

IMA Site Leader for Rabbit Branch Park

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In 2013, the Fairfax County Park Authority opened Rabbit Branch Park off of Tapestry Drive. Rising like a phoenix from the ashes, this park is the former site of a defunct swimming pool. It was transformed into a [native meadow](#), featuring plants like Coreopsis, common milkweed, butterfly weed, [goldenrod](#), and little bluestem grass. Near the edges, oaks, American hollies, American sycamores, sweet gums, and other native trees were added to eventually create a woodland. Since an underground pipeline runs through this park, that easement will always remain a meadow because the utility companies want it free from tree roots. During these past six years, folks marveled at the natural beauty this little park offers.

Unfortunately, invasive species threaten Rabbit Branch Park, with [Bradford pears](#), [Amur honeysuckles](#), and [winged burning bush](#) being especially problematic. Some of these weeds germinated from the existing seed bank within the soil. Others spread from the neighboring HOA grounds and residential properties. Now is a critical time for someone to step up and become an Invasive Management Area (IMA) site leader for this park. Hitting these weeds at this stage, before they become bigger and churn out even more invasive seeds, will make all of the difference. IMA site leaders receive an easy training



Figure 1. Bradford pear saplings (*Pyrus calleryana*) line both the front (A, indicated with arrows) and back (B) of Rabbit Branch Park.

and permitting process before committing to at least three workdays at this site per year. Volunteers need to be 18 years old or better, in good health, and ready to learn! This job is for anyone caring about the local ecology, wanting to help the community, concerned about the broader environment, and/or would love a meaningful workout without gym fees. If you would like to become an IMA site leader or have further questions, please contact me at greg@grsykes.com. Remember, the “thanks” you hear from me is unimportant; the unheard gratitude from the wildlife and future generations matters most.



Figure 2. [Amur honeysuckle \(*Lonicera maackii*\)](#), a bush honeysuckle (A), is one of the major invasive plants threatening Rabbit Branch Park. This specimen has ripened berries that provide insufficient nutrition to native birds. Most native animals, such as insects, cannot digest its leaves. The dark green foliage in the bottom right background is [English ivy \(*Hedera helix*\)](#), another invasive menace. The line between invasive weeds, including Bradford pear saplings (B), and native habitat is especially stark in November after most natives lose their leaves. An advantage exploited by these weeds is keeping leaves late into autumn and sprouting new foliage in early spring, thereby enabling a longer photosynthetic period. [Japanese honeysuckle \(*Lonicera japonica*\)](#), the vining honeysuckle with which many people are familiar, is another noxious weed that keeps its foliage late into the year (C). The red berries belong to [multiflora rose \(*Rosa multiflora*\)](#), an IMA target that already lost most of its leaves. Each rosehip contains approximately 10 viable seeds capable of lasting at least 20 years in the soil before germinating.



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