

## One Restoration Site, Two Outcomes

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The Invasive Management Area (IMA) program, which is sponsored by the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA), supports many habitat restoration sites throughout county parks. On October 8, 2018, the first action on one IMA site began near Royal Lake as a corporate workday for Accenture and provided children with service hours. Led by two IMA site leaders who had FCPA permission to pull targeted invasive species, this group made tremendous progress eradicating species, such as [multiflora rose](#), [porcelain-berry](#), [Amur honeysuckle](#), and [winged burning bush](#). Since runoff from a storm drain outfall cuts through the site, erosion is a concern so going slow while preserving soil integrity is better than tearing up the ground.

Additional work over the months opened space for native plantings to begin, including red chokeberry, arrowwood viburnum, willow oak, flowering dogwood, several aster and boneset species, golden ragwort, woodland phlox, eastern enchanter's nightshade, Jacob's ladder, golden Alexander, bottlebrush grass, northern river oats, and Pennsylvania sedge. Best of all, some of the native plants started coming back, such as boxelder trees and Virginia creeper, which are excellent floodplain plants for soil control.



**Figure 1. At this time, blooming golden ragwort is the most conspicuous native plant in this reviving natural area. Other species will soon flower.**



**Figure 2. Few native plants arise in this plot blitzed by encroachment. Thickly dumped yard debris stifles native flora and obstructs volunteers from pulling tough, invasive vines (e.g., ground ivy, [Japanese honeysuckle](#), and [English ivy](#)), which survive through leaf piles and reemerge.**

Over two years later, the site still needs attention but it is on the way to recovery. One of the two residential neighbors, whose property backs up to this site, was great and left it to nature and site leaders to encourage the restoration process (Figure 1, photographed with back to the fence line). Sadly, the other neighbor, who knew about the project, decided to indiscriminately whack everything back and dump yard waste, which smothered smaller native plants, onto the site (Figure 2, same day and camera settings as Figure 1); these actions are counterproductive and against park rules. Additionally, this yard debris had pieces of invasive [Pachysandra](#) in it, which was not previously present at this site. Left in moist soil and leaf litter, *Pachysandra* can re-root and establish a new weed patch. Combing through the leaves, a volunteer pulled the *Pachysandra* before it could grow, but any seeds from other invasive species wait undetected until they sprout. Any private land and housing “entitlements” end at the property line without extending into parks. Perhaps an ultimate irony is when people justify such actions by claiming that they want to get rid of [poison ivy](#), yet activity like this **encourages** poison ivy to thrive! Poison ivy is an [early succession](#) native—the kind of species that colonizes recently disturbed soil, which is why it is common around roadsides and abandoned farm fields.

Many chapters remain to be written on how this story turns out. Natural area rehabilitation takes years or decades—longer than anyone wants. That time is crucial as it balances eradicating weeds, cultivating native plants, minimizing erosion, and preserving soil. We welcome new IMA volunteers; even better if folks would like to be trained and granted the FCPA permits to become an IMA site leader! Let me know how you would like to participate by sending a message to [greg@grsykes.com](mailto:greg@grsykes.com). As seen here, education, coordination, and lawful activity are keys to successful habitat restoration and for both people and wildlife to enjoy the native environment.

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