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Grants available to help choke off chokecherry trees in Alaska

(Anchorage, AK) – Once considered pretty, fragrant ornamental trees, chokecherry trees across Alaska are now the target of a widespread control effort 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 offering grants to local governments and non-profit organizations to remove two types of chokecherry trees from Alaska.

Both *Prunus padus*, commonly known as European bird cherry (EBC), chokecherry, or mayday trees, and *Prunus virginiana*, commonly known as Canadian red, or chokecherry, were originally introduced in Alaska as attractive, ornamental trees.

“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 \$200,000 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 April 9, 2021.

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), are now deemed invasive species with the potential to significantly affect native ecosystems in Alaska.