

ge says juvenile unconstitutional

50 years.

Samour ruled that 34 other convicts serving life without parole aren't entitled to similar sentence reductions under the law.

Samour ruled in a case filed by Curtis Brooks, who was sentenced in 1997 to life in prison without parole after his conviction for felony murder.

Defendants can be charged with first-degree murder if someone dies in the commission of a felony, such as burglary or robbery.

Battle against Russian olive trees waged for second year

Invasive plant chokes out native trees, harms watershed

BY MIA RUPANI
HERALD STAFF WRITER

Mountain Studies Institute and Southwest Conservation Corps continue to wage war against the Russian olive, an invasive species that chokes out native trees and degrades the quality of the watershed.

Last year, MSI was awarded a \$195,000 grant from the Colorado Water Conservation Board and an additional \$52,000 from Colorado Parks and Wildlife for a three-year Russian olive-removal project.

Removal efforts continued Saturday morning at Animas Valley Elementary and Christ the King Lutheran Church with two saw crews from SCC, and help from Durango Day-break Rotary Club.

MSI's Amanda Kuenzi said the project specifically targets Russian olive trees on private land.

"Many homeowners are not motivated to remove the plants because tree service is very expensive," she said.

Russian olives have silvery-white leaves, olive-shaped fruit and 1- to 2-inch thorns on its branches.

Originally introduced for ornamental landscaping, the plants are native to East Asia and Russia, and consume nearly 75 gallons of water per day.

They are considered a "List B noxious weed," which requires local governments to manage their spread under Colorado state law.

"Russian olive reduce wildlife habitat, interfere with nutrient cycling and outcompete native



MIA RUPANI/Durango Herald

Amanda Kuenzi with Mountain Studies Institute examines leaves with Southwest Conservation Corps' Graham Hornock on Saturday during year two of a project aimed at removing Russian olives. Originally introduced for ornamental landscaping, the invasive plant chokes out native trees and harms the watershed.

species," Kuenzi said. "The wetlands have been deteriorating in the West because of irrigation practices and water storage. We have to protect these important ecosystems."

She said crews will be working on removal efforts through mid-November with about 60 private landowners throughout the Animas River Valley.

On Saturday, the Rotary Club collected wood from the removal effort for its firewood-distribution project.

"We take members out to cut up firewood for low-income families and seniors," said Rotary Club member David Pirrone. "We gather and split the firewood, and around the end of October, we deliver the firewood to about 25 families."

Pirrone described the partnership as "perfect" because it benefits everyone involved.

"We are always looking for sources of firewood, and this works out well for everyone," he said.

Kuenzi said it is possible to

control the spread of Russian olives, but there is an urgency to efforts because of climate change.

"There are areas where Russian olives are so prolific it would be extremely costly to manage," she said. "We are lucky here because there are pockets, and we have the ability to take care of the problem now."

Kuenzi warned that as global temperatures continue to rise, the plant will become more difficult to control.

"This is manageable, but we have to make moves now," she said. "As temperatures warm, this tree will become more prolific."

The future of the Russian olive project relies heavily on its funding.

"There is way more work to do than what has been budgeted and the timeline we have," Kuenzi said. "We hope to find the funding to continue because we would love to."

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JERRY MCBRIDE/Durango Herald

La Plata County Youth Services, is excited on Thursday in the former county manager house, 2490 Main Ave. The nonprofit moved building a couple of blocks away into

to be in A-frame

IF YOU GO

La Plata Youth Services will hold an open house on from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Oct. 31 at the county manager house, 2490 Main Ave.

Watch video at durangoherald.com

fairgrounds. It used to house the county manager but has been vacant for several years.

As part of the move, La Plata Youth Services has a goal to raise \$68,000 to cover