



Celebrating Our Wetlands – May 2009

Wetlands provide unparalleled benefits to the ecological health of the natural landscape. Coastal wetlands are often the first line of defense against rising tides stemming from storm events. Both coastal *and* non-coastal wetlands provide nursery habitat for aquatic life, a vital step in the ecological food chain. Taking action to protect the health of our wetlands against encroachment from invasive species is of extraordinary importance. On May 12, 2009, as part of Earth Day activities and in association with American Wetlands Month, Goddard's Environmental Team coordinated a volunteer effort to remove many of the invasive plants threatening our wetland areas. Thanks to all the volunteers that gave their time to help make this activity a roaring success.



Invasive Plant Removal

Invasive plant species are a headache to both the home garden and the natural landscape. Because their growth is not suppressed by natural controls, as are native species, the invasives are able to overtake an ecosystem by outcompeting native species. How do these invasives get here in the first place? Invasive plants that often begin as horticultural prizes sometimes end up turning into a native nightmare. They can overgrow their space in a residential area and spread to

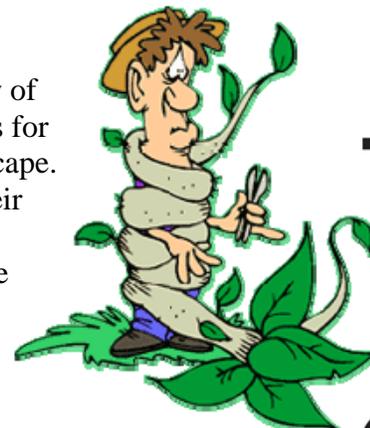
the surrounding landscape. Also, birds can eat and then deposit seeds throughout the surrounding landscape. These methods of seed dispersal allow invasives to spread among different areas of a landscape.

Threat Level: High

Invasives proliferate the landscape and disrupt the biodiversity of native ecosystems. Native insects that depend on native plants for food and cover suffer when invasive species take over a landscape. Many insects are plant specific, meaning they will only lay their eggs on specific plants. Likewise, certain animals rely on specific native plants for food or nesting material. If the native plants are no longer present, the insects and animals may disappear as well. By removing invasives, you are helping native species reclaim their habitat.

Specific Invaders

The culprits we specifically focused on were Japanese Stilt Grass (*Microstegium vimineum*), Mile-a-Minute Weed (*Polygonum perfoliatum*), and Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*). These specific plants have encroached into the wetland from surrounding areas.





THE LINEUP:



Mile-a-Minute Vine

Volunteers removed this trailing vine the old fashioned way, with elbow grease. These should be pulled as young vines to keep from spreading. If all the vines are not able to be pulled, cut the ends off and dip them into Roundup®. This will kill the plants from the ends down to the roots and stop them from spreading. Virginia Creeper, a native vine, will be able to colonize the area once Mile-a-Minute vines have loosened their grip. Be sure to wear sturdy gloves as the Mile-a-Minute vines have claw-like thorns.



Japanese Stiltgrass

Volunteers removed these plants by pulling as well. It is preferable to remove these plants in early spring before they go to seed. In large areas, Roundup® may be sprayed to eliminate the stiltgrass. Once the stiltgrass dies back, Water Smartweed (a native plant) will be able to colonize the area.



Common Reed

This tall sturdy plant needs to be cut down with hedge clippers. Common Reed plants grow quickly and crowd out native plants, most notably Cattails. By cutting the common reed down consistently, native plants have a fighting chance to emerge and take over.