Overview

Lesser celandine, native to Europe, is a low-growing perennial plant. It was originally cultivated as an ornamental due to its attractive yellow flowers and ability to quickly create a uniform groundcover. Lesser celandine grows vigorously and forms large, dense patches in gardens and on forest floors, displacing native and ornamental plants. It can easily out-compete spring-flowering plant communities and negatively impact local wildlife. This invader emerges well in advance of most native plants and spreads rapidly via underground tubers and bulblets. The prolific tubers may spread to new sites during flood events or be unearthed and scattered by humans and other animals. It grows in full shade to full sun and prefers moist to wet soils but can persist in a wide range of conditions.

How to Identify

Lesser celandine plants consist of rosettes of tender, succulent, dark green, shiny, stalked kidney- to heart-shaped leaves. Flowers are symmetrical, bright yellow with a slightly darker center found singly on delicate stalks that rise above the leaves. The number of petals on each flower varies greatly across the species, ranging from 6 to 26 with double bloom varieties displaying up to 60 petals. Three (rarely 4) green sepals are present and are a good distinguishing factor when examining look-alikes.

Look-alikes

Lesser celandine closely resembles marsh marigold, Caltha palustris, a native wetland plant occurring outside the CWMA area and unlikely to be found locally. Another native marigold with white flowers, Caltha leptosepala, is found in the area. To be sure you are not dealing with a native Caltha species, examine the flowers and the roots. Caltha palustris appears not to have sepals, but in fact lacks petals and has only yellow colored sepals. Neither Caltha species has tubers or form dense continuous mats like lesser celandine.
Prevention
This plant was formerly sold as an ornamental and is still found in many gardens. Early identification and timely removal of lesser celandine is crucial to preventing its spread. Care should be taken not to move contaminated soil, and plant parts should all be disposed of in the landfill to prevent contamination of the yard debris and compost system. After working in an infested area, tools and footwear should thoroughly cleaned. Lesser celandine is extremely hard to control once established.

When to Remove
Due to its short life cycle, the window of opportunity for controlling lesser celandine is very short. Lesser celandine flowers in late winter before many other plants have started growing. It’s best to remove manually or with herbicide when all the plants have come in for the season, just before or during its early flowering period (late winter/early spring).

Manual Control Method
1. When soil is moist, carefully DIG plants and SIFT soil to remove the tubers/bulblets. Carefully bag all tubers and bulblets and place in a plastic bag. Label the bag “Invasive plant material – do NOT compost” and dispose of it in the trash. This method is extremely labor intensive and will not be feasible at most sites. Because of the massive soil disturbance this method causes and the likelihood of increasing its spread, manual control is generally not recommended in riparian zones or wetlands unless dealing with an extremely small population (i.e., a few plants).

2. PLANT native or non-invasive plants in the control area after the bulk of the invasive plants are removed. This will help to repopulate the area with desired species and prevent new and recurring infestations.

3. MONITOR area for re-sprouts. Lesser celandine tubers will continue to grow and produce new plants. After initial removal, the area needs to be managed every few weeks to dig out new growth. When the majority of plants have been removed, the site should only need yearly monitoring.

Herbicide Control Method
Herbicide methods should only be used in combination with manual control and monitoring.

1. When using glyphosate to control lesser celandine, plants should be sprayed at the recommended label rate. Glyphosate treatments should be carried out in late winter or early spring, just before or in early flowering, generally February through early March. Glyphosate will kill grasses, so use this only in areas where grass damage can be tolerated.

2. One treatment generally does not effectively kill an invasion. MONITOR your site for regrowth of lesser celandine and repeat manual control or herbicide application as needed.

3. REPLANT native or non-invasive plants in the control area after the bulk of the invasive plants are removed. This will help to repopulate the area with desired species and prevent new and recurring infestations.