

Eagle Scout Project Completed Supporting the IMA Program

By Greg Sykes (greg@grsykes.com)

Congratulations to Scott McDonald for completing a successful Eagle Scout project for the Invasive Management Area (IMA) program! On August 3, 2019, Scott led 11 recruits to eradicate invasive [multiflora rose](#) (*Rosa multiflora*) and [Japanese holly](#) (*Ilex crenata*). Other weeds found and pulled included [Amur honeysuckle](#) (*Lonicera maackii*) and [rose-of-Sharon](#) (*Hibiscus syriacus*). This site sat along the Shanes Creek trail but away from the imminent [stream restoration project](#). Knowing that the work ahead would be tough with predictably hot, humid weather, Scott started the workday at 7:00 a.m. and wrapped up by his noon deadline. The resulting 24 weed-filled bags were sent to the incinerator to prevent any developing seeds from spreading. In the larger scope, this restored area reduces habitat fragmentation by connecting the adjoining, healthy parkland sections. Subsequent monitoring conducted on all IMA sites, which are outside of the Eagle Scout Project's scope, will remove any weeds emerging from seed or residual root fragments.

To prepare for this project, Scott attended other IMA workdays. Some of them focused on eliminating the same species within his project's scope, in which he learned how to identify the targets, the best removal strategies, and how to distinguish the invasive from native plants. This process involved learning how to use cool tools like a Weed Wrench. This device came in especially handy during Scott's project because the searing, dry days preceding the project date baked the ground and the Weed Wrench was the most effective way to extract the roots from the hardened soil. Scott also participated in garlic mustard pulls, which is unlike any of the weeds he targeted. However, garlic mustard sessions require extensive hikes through the forest, so this workday helped him learn the logistics behind moving volunteers and supplies.



Figure 1. Before work, invasive weeds densely choked this site (A). Most of the foreground is multiflora rose. A massive Japanese holly appears on the right edge of this image. After five hours of hard work, Scott's team cleared most of the non-native targets from this plot (B). The native plants present, seen in the foreground and left undisturbed, will grow and help this habitat heal. Photos by Bob McDonald.

Are you a Boy or Girl Scout who needs a merit project? If so, I am happy to work with you! The best way to find out if an IMA workday is a good fit for you is to first participate in some of the workdays that I lead. After attending the workdays and if you like the IMA option, send an e-mail to me at greg@grsykes.com, letting me know you would like a project and deadlines to complete it. ***Always cc at least one parent or guardian in your communications with me!*** We will then check out potential sites with your parent(s) and/or scout leader and go from there. These sites are either untouched or underwent minimal IMA work, so you get the first, real stab at knocking out the targets! Scout work is covered under the Fairfax County Park Authority permits already issued to me, so I must be present during your workday. Many of the scouts loved doing IMA so much that they participated in subsequent workdays, even as young adults who long since completed their project! **Very important:** To have a successful IMA-based project, **you** must want to do this activity and decide for yourself that this is a project for you.

Once again, congrats to Scott for a terrific job and a well-earned Eagle Scout rank!

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