

## Wavyleaf Basketgrass Update

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In *The Herald's* September 2012 edition, we learned about a new, emerging threat to Fairfax County's woodlands: [wavyleaf basketgrass](#) (*Oplismenus hirtellus* ssp. *undulatifolius*). Since that publication, new patches surfaced in Long Branch Stream Valley Park (LBSVP)—the neighboring park northeast of the Royal Lake basin. Although LBSVP is part of the Accotink watershed, news of this Eurasian weed's spread one mile away from KPW is troubling. Its extremely sticky seeds (see Figure 1) are most likely the way that this plant gains ground. The exact vehicle distributing the seeds is unclear but could include human foot traffic brushing against the seeds, birds coincidentally landing near a patch and contacting the seeds, or traveling deer or other large mammals and accidentally picking up seeds along the way. According to Erin Stocksclaeder, naturalist for the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA), rodents rustling through the forest floor locally disperse seeds; new patches sprout along fallen logs and other features attractive to small critters. However, mice certainly are not to blame for this weed's escape from Fraser Preserve. Carrie Wu at the University of Richmond is finding answers to other questions surrounding wavyleaf basketgrass, such as how long the stickiness lasts and the seeds' longevity in the soil.

Within Fairfax County parks, monitoring for wavyleaf basketgrass falls under the Early Detection and Rapid Response (EDRR) program. Once spotted by a team of trained biologists or volunteers, GPS coordinates of patches (like the one at LBSVP) are sent to FCPA. Then, in the early growing season, contractors spray glyphosate-based herbicides onto designated targets. If a patch goes untreated or is discovered too late and seeds form, people are asked to stay away from the site to prevent spreading this grass.

Some folks who have grown up with other foreign, weedy species find the whole “non-native invasiveness” concept esoteric. They try to justify inaction to remove the plant by commonly saying, “It's been here for as long as I remember,” “But it's so pretty so it must be OK,” “It's only a few plants so there's no harm,” or, “It has already naturalized and here to stay, anyway.” These sentiments are far from the truth for other invasive alien species such as English ivy or oriental bittersweet. However, none of these excuses even apply to wavyleaf basketgrass. Right now, wavyleaf basketgrass is actively invading Fairfax County. Together, we can stop this clear and present danger in its infancy. Here are some general ways you can help curtail non-native invasive weed expansion:

- Stay on the trails to reduce inadvertently contacting and spreading the seeds.
- Always walk your pets on a leash so they do not wander into patches, either. Dogs are a possible vector for spreading seeds into different parks and forests.



**Figure 1. Many seeds that cling to passing animals do so through tiny hooks, which inspired Velcro's invention. Instead of hooks, wavyleaf basketgrass seeds adhere to and are distributed by animals via incredibly sticky goo—reminiscent of the sundew secretions which snare insects. The magnified inset shows droplets backlit by sunlight. Photographed in mid-November 2014 at LBSVP by Greg Sykes.**

- Never dump yard debris or anything else into parklands, which, among other problems, introduces exotic seeds into natural areas.
- Participate in an Invasive Management Area (IMA) workday. Find out more about Royal Lake's program and how to join a workday here: <http://www.grsykes.com/ima/>

Ways you can specifically fight wavyleaf basketgrass:

- Recognize it and distinguish it from similar-looking species. The original article posted at [www.grsykes.com/pdf/eco-articles/38\\_2012-09.pdf](http://www.grsykes.com/pdf/eco-articles/38_2012-09.pdf) has different life-stage photographs and references.
- Keep out of known wavyleaf basketgrass infestations while it fruits (July through the first several hard frosts).
- If you encounter wavyleaf basketgrass in Fairfax County, report it to FCPA naturalist Erin Stocksclaeder ([Erin.Stocksclaeder@fairfaxcounty.gov](mailto:Erin.Stocksclaeder@fairfaxcounty.gov) or 703-324-8681).
- Document sightings of it *anywhere* with your Droid or iPhone. Towson University offers an app for mobile devices; learn more about this project and additional wavyleaf basketgrass identification tips here: <http://heron.towson.edu/wavyleaf/home/>

Thank you in advance for your help!

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