

IMA's 2012 Year in Review

By Greg Sykes (greg@grsykes.com)

Has 2012 been another busy year for Royal Lake Park's Invasive Management Area (IMA) program! During the abnormally warm winter, volunteers took advantage of the thawed ground and targeted conspicuous evergreen weeds such as [English ivy](#) (*Hedera helix*), [Pachysandra](#) (*P. terminalis*), and [periwinkle](#) (*Vinca minor*) that smothered the forest floor. Nearby sections cleared earlier of these weeds already saw spring beauties (*Claytonia virginica*), ferns, and other native flora natural return this year!

Elevated spring temperatures ushered an early [garlic mustard](#) (*Alliaria petiolata*) season, dedicating several removal workdays, especially along Shane's Creek. Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) and REI's combined "Take Back the Forest" campaign, huge volunteer turn-outs, plus previous years of garlic mustard pulls denting the population resulted in more Royal Lake Park area cleared of garlic mustard than ever! At this time, volunteers working under FCPA's Early Detection Rapid Response (EDRR) program eradicated a bitter orange (*Poncirus trifoliata*) plot in Lakeside Park; for more about this special event, please read Tony Vellucci's article, "His Legacy Lives On ... Unfortunately" (page 6 of the [The Herald's April 2012 edition](#)).

During the summer, IMA volunteers ripped out [Japanese stiltgrass](#) (*Microstegium vimineum*). The pre-fruited grass was left to decompose where it was pulled; the seeding weeds were bagged for either the landfill or the incinerator. The plot in back of Claridge Court (upstream of the "Magnolia Bog" site) was formerly dominated by [Amur honeysuckle](#) (*Lonicera maackii*). Last year, this bush was cut back to prevent seed development and induce an experimental "slow kill" approach so that vegetation is always present here. Earlier in the year, some native species were re-introduced to test the site's readiness. They survived despite this summer's heat and drought. Purging sapling-killing [Japanese honeysuckle](#) (*Lonicera japonica*) and some English ivy from here opened the ground for the autumnal native planting.

October's Volunteer Fairfax workday saw over 100 specimens planted and over 100 total volunteer hours earned! The selected species (see Table 1) mixed fast-growing shrubs like elderberry and winterberry with deer-resistant spicebush and American holly. All of these plants already occur within the Royal Lake area. The moist soil, a bucket of stream water following the planting, and subsequent rains helped hedge these plants' survival bets. FCPA is experimenting with a new, photolytic mesh tree protector, which is being tested on some of these specimens. Following the reforestation, volunteers switched gears to nearby sites and pulled 15 bags of English ivy, Pachysandra, periwinkle, and [multiflora rose](#) (*Rosa multiflora*).

Table 1. This list identifies the species planted during the October 20th workday.

Common Name	Scientific Name
American Elderberry	<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>
American Holly	<i>Ilex opaca</i>
Deer Tongue	<i>Dichanthelium clandestinum</i>
Mapleleaf Viburnum	<i>Viburnum acerifolium</i>
New York Ironweed	<i>Vernonia noveboracensis</i>
Redbud	<i>Cercis canadensis</i>
Sensitive Fern	<i>Onoclea sensibilis</i>

Common Name	Scientific Name
Spicebush	<i>Lindera benzoin</i>
Virginia Creeper	<i>Parthenocissus quinquefolia</i>
Virginia Smartweed	<i>Persicaria virginiana</i>
White Wood Aster	<i>Eurybia divaricata</i>
White Avens	<i>Geum canadense</i>
Wild Strawberry	<i>Fragaria virginiana</i>
Winterberry	<i>Ilex verticillata</i>

This workday's 26 participants encompassed a wide demography with many IMA veterans and new hands. Word keeps spreading about both the importance of habitat restoration programs and how cool IMA workdays are as experienced students recruited some of the new members. Workdays always have an educational component. With at least three volunteers from Lake Braddock Secondary School's AP Environmental Science class, impromptu mini-field lessons ranged from the problems with non-native invasive weeds, why wildlife depends on native flora, how to estimate a forest's age based on what is growing there, and riparian buffers (which the Environmental students just had just studied and now saw the real deal). One of the students is already planning a habitat restoration Eagle Scout project through

IMA. His project complements existing efforts and will have a lasting effect on Royal Lake's ecology. FCPA encourages such self-sustaining projects; scouts may gravitate towards construction projects but should first check that their results can be maintained by an already extended FCPA staff. Working with and teaching students—from young children to young-at-hearts, from grade school to graduate students—is a rewarding experience, especially when word comes back on how they are educating others about healthy land stewardship. Adults may go home and reevaluate their landscaping choices while children have seeds of knowledge to apply when they become property owners. If you would like to join the fun on future workdays, send an e-mail to me (greg@grsykes.com) requesting to be on the IMA volunteer list. Inquiries from teachers, professors, and scout leaders are welcomed.

Synthetic trash is also invading our watersheds. This year, Royal Lake hosted several Kayak Clean-Ups, where volunteers used their naturally-powered boats to remove water-accessible garbage. A big “thanks” goes to Ed Murawski for helping with this effort! For Kayak Clean-Up updates, ask me to include you on the notification list.

Even without a vessel, you can help the watershed by:

- picking up street trash including old, plastic-wrapped newspapers in the gutter
- joining a KPW Road Raiders workday (contact Tony Vellucci at ajvellucci@gmail.com for information)
- partaking in the semiannual Lake Clean-Up (contact Dawn Gunning at dawngunning@yahoo.com to be on her list)
- throw away garbage found within parks, especially around storm drains
- no dumping onto common lands, even if it's “only leaves”
- reduce or eliminate lawn chemical usage
- clean up pet waste and place it into a trash can

Fishermen, leave the fishing hole the same as you found it—taking any garbage with you. If you want to continue to catch fish, make sure they have a healthy place in which to live. Replace lead weights with tin; the weights get lost sooner or later, so let's keep toxic metals out of the waterway. Keep lead out of the regular trash; lead weights may be brought to the I-66 Transfer Station (aka “the landfill”) and deposited free of charge at the hazardous household waste facility.

With all of the various environmental opportunities, there must be at least one that fits into your lifestyle. Please consider helping the ecosystem, getting a workout, and meeting new friends all at the same time. Looking forward to seeing you in the field!

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