

IMA Update

By Greg Sykes (greg@grsykes.com)

October 27th's VolunteerFest was an incredibly successful event! A number of new and returning volunteers braved the drizzle to help Royal Lake's Invasive Management Area (IMA) site. We planted 16 native shrubs in woodland that was once strangled by [English ivy](#). The refreshing morning rains provided ideal planting conditions, giving these plants an extra edge towards establishment. After the planting, we removed 11 more bags of ivy, thereby clearing the land for future native plantings!

My IMA permit was extended through the end of this year and the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) is drafting 2008's permit, which will cover all of Royal Lake (the 2007 permit covers a small subsection) and include more invasive species to target. The FCPA naturalists are delighted by all that this community has accomplished at the IMA site. I am also pleased by the responses and feedback I receive both from volunteers and from the folks I encounter while surveying the sites. In our discussions, many of you mentioned other areas infested by invasive plants and your concerns for the local forest's well-being. The good news is IMA sites can have multiple site leaders! I'm more than happy to collaborate with leaders and formulate a park-wide strategy.

To be a site leader, you need to attend several county-sponsored seminars, where you are trained about soil management, native and invasive species identification (includes field ID session), and a class on the paperwork. The training also includes the best way to destroy target species. This point is crucial because an incorrectly "attacked" plant could result in more harm than good as the fragmented plant regenerates (think "starfish effect") or seeds germinate. When you are issued a work permit and sign the agreement, the county loans tools accordingly to the target species, provides bags, and gives you a T-shirt, gloves, and a hat to keep. As a dedicated volunteer, you also get certain county-related benefits and discounts. Site leaders commit to at least three or four workdays per year followed by a native species planting. All times and dates are determined by the leader. This person is responsible for recruiting volunteers; you can work alone if you prefer as a few other site members do, but working with groups helps both educate the public and makes faster progress. At the end of a workday, recruiting session, or patrol, the leader files a report with FCPA.

This invasive species management is bigger than just one site leader or a county program--it's part of a larger, global effort! People around the world recognize how certain species introduced to the wrong place can be catastrophic to an ecosystem. Hawaii is in constant battle with invasive plants and animals (e.g., strangler figs, mongoose), Guam is controlling the brown tree snake, Australia is eradicating the cane toads, and the Galápagos Islands are hit with feral livestock, quinine and balsa trees. Doing nothing leads to reduced biodiversity and possibly extinction. Many of these programs have a unique genesis, yet they've become academically linked by the momentum driving habitat restoration. What's cool about the IMA program is that it's here, in KPW, enabling you to be part of a global thrust and be an integral part in constructively righting a wrong.

So... if you want to join an international endeavor or are simply sick of seeing a certain pesky invasive plant in your neck of the woods, sign up to become an IMA site leader! For more information about my IMA leader experiences, you may contact me at greg@grsykes.com. To become a site leader, please contact Kathy Frederick at katherine.frederick@fairfaxcounty.gov or 703-324-8681 during the registration period, January 2 - 31, 2008.

Besides site leaders, we need volunteer workers, too. During the winter months, I will still lead workdays and continue ivy removal when the ground is thawed. Since we won't know in time for the next *Herald* publication what the ground will be like, please contact me if you would like to join a winter workday and I will let you know of the next session. See you then and again, thanks to all of the IMA volunteers!

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