

IMA Q/A's: the December 2010 Edition

By Greg Sykes (greg@grsykes.com)

Thank you for the continued inquiries about the Invasive Management Area (IMA) program and our local environment. The invasive species profiles published earlier this year resulted in much positive feedback and inspired people to pull some of those nasty weeds from their yards. If you would like to receive these articles as PDFs, send an e-mail to me asking to be on the e-subscription list. For now, let's take a break from the profiles and answer some of your questions.

Q: What was with the IMA activity at the Grassy Knoll (park entrance near the Gainsborough Drive/Claridge Court intersection) during Halloween weekend?

A: In a single weekend, an [English ivy](#)-choked, locally abused dumping ground was transformed into a fern gully! On Saturday, energetic volunteers pulled 26 bags of English ivy from that ravine where the path enters the forest. This area is fragile and erosion-prone due to both flow from the nearby storm drain and the two points where spring water naturally bubbles out of the ground. A smaller group returned on Sunday to meticulously pull fine English ivy root remnants which would otherwise resprout into vines. Since this ivy's loose leaves may send roots into moist environments either here or washed downstream, a light raking gathered the leaves. Next, volunteers planted a native potpourri:

Common Name	Scientific Name
Arrowwood	<i>Viburnum dentatum</i>
Bedstraw	<i>Galium</i> sp.
Blue Stem Goldenrod	<i>Solidago caesia</i>
Christmas Fern	<i>Aronia melanocarpa</i>
Creeping Blackberry	<i>Rubus</i> sp.
Elephantsfoot	<i>Elephantopus</i> sp.
Flat Topped White Aster	<i>Doellingeria umbellata</i>
Flowering Dogwood	<i>Cornus florida</i>
Golden Ragwort	<i>Senecio aureus</i>
Green Briar	<i>Smilax</i> sp.
Grey Green Sedge	<i>Carex</i> sp.

Common Name	Scientific Name
Lady's Fern	<i>Athyrium felix-femina</i>
Mayapple	<i>Podophyllum peltatum</i>
New York Fern	<i>Thelypteris noveboracensis</i>
Partridgeberry	<i>Mitchella repens</i>
Pokeweed	<i>Phytolacca americana</i>
Sensitive Fern	<i>Onoclea sensibilis</i>
Virginia Creeper	<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>
White Avens	<i>Geum canadense</i>
Willow Oak	<i>Quercus phellos</i>

Of the 138 specimens, 47% are ferns. All of these plants are from local genetic stock and quarantined to prevent accidental introduction of non-native invasive seeds. In case you are wondering about elephant's foot, it is the already naturally occurring plant along the Grassy Knoll which bloom little blue summer flowers. Finally, the area was seeded with native wildflowers and annual ryegrass (a short-lived cover crop). Be sure to visit this location in the spring—it should green into a charming IMA plot!

Q: How are the other IMA sites at Royal Lake?

A: The Engine Site (named after the rusted engine block and other car parts there), was strangled by a tangle of non-native invasives, most notably [Chinese wisteria](#), English ivy, a huge [rose-of-Sharon](#) patch, and [Japanese honeysuckle](#). Whereas the wisteria eradication was detailed in the June 2010 IMA update, IMA volunteers completed clearing the remaining target species in November. Volunteers planted several flowering dogwoods and native herbaceous species here. Now, this area will be monitored against any weed resurgence.

The brutally hot summer and drought took a major toll on autumn 2009's Magnolia Bog plantings. These plants had yet to become fully established and were vulnerable to the extreme weather. Despite the heavy losses, most of the sweetbay magnolias (*Magnolia virginiana*) survived, as did the American hazelnuts (*Corylus americana*), strawberry bushes (*Euonymus americanus*), and several of the Viburnums. The vines and herbaceous plants [e.g., golden ragworts and moonseed vine (*Menispermum canadense*)] fared better than the woody shrubs. The best news of all: native seedlings such as spicebush (*Lindera benzoin*) are moving into this area on their own! In habitat restoration, planted species help nature get a head start; whatever survives is great and whichever natives arrive naturally is even better.

Q: Besides weed resurgence for which you are monitoring, what are the other threats to Royal Lake Park?

A: Human encroachment and unauthorized activities, including claiming park land for private use, dumping yard debris, and discarding trash (we've experienced a recent rash of disposable diapers tossed into the woods) are the greatest dangers to the parks. The other day I removed another car battery from parklands, this one was perched inches from the stream bank behind Pommeroy Drive, several houses South of the Commonwealth Swim Club. With so many places to legally drop off such a hazardous material (e.g., gas stations, auto parts stores, mechanic shops, the recycling center off of Pickett Road), leaving it to tumble into a waterway is criminally negligent.

Another woodland threat is when folks embark on their own park project without FCPA approval. Despite good intentions, untrained people cause greater detriment than benefit to the lands they wish to protect. For example, native grape and poison ivy vines endured unauthorized whacking—including those growing away from trails. These native vines provide wildlife with valuable shelter and food resources with minimal tree damage.

Q: How does anything eat [poison ivy](#)? Isn't it poisonous?

A: Many birds, mammals, and insects evolved to eat poison ivy's leaves and/or its energy-boosting, lipid-rich berries. The fruits offer nutrition in late fall/early winter when food supplies are short.

To put poison ivy's wildlife value into perspective, consider this question: What do chocolate, grapes/raisins, and onions have in common? Humans may enjoy these foods yet they are potentially deadly to dogs. Other plants are toxic to us yet edible to certain creatures.

Q: How should someone become involved with the parks?

Here is a great general website to get you started: <https://www.volunteerfairfax.org/>

Find out about the environment and help the parks through the Virginia Master Naturalist Program at: <http://www.virginiamasternaturalist.org/>

To learn more about Royal Lake IMA workdays, send an e-mail to me asking to be on the volunteer distribution list. We have several KPW residents stepping up and training to be deputy IMA site leaders. Long time IMA volunteer Diana Shannon and her family led an August workday of bagging [Japanese stiltgrass](#) (*Microstegium vimineum*) at the Grassy Knoll. Further helping the IMA cause is Amelia Malone, who is a Girl Scout earning her Silver Award. At the IMA booth during the KPW Halloween Festival, she quizzed and educated our visitors on identifying the beneficial native and nasty invasive specimens displayed. Both Diana and Amelia received FCPA permission and training on how to effectively conduct an IMA workday. For example, Amelia is now planning a project after intense IMA leadership training during the Fern Gully restoration, where she learned:

- how to conduct effective workdays while keeping safety a top priority.
- that all of this work is conducted through FCPA-issued permits.
- that timing is critical. Some invasive species (e.g., [garlic mustard](#) and Japanese stilt grass) are seasonally targeted. The Fern Gully restoration work was timed for an autumn planting, when transplanted and seeded species have the best chance of surviving. Given this project's sensitivity, it was designed to have only a day between pulling the weeds and planting the natives.
- how workdays and monitoring sessions fall into a long-term habitat restoration strategy.
- the importance of the species selected. In this case, we employed native plants which thrive in moist, shady environments; the various species have different, complimentary root structures to best retain soil. Many of the selected plants are not favored by deer so the flora is more likely to flourish without deer grazing and hooves further threatening the soil integrity.

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