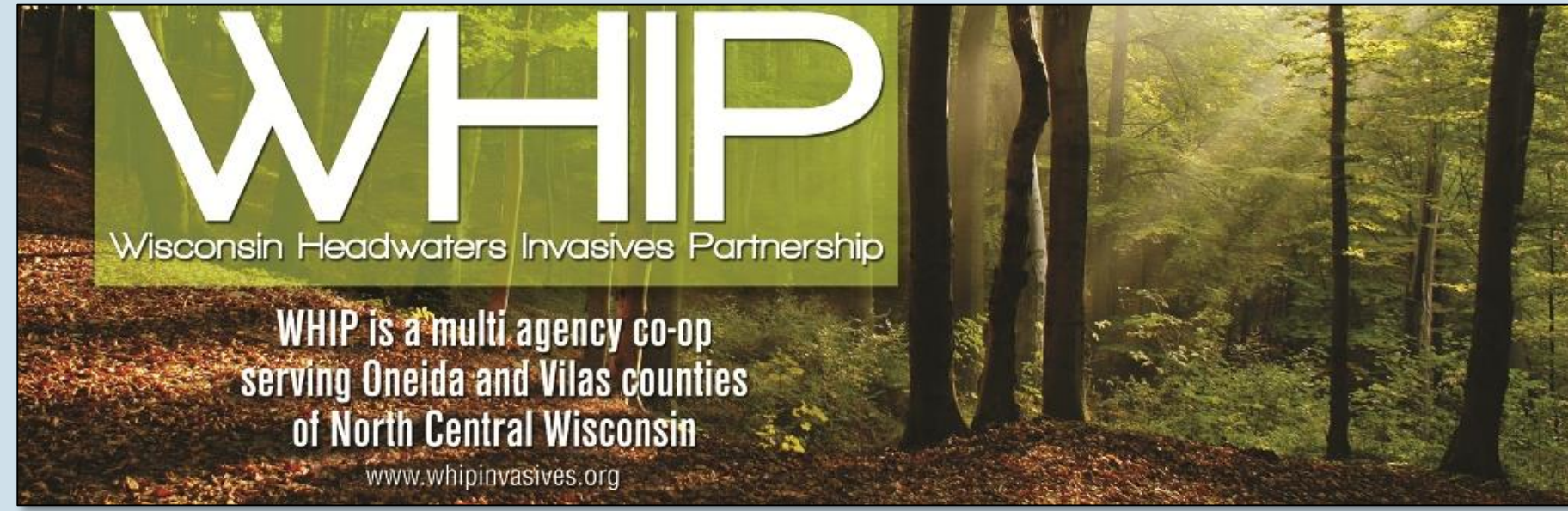# *Project W.O.W.: The War On Weeds!* Using Technology to Track Invasive Plants in the Northwoods

Wisconsin Headwaters Invasives Partnership (WHIP), Oneida & Vilas Counties
To participate, contact WHIP Coordinator Rosie Page at rpage19@gmail.com or 715-282-7269.

Summary

The Wisconsin Headwaters Invasives Partnership (WHIP), wanted to enhance local citizens' knowledge of invasive plants and how to identify them. We compiled educational kits with outreach materials for classrooms and groups to borrow. Project W.O.W. also asked volunteers to watch for invasive plants in familiar areas like parks and playgrounds, and use a simple free smartphone "app" to report their findings. Tracking invasive plants as they spread allows for better control while the populations are still small, in our area of north-central Wisconsin.

Fig. 1: WHIP's Steering Committee learns to use the GLEDN app and the tablets to record invasive plants!

Methods

For each of 8 educational kits, we collected based invasive species materials, small DNR field guides, the *Invasive Plants of the Upper Midwest* reference by E. Czarapata, and a Google Nexus 7" tablet loaded with the GLEDN app (Great Lakes Early Detection Network) for recording invasive plants. This app offers information, photos, and maps, usable in the field without an internet signal. Participants used either their own device, or borrowed a project tablet.
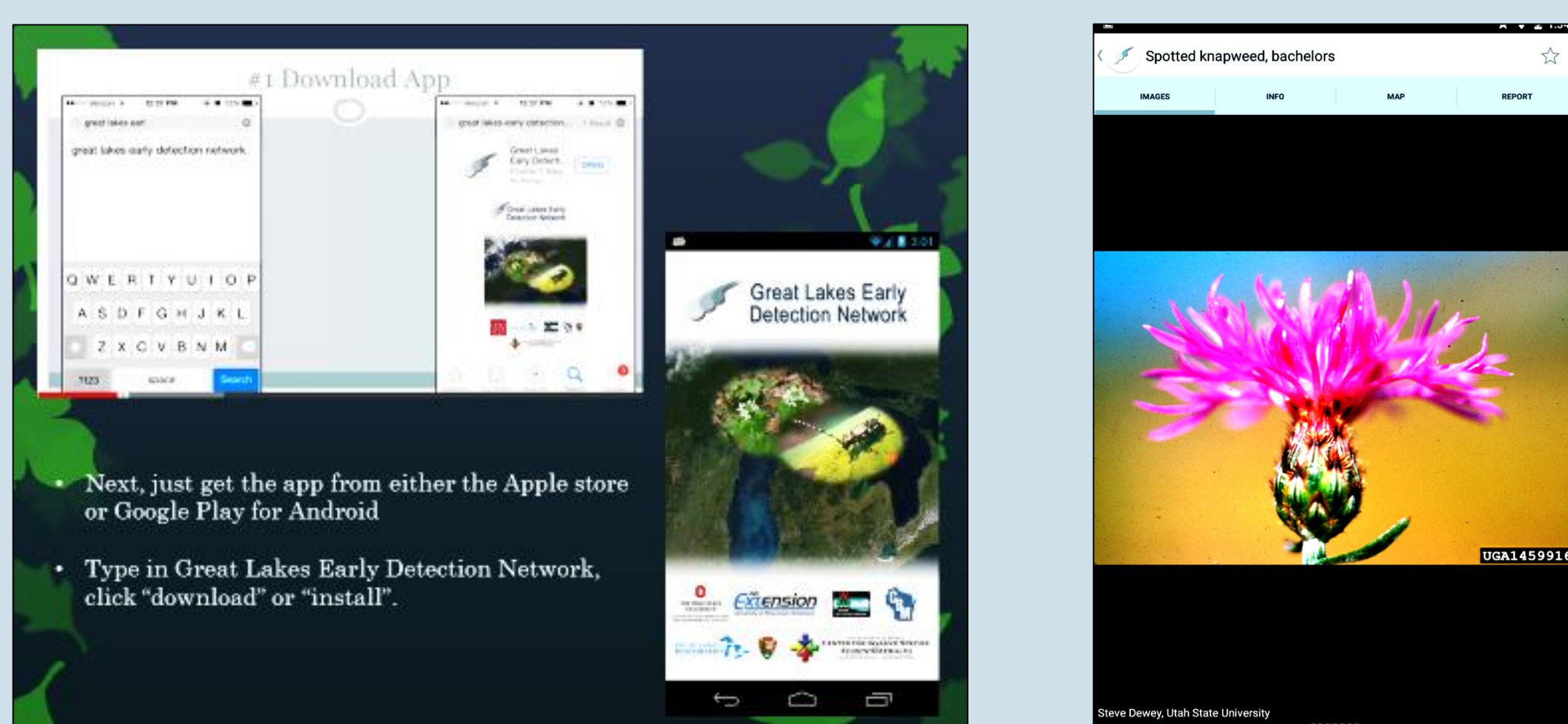

Fig. 2: Recording data in the GLEDN app on tablets

Fig. 3: Thanks to Girl Scout Troop #7091, who participated and also generously donated 8 backpacks for our kits!

Volunteer Involvement & Recruitment

WHIP used its full network of partner groups to attract and recruit participants. The following formal groups were trained in invasive plant identification and how to use the GLEDN app for their area:

- Girl Scouts Troop #7091 in Rhinelander
- All 5th graders in Rhinelander and their teachers
- Crandon-based Master Gardeners group
- Vilas County Clean Boats Clean Waters staff
- Oneida County CBCW volunteers
- 5 Lake Association boards in Vilas County
- Educators at a Science Workshop held at Kemp Station (3 elementary, 2 secondary, 3 agency)
- Public trainings held at Trees for Tomorrow, Oneida and Vilas County Fairs, ForestFest

Fig. 4: Working with youth to practice our tablet photo-taking skills on fake samples of Spotted Knapweed!

Results

WHIP was able to train 300+ participants in total and has plans for more. A bonus outcome was that the GLEDN app proved very helpful in our college student's senior project on European Marsh Thistle. We were also happy to have the chance to train all the Vilas County CBCW staff who mapped invasives at their boat landings in between boater contacts! Thank you to Vilas LWCD and UW Oshkosh.
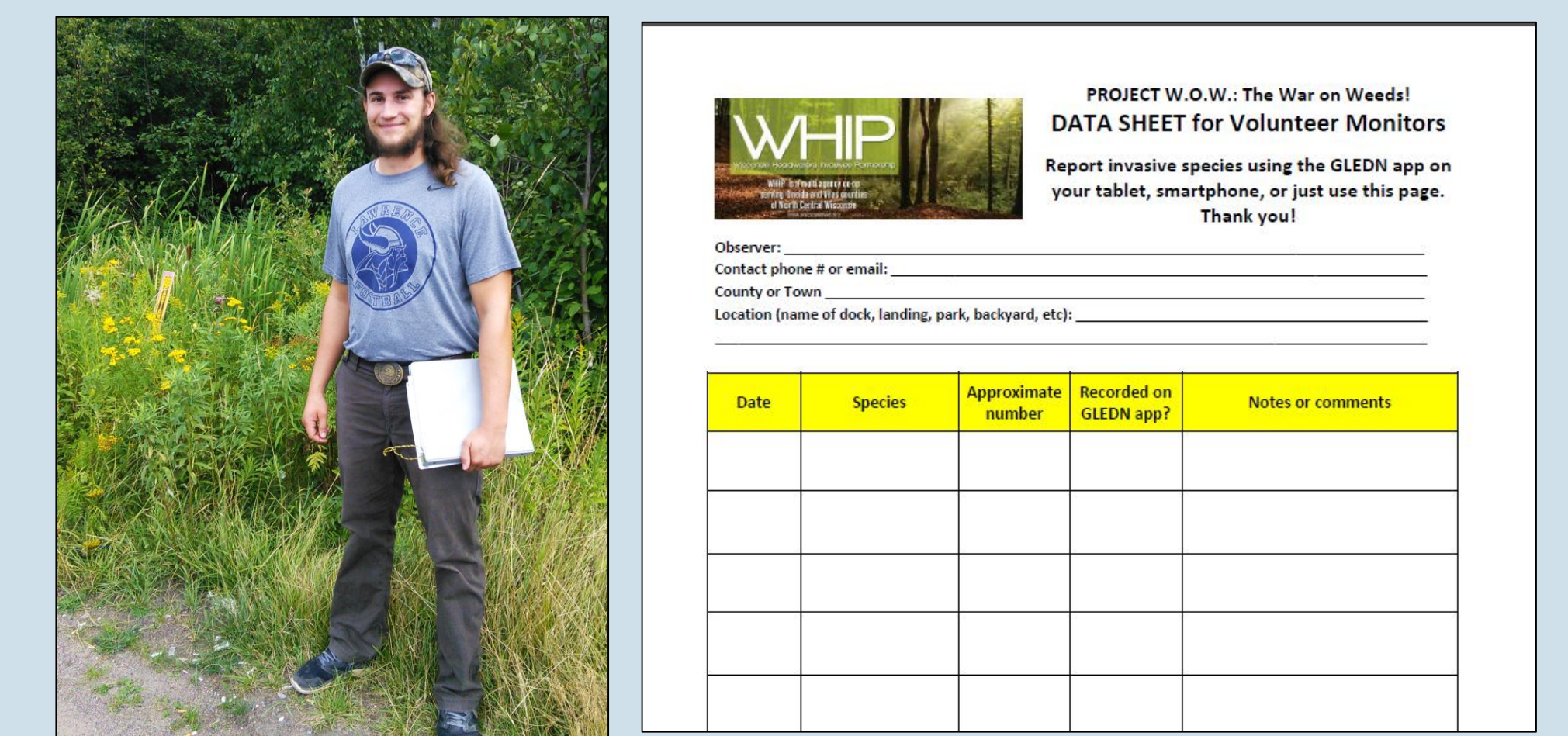

Fig. 5: College student Mitch Ives, Jr. used our tablet in his senior project to locate European Marsh Thistle

Future Plans

Our tablet tracking of invasive plants will be continued into the upcoming school year. An excellent next step would be developing commitments with specific classrooms to monitor areas. WHIP would like to recruit additional adult groups such as land trust volunteers and private landowners. GLEDN will only benefit from more data and participation!

Conclusion

Besides being popular with participants, this project successfully used simple technology as an effective way to encourage report new sightings! Since our tablets and kits are now purchased, we are fully prepared to continue this project with new youth and volunteers. To participate in Project W.O.W, contact WHIP Coordinator Rosie Page at **rpage19@gmail.com** or 715-282-7269.

References

Great Lakes Early Detection Network: **www.gledn.org**

Early Detection&Distribution Mapping System: **www.eddmaps.org**