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2016 Scotch Broom Challenge: Doom on Broom!

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NEVADA CITY, Calif. March 7, 2016 - Let me start off this story with a disclaimer: I am not an angry person and there are few things that agitate me in this world. I have very little to complain about. I'm healthy and happy. I live in a lively and welcoming town. My job as the Restoration Coordinator at the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) allows me to explore the beauty that surrounds us on a regular basis.

Now that that's off my chest, let me set the scene. Just the other day, I went hiking with friends along the river. We began down the trail, taking in the sounds and scenery of the South Fork Yuba River. As the corners of my smile spread across my face, a spindly, ogre-green shrub entered my peripheral vision and I was overcome with anger. Dost my eyes deceive me?

Scotch Broom!

This season it lacks its characteristic yellow flowers, but its wintry façade could not fool me. An environmental diatribe let loose from my lips. Before I knew it, I was standing on my soapbox in the middle of the trail, spreading awareness of my vegetative adversary:

Scotch broom is highly flammable, even when the plant is green. It thrives after disturbance and interrupts the natural fire cycle. It steals water from and crowds out native vegetation. The seeds are extremely resilient and can last up to eighty years. It contains no wildlife value – nothing will eat it! Except the occasional hungry deer – but they'll eat anything! Birds scoff their beaks at the seeds.

But, we have an unexpected ally! This unlikely friend is no bigger than the width of a human hair, but carries the strength to infect large, dense stands of Scotch broom. The gall mite was first found in the Portland, OR and Tacoma, WA region in 2005. It has spread southward and recently can be found as close to home as Hirschman's Pond! The mite appears to reduce seed production and in high densities can cause extensive stem die-back and plant mortality. Viva la gall mite!

As I wrapped up my rant, those around me were either terrified of me or terrified of Scotch broom, but I am pretty sure it was the latter. People began asking how they could help and what the community could do about it.

How can you do your part, you ask? SYRCL is hosting an event in partnership with State Parks to tackle our foe. SYRCL works hard to keep our watershed and our community healthy and safe and we depend on volunteers like you to help us with our mission. Join us on Saturday, March 26th from 9am – 2pm at the Independence Trail West. We will use weed wrenches to remove the invader and help make our green spaces healthier! We'll break for lunch and admire our hard work. Be sure to check out the Fire Safe Council website (www.areyoufiresafe.com) for more Scotch Broom Challenge events close to you!

Join us this season for the Scotch Broom Challenge and spread the mantra! Repeat after me:

Doom on Broom.

If you have questions or are interested in volunteering, contact Cordi Craig at cordi@syrc.org or 530.265.5961.

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