

Kindly Ask First

By Greg Sykes (greg@grsykes.com)

In the past were incidents where people decided to take action on parkland without asking the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) first. The most recent episode was this summer, at the park entrance near the Gainsborough Drive and Claridge Court intersection. Over the years, Invasive Management Area (IMA) volunteers cleaned and restored sections of this area. The last section had a bit of [Japanese honeysuckle](#), [Amur honeysuckle](#), [wintercreeper](#), and [English ivy](#), which volunteers pulled while preserving native vegetation. This summer, someone(s) ripped out expanses of the native Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*) and bits of poison ivy (*Toxicodendron radicans*), arranged fallen timbers perpendicular to the slope, and left the non-native invasive species! These unauthorized and antiquated actions are extremely counterproductive to FCPA and IMA volunteer efforts. As an immediate erosion control measure, volunteers spread annual rye grass and forest plant seed mix in this area.



Figure 1. By late summer, Virginia creeper's five leaflets may be difficult to discern after it served as a food source. This grazing helps to naturally control the vine's growth.

IMA volunteers worked slowly in this erosion-prone area to minimize soil disturbance near the storm drain outfall. Virginia creeper and poison ivy in woodlands help retain soil and prevent erosion. Virginia creeper leaves feed an assortment of animals, from sphinx moth caterpillars to deer; better that deer eat fast-growing Virginia creeper than more sensitive plants! In the forest, animals naturally prune this vine so it rarely threatens to choke other plants. Scores of bird species gulp down Virginia creeper's berries. Learn more about this important plant here:

http://www.fcps.edu/islandcreekes/ecology/virginia_creeper.htm

http://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/pg_pagu2.pdf

http://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=PAQU2

Poison ivy misunderstandings were addressed in the March 2008 article and follow-up interview:

What About Poison Ivy? http://www.grsykes.com/pdf/eco-articles/06b_2008-03.pdf

Ochs, Carol. 2008 (Fall). This poison in a park is good for wildlife. *ResOURces* 8(4):6.

<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/parks/resource-management/Downloads/ResOURcesfa08.pdf>

Learning about FCPA's stewardship (August 2009):

SPECIAL EDITION: Park Land Management http://www.grsykes.com/pdf/eco-articles/16_2009-08.pdf

Nature and land management education (January 2010):

Getting To Know the Natural World http://www.grsykes.com/pdf/eco-articles/20a_2010-01.pdf

We are always looking for volunteers to help with existing projects or to become a site leader on a specific mission. As recruiting invitations frequent *The Herald's* pages, this March 2011 article summarizes some of the activities:

Volunteers Needed In Local Park Projects http://www.grsykes.com/pdf/eco-articles/27a_2011-03.pdf

If you would like to know about future IMA workdays at Royal Lake Park, send an e-mail to me at greg@grsykes.com. To become an IMA site leader on FCPA land, even for a small patch of weeds, please contact Erin Stocksclaeder at Erin.Stocksclaeder@fairfaxcounty.gov. To get involved in KPW

Parks & Lakes clean up and trail repair days, ask Dawn Gunning (park@kpwca.org). For maintenance and other park-related projects, please write to park manager Ed Richardson (Ed.Richardson@fairfaxcounty.gov) with your inquiries. If you see a potential project, please ask before acting. We are always looking for responsible partners.

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