

IMA's 2013 Restoration Progress

By Greg Sykes (greg@grsykes.com)

Throughout 2013, Invasive Management Area (IMA) volunteers' theme at and around Royal Lake was "Stop the Spread." Several workdays along Shanes Creek sought and eradicated pockets of non-native invasive weeds before they could take over the area. Earning his Eagle Scout badge, Bobby Eaton (Troop 698) spent several IMA workdays training to be a site leader. Then, he directed an enormous workday behind Windsor Hills Drive, which involved clearing an expansive [English ivy](#) (*Hedera helix*) patch and a [winged burning bush](#) (*Euonymus alatus*) grove. Subsequent monitoring sessions removed bits of regrowth from either snapped roots or a germinating seed bank. Teasing out root pieces is more tedious and less glorious than running a site's first wave purge, but it prevents the problem plants from repopulating the plot. Usually, English ivy sites require a couple of years of patrolling before fully ridding this target species.

April's successful [garlic mustard](#) (*Alliaria petiolata*) removal event covered more area than ever! Student volunteers teamed with an AmeriCorps group. Although the seeds may survive for over 10 years, this weed had a decreased population compared to previous seasons thanks to volunteers who, over the years, participated in previous garlic mustard IMA workdays.

Summer and fall found IMA volunteers at Lakeside and Royal Lake Parks controlling exotic invasive seed machines such as [oriental bittersweet](#) (*Celastrus orbiculatus*, profiled in the [previous edition](#)), bitter orange (*Poncirus trifoliata*), [Japanese honeysuckle](#) (*Lonicera japonica*), [multiflora rose](#) (*Rosa multiflora*), winged burning bush, and [porcelain-berry](#) (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*). The work here helps to stem the targets' spread elsewhere. During this time, we helped train Gary Krauss of neighboring subdevelopment Olde Forge - Surrey Square to be an IMA site leader for local parks in his neck of the woods.

By mid-autumn, IMA volunteers planted 439 native specimens at different sites along Shanes Creek including the Eagle Scout project's plot. Most of these natives were plants rescued before the bulldozers arrived at the Crooked Creek Park stream restoration project. The "Stop the Spread" campaign rounded off the year when volunteers removed mature multiflora rose and Japanese honeysuckle growing on the main peninsula between Royal Lake and the path near the boat ramp.

Park visitors might have trouble recognizing restored areas, just as they would find difficulty in spotting a cured patient after recovering from a disease. Figure 1 depicts "before" and "after" images of one such locality. IMA volunteers and Fairfax County Park Authority staff partner together like a trained medical team. The invasive plants—a malignancy to forests—are identified and surgically removed while leaving native species in place to help the ecosystem mend. A scalpel's cut might appear gory, needs stitching, and requires time to heal; IMA sites may look disrupted, need replanting, and also time to heal, although the forests' full recovery may span decades to centuries. Fortunately, all we need to do for woodland health is keep invasive species out of the plot, "suture" the soil with native plantings (if needed), and let nature take its course without any other human disturbances. Sometimes, the native transplants do not survive due to relocation or environmental stresses, water deficits, underlying geology, predation, and the like. As any recovery is subject to setbacks, natural habitat repopulation is IMA's ultimate goal. Little bits of effort go a long way!

If you would like to join us for a Royal Lake IMA workday, please send an e-mail to greg@grsykes.com asking to be added to the volunteer list. Would you like to be a site leader of a weedy parkland patch near you? Contact Erin Stocksclaeder [Erin.Stocksclaeder@fairfaxcounty.gov, (703) 324-8681] about it. Write an e-mail to Erin or me for ideas if you or a scout you know needs a project. While scouts often want to build something for merit badges, please consider an IMA project, which has an existing support structure, benefits people and the environment, and flourishes with lasting impact.



Figure 1. Before the restoration work (A), English ivy choked this site at Royal Lake Park, near the Grassy Knoll entrance by the Gainsborough Drive and Claridge Court intersection. Two and a half years after Girl Scout Amelia Malone earned her Silver Award by leading workdays to remove the ivy and replant with native species, this site is healing into a diverse fern gully (B). Among the species pictured are asters, common violets (*Viola sororia*), jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*), golden goundsel (*Packera aurea*), Christmas fern (*Polystichum acrostichoides*), and ladyfern (*Athyrium filix-femina*).

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