

Invasive Exotics Affect Park Utilization

A recent article in the *Washington Post* (March 15, 2004) has aroused some local controversy concerning tree removal from Ossian Hall Park in Annandale, Fairfax County, Virginia. It seems the park has become rundown, overgrown and, hence, attractive to neighborhood gangs and others pursuing illicit activities. In an attempt to upgrade the park and make it more safe and attractive to residents, the Fairfax County Park Authority has proposed cutting down trees, perhaps hundreds of them, as part of a Master Plan Revision. The *Washington Post* article states, however, that overgrown underbrush is at the root of the problem of poor visibility and dangerous activity.

When a message on the topic was posted to the Native Plants East Listserve, it was picked up by Marc Imlay, board member of the Mid-Atlantic Exotic Pest Plant Council, vice president of the Maryland Native Plant Society, and chair of the Biodiversity and Habitat Stewardship Committee for the Maryland Chapter of the Sierra Club. He stated that, "I have many times been to areas not used by people simply because of the invasives. This included multiflora rose at Runnymede Park at Herndon (Virginia) before we cleared them on Earth Day. Several neighbors came up to us afterwards to personally thank us for allowing them to use the park again. (A joint VNPS/MNPS/Army National Guard project.) I have seen this with wineberry, tree of heaven and with porcelain berry, kudzu, honeysuckle and English ivy vines, separate or mixed together. It is plausible that identification and removal of the invasive vines and bush honeysuckle at Ossian Hall Park will clear the line of sight enough." The thread was continued when another member wrote to say, "Good point. Planting prickly natives that provide good cover for wildlife but not for humans (blackberry, raspberry, American holly, etc.) in strategic spots might also be worth considering." This was followed up by another member, who stat-

ed, "If there is a dense understory, it is probably 90%+ exotic invasives that shouldn't be there anyway. Ironically, cutting the trees may merely tend to worsen the invasives problem [by allowing more sunlight to penetrate from above]."

At present, the Master Plan Revision for Ossian Hall Park is still under review. The topic is an interesting one that bears further discussion. It also is full of

prospects for the development of volunteer projects, educational opportunities, community service, and more in parks everywhere. And we can add the concern for personal safety for ourselves and our families to the environmental concerns posed by exotic pest plants.

— KB, Ed.

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