

IMA Update

By Greg Sykes (greg@grsykes.com)

For the second consecutive year, the Invasive Management Area (IMA) program at Royal Lake Park participated in another fabulous workday through VolunteerFest! For the first time, volunteers focused on eradicating English ivy ground cover from parkland in back of Claridge Court. This clearing resulted in 16 bags of weeds removed! Volunteers also started eliminating [autumn olive](#), [Japanese honeysuckle](#), and [Amur honeysuckle](#) from this site. They took this opportunity to break up some of the illegally dumped piles of yard debris on park grounds. Some of these piles were stacked next to (and probably on to of) cool native plants, such as Indian cucumbers (*Medeola virginiana*). With the debris thinned, native plants have a chance to root into the soil and better stabilize this floodplain. The workers consisted of KPW residents, volunteers from other parts of the county, and a corporate group from Target (Burke store location). To help accelerate the native plant recovery, a couple of volunteers returned the following week and planted riparian species, from woody staples [e.g. arrowwood viburnum (*Viburnum dentatum*)] to more specialized herbaceous plants [e.g. cutleaf toothwort (*Dentaria laciniata*)]. A big round of “thanks” goes out to all volunteers!

I am glad to have met so many fans of the IMA program during the Halloween Festival at Lakeside Park. Thanks to everyone who requested more information or asked to be contacted for future workdays. Due to logistical reasons, only about half of the workdays are published in the *Herald* beforehand, so if you would like to be kept up to speed on future IMA events, please send an e-mail to me at greg@grsykes.com and I will add you to the distribution list. I hide names of recipients and do not share e-mail addresses.

Throughout the past two seasons, the primary qualifications for IMA volunteers were 1) healthy enough to do strenuous outdoor work, and 2) minimum ages of either 11 or 16 years old, depending on the work at hand. The nature of the hard work, trip hazards, sharp tools, and discipline to pull only the targeted invasive species sculpted these requirements. Several people have younger children willing to participate. Thank you to the parents who want to teach their children environmental stewardship while honoring the age restrictions. I am currently looking into hosting a family-oriented IMA workday that enables children in the 6-10-year group to work with the parents. No promises at this point, but if you would like to participate as a family team, please send an e-mail to me along with the ages of the children and any prior related experience. In the meantime, parents might consider introducing youngsters to park clean-up workdays or children's programs at Hidden Oaks Nature Center (NC) (<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/hiddenoaks/>) and Hidden Pond NC (<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/hiddenpond/>).

On the other extreme, we've hosted a couple of intense workdays lasting four hours or longer. Some people would like to improve their strength and endurance. I will have special training sessions during normal workdays, where we will pay particular attention to gaining strength through relaxation, heightening attentiveness to detail, and monitoring form and movement to maximize endurance. Additionally, these volunteers may request to work extended hours. The motto will be “Work at, not work out!” As with all IMA workdays, safety is my top priority, and people can leave early if needed. There's nothing to lose and self-improvement to gain, so send an e-mail to me and you'll be on the list!

If you want to go all-out for habitat conservation, become an IMA site leader! From January 1-31, 2009, IMA Volunteer Coordinator Kathy Frederick is recruiting site leaders for the 2009 season. To become a site leader, you train in different IMA-related seminars, after which you commit to at least three weed removal workdays followed by a native planting session. FCPA provides all tools and bagging supplies. I'm happy to coordinate efforts with anyone who would like to lead workdays. Unfortunately, the local parks have many potential IMA sites, such as the [autumn olive](#) and [English ivy](#) by Chatsworth Court, [porcelain-berry](#) and [mile-a-minute](#) from the dam to Shane's Creek, [oriental bittersweet](#) by the soccer fields and tennis courts, more English ivy where Rabbits Branch empties into the lake and across from Commonwealth Pool, and honeysuckle and [multiflora rose](#) nearly everywhere. So, contact Kathy at katherine.frederick@fairfaxcounty.gov or 703-324-8681 during the registration period, expand your knowledge, and help conservation efforts!

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