

IMA Update

By Greg Sykes (greg@grsykes.com)

Many KPW residents commented on how everywhere they looked these past six months, they saw the big green and yellow "Habitat Restoration" sign denoting current Invasive Management Area (IMA) worksites. Glad we got noticed! Since the [last update \(December 2009\)](#), volunteers eradicated nearly all of the [English ivy](#) at the Battery Site, thawed ground permitting. All that remains are an extremely small patch and some re-sprouting vines in the vicinity which will be cleared during monitoring patrols. For the record, the tree tubes seen from the dam to Crooked Creek Park are NOT IMA's work; these saplings are from the Department of Public Works to compensate for the tree loss inflicted by the spillway project.

With a snow-covered ground, IMA volunteers traveled to eight different sites between Royal Lake, Lakeside, and Crooked Creek Parks to cut English ivy-free "windows" around tree trunk bases. The vine soon dies, which reduces both the burdening weight (magnified when ice and snow accumulates on the leaves) and the tree's vulnerability to wind shear damage. Furthermore, the freed trees can once again gather light when leaves emerge. Since English ivy only fruit from climbing vines, severed weeds lose their seed-dispersing potential.

Once spring warmed the ground, IMA's attention went towards the seasonal [garlic mustard](#) pulls along Shanes Creek, near the newly planted Sweet Bay Magnolia Bog (in back of Claridge Court). Other non-native invasives removed include [mile-a-minute](#) seedlings, [privet](#), [Bradford pear](#), [Japanese honeysuckle](#), [Amur honeysuckle](#), and an increasing number of [winged burning bush](#).

On May 4th, a team of Fairfax County biologists and volunteers ran a monitoring patrol on every Royal Lake IMA site and conducted a field survey on some of the first completed sections. These studies assessed the sites' health by counting how many plant species were present and estimating each species land coverage within subplots. Fortunately, many native plants are thriving in the formerly weed-infested parcels, though they are not spreading as quickly as was hoped. The few invasive species, particularly mile-a-minute and garlic mustard, were documented and pulled before they establish themselves in these still sensitive plots. However, right next to one plot, [Chinese wisteria](#) started taking root and spreading. Within days of its discovery, this brutally fast-growing tree-killer was eradicated by a small rapid reaction IMA team. The IMA teams also found fresh evidence of people planting non-native garden plants on parkland. Please remember that the parks are to sustain our native ecosystem and any plants volunteers add are specifically selected for their functionality, thereby supporting the native habitat. Planting within a park is illegal without a vegetative planting request form approved by the Natural Resource Management Plan Division (for more information, please call a Naturalist at 703-324-8580). When residents sink invasive species into the parks, IMA volunteers have no choice but to pull those plants.

By the same token, I welcome anyone enthusiastic enough to work in the parks to join us in an IMA workday. As you can see, we partake in many ecological activities, and there's sure to be one suited for you! At the same time, you get to learn about ecosystems, different species, how habitat restoration works, and have fun doing so! Send an e-mail to me and I'll keep you posted on our next activities!

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