

IMA Update

By Greg Sykes (greg@grsykes.com)

Invasive Management Area (IMA) volunteers “hit the ground running” in mid-March. The Resource Protection Area permit came through in late February, so had the green light to resume clearing weeds from parkland. The new work area is called the Battery Site since two years ago, Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) staff and I discovered and removed an illegally discarded car battery here. From that time until the end of 2008, IMA volunteers cut and killed the [English ivy](#) vines growing on the trees, thereby saving the trees from a slow, smothering death. The March workdays concentrated on perimeter sweeps: thorough eradication of expeditionary vines and pulling ivy from the transitional edges where vines tangled amongst native plants. Pulling the scattered evergreen ivy in the winter/early spring helps volunteers find these vines trailing into the woodlands while other plants remain dormant. This work resulted in the patch having a defined, controllable edge so that the native habitat is no longer immediately threatened by the ivy’s advancement. Other invasives approved for removal, such as [Amur honeysuckle](#) and [Japanese honeysuckle](#), were pulled if they were in the work path.

This site is now in the next stage: the ivy patch’s systematic eradication. This large plot is an epic project requiring some time before totally purging the invasive species. The area’s size can easily support a large work group, so please let me know of any willing and eager parties. It’s perfect for scouts or other students in need of community hours. If you are a science teacher or professor, how about leading a field trip on habitat restoration? With today’s budget cuts and economic strains, taking a class on an IMA workday saves money while providing students with first-hand experience. I can even give a classroom lecture emphasizing the importance of a native ecology and how IMA promotes sustainable environments. Speaking of caring for the environment, the IMA volunteers discussed how much ecological stewardship blends with teachings of every major religion. Indeed, Royal Lake IMA sites witnessed people practicing (in alphabetical order) Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism among other faiths, and everyone strove toward a shared ecological goal. How about mobilizing your congregation into participating in an IMA workday? You may then apply the knowledge gained and create a native sanctuary at your place of worship, as already realized by so many parishes and temples. Once the IMA volunteers clear the Battery Site of ivy, they may replant with native species and monitor against invasive species resurgences.

The special May 2nd Virginia Invasive Plant Removal Day was a smashing success! Garlic mustard was the primary target of this workday. This zesty herb is yet another exotic plant that escaped cultivation. Appearing in late winter through spring, it aggressively spreads and more importantly kills the beneficial soil fungi on which native plants depend for nutrient uptake. For more information on this allelopathic weed, check out <http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2006/04.27/15-invasive.html>. Volunteers pulled the biannual garlic mustard in bloom (in its easy-to-spot-and-identify second year), but left the first year sprouts since these nasty plants end up thinning themselves, too. Unable to reseed, this strategy depletes the short-lived garlic mustard’s seed bank, leading to its elimination. IMA volunteers found scores of mile-a-minute seedlings, which were also eradicated. The final hour was Battery Site English ivy removal.

Garlic mustard is easy to pull, so this workday was specifically open to children aged 7 years and older. However, the youngest person attending was 13. Since special preparation is needed for a young volunteer workday and none attended this one, I will only publically advertise future workdays for teenagers through adults. If you have family groups including younger children eager to participate in an IMA workday, please contact me. I will see which target species are in season, determine if it is easy enough for the age group, and we can schedule a special session for your party.

From the verbal feedback I get from both KPW residents and participants on workdays, and from the eco-friendly improvements on neighborhood properties, we should all share in the pleasure of knowing so many people work towards a sustainable, native plant-based landscape. However, FCPA staff and I have found suspicious shovel holes in the parklands. People’s desire for native flora is wonderful, but please keep wild natives in the woodlands. We encourage native species in the parks and plant natives where invasives once stood to bolster indigenous varieties. If you would like native plants, please obtain them from a reputable nursery. On May 16th, Green Springs Park had its huge plant sale with many vendors, www.grsykes.com

including the non-profit Virginia Native Plant Society, selling wonderful native plants. Whereas some local nurseries carry natives, others have yet to get with the times; keep asking for the precise name of native species so that retailers know that the demand is present. For example, don't just ask for a "fringe tree" because instead of the gorgeous Fairfax native *Chionanthus virginicus*, they might sell a Chinese *C. retusus*. Often, retailers can special order the proper selection for you.

To join a workday or get on the Royal Lake IMA distribution list, contact me at greg@grsykes.com. Some folks who signed up on my IMA distribution list have settings such that my blind-copy e-mails get bounced. If you signed up but have not received any messages so far, please either change the permissions to accept mail from my address or send a new message to me with an address that accepts blind-copies. For other Royal Lake activities, contact the KPW Parks and Lakes Committee at parks@kpwca.org. Hope to see you in the field!

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