

IMA Program at Royal Lake Gaining Even More Volunteers

By Greg Sykes (greg@grsykes.com)

Recent months saw a huge uptick in volunteer participation at Royal Lake Park's Invasive Management Area (IMA) sites! Non-native invasive weed-pulling workdays were held throughout 2014, including [oriental bittersweet](#) eradication at both several newly discovered localities and nailing any re-emergences at previously attacked sites. [Multiflora rose](#), [winged burning bush](#), and honeysuckles were among other targeted species, in addition to the garlic mustard removal held each spring along Shane's Creek. Also by Shane's Creek, deputy IMA site leader Diana Shannon led her family on an annual summer workday pulling [Japanese stiltgrass](#). The 2014 tallies: nearly 100 volunteers spent 351 hours patrolling and removing 89 bags of weeds from Royal Lake Park and adjoining parklands! Great job!

Over the years, I have said that if you can round up at least six volunteers, we can coordinate a habitat restoration workday. Lauri Snider accepted that offer and contacted me about hosting a session for members at St. Stephen's United Methodist Church. For the Sunday morning of October 5, 2014, the pastors asked parishioners to volunteer and better the community; later that day, they would reconvene at church for prayers and a luncheon. Lauri graciously opened up her group's workday so announcements were sent to people of all denominations. As a result, we gained some loyal KPW helpers plus students needing service hours, rounding the total participant number to 14! Together, we put a sizable dent in a huge [periwinkle](#) patch. Later that month, over 30 Lake Braddock High School AP Environmental Biology students answered the call, too! Diana and I split this large group into two smaller ones and coordinated our efforts to clear most of the remaining periwinkle. Crooked Creek Park benefited from the annual "De-Stress Before Christmas" workday—held on the Saturday before Christmas with a six-person minimum. This time, volunteers unleashed their holiday tensions on a colossal oriental bittersweet tangle. While this enormous patch requires more workdays before completion, the sandy soil and the weeds' moderate maturity here enables faster progress than a typical bittersweet site. If you would like to help on one of my future workdays, send an e-mail to greg@grsykes.com asking to be on the volunteer list.

I am excited to announce that Royal Lake now has another fully vetted IMA site leader! Last fall, Suzanne Doherty expressed interest in the habitat restoration work we do. She joined several IMA workdays, including typical sessions where we pull weeds at a specific plot. She also participated in a "search and destroy" patrol, where a small band of volunteers monitor previously cleared sites and scour the woods for newly emerging weeds. Suzanne is a neighbor who has lived in the Lakepointe Townhomes community for 38 years. Her concerns for environmental issues naturally included wanting to help care for the local lake she loves. She joined IMA to "make a small contribution toward preserving the natural order of things in my small corner of the world." Although recently retired, this life-long avid gardener runs a townhouse landscape design company, Jewel Box Gardens by Suzanne <http://www.jewelboxgardensbysuzanne.com/>. Suzanne adds, "Work with the IMA seems a natural extension of that [gardening] interest in the sense of reversing some of the damage done by invasive species escaping from well-intentioned gardens and private back yards! I have already met some wonderful people and look forward to working with fellow volunteers." With training completed through the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) and County permits in hand, Suzanne is already leading work on [English ivy](#) removal on parkland between Lakeview Swimming Pool and the bridge over Rabbit Branch. As I am still a site leader and will continue IMA duties, Suzanne and I are equal partners in Royal Lake's stewardship. To join one of Suzanne's workdays or to hear when her future workdays will be, send an e-mail to her at jewelboxgardensbysuzanne@gmail.com.

The FCPA offers so many ways people can responsibly become involved at and around Royal Lake. You will learn far more working with the park system than you could ever imagine! A big "thank you" goes out to everyone who picks up and throws trash in the garbage cans. Remember that activity unauthorized by FCPA, including spraying herbicides and using power tools on parkland, is illegal. If you would like to become independently engaged in the parks or be a site leader, please contact FCPA naturalist Erin Stocksclaeder (Erin.Stocksclaeder@fairfaxcounty.gov or 703-324-8681). See you in the field!

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