



**RESTORATION ALONG BACKLICK RUN:
INVASIVES OUT, FOREST IN**

This spring, we launched a major expansion of our work in Wilburdale Park, in the Annandale section of Fairfax County. “We,” in this case, covers a lot of people, time, and talent. The Fairfax County Park Authority, which owns the park, “brush hogged” several invasive alien plant thickets—an essential preliminary to reintroducing native plants. (More on invasives below.) Professor Lisa Williams and her Northern Virginia Community College botany class invested several days in clearing invasives and planting. Students and staff from the GW Community School, our partner at Wilburdale since 2006, also did a formidable amount of chopping, yanking, and planting—as did the Sangha’s own volunteers. And the Virginia Department of Forestry supported the project with a grant.

Wilburdale Park is not exactly Great Falls, but it’s definitely worth all this effort. Wilburdale encloses 2,200 feet of Backlick Run, a badly degraded stream that drains about one-third of the 42-square-mile Cameron Run watershed. Wilburdale’s seven-acre forest is the largest remaining patch of woods along Backlick Run’s piedmont section, which accounts for about half of the stream’s seven-mile length. The forest is obviously important for its own sake, but it’s also important to the stream because it filters and absorbs large quantities of storm-water runoff. Frequent, high-volume doses of runoff are polluting and scouring out streams throughout the Washington suburbs.

Unfortunately, Wilburdale’s forest is itself in trouble, mostly because of invasive alien plants. Dense-growing invasive vines climb the trees, making them more likely to topple. Invasive shrubs and herbs (nonwoody plants) suppress their native counterparts, as well as the tree seedlings that the forest needs to renew itself.

We have been working in Wilburdale since 2002, clearing invasives and restoring the native forest. This spring, our Wilburdale coalition advanced that effort farther than it has ever gone in a single season, by clearing about an acre of invasives. (The clearing is in two sections, one of which is shown above.) Of course, the invasives will continue to resprout in the cleared areas, so we will have to keep after them for several more years. But the clearing knocked them down enough to start restoring native forest—and our volunteers planted about 700 native trees and shrubs in the cleared areas. The NOVA botany class also planted a “buffer strip” of trees and shrubs along the park’s lawn, where it meets the stream. Thanks to all our Wilburdale participants, the forest and the stream are growing into a healthier whole.

On line: For more on our work at Wilburdale, go to: <http://www.earthsangha.org/dca/sp.html>

Photos: Above, in April, after a thorough bout of invasive alien plant control, we reestablish forest in a section of Wilburdale Park, along Backlick Run. Below: Lake Braddock Environmental Science Teacher Maureen Goble at a planting in May.

Practicing What She Teaches

“Any time students are doing something, rather than just listening, there’s an opportunity to make important connections,” says Maureen Goble, Environmental Science Teacher at Fairfax County’s Lake Braddock Secondary School.

Maureen runs the Lake Braddock Environmental Science program, and she has been taking her classes out to our stream-buffer plantings ever since the plantings started in 2005. That’s a substantial investment of effort: The Lake Braddock program, now seven years old, has expanded steadily to its current enrollment of 270 students, and the buffer plantings have become the course’s primary service-learning component.

Maureen thinks that the plantings have a great deal to teach. “Many kids have never planted anything outside,” she says. But as they work, “They can look at the plant as they pull it out of the pot and see how tightly the roots hold onto soil and relate that to erosion. They can compare a vegetated area to one that is not. They can look around and actually see the things that we talk about in class.”

“It’s a different way of learning,” she says, “and I think they get a lot out of it.” The streams are getting a lot out of it too. Thus far, 11 patches of incipient forest, along various streams in Fairfax County, owe their existence to Maureen and her students!



IN GRATITUDE TO OUR MAJOR DONORS FOR 2007

We thank everyone who has given to the Sangha, in whatever form. We owe a special debt of gratitude to the following people and organizations, who made major donations to our work last year. The Sangha has drawn great strength from their generosity and vision. May the spirit of their gifts continue to live within our work and practice.

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We believe this list to be accurate and complete but would greatly appreciate any corrections.

EARTH SANGHA

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IN ACTION**

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Comprehensive program information is available on our web site: earthsangha.org.

Want to volunteer or meditate with us?

We work with volunteers at our nursery and our field sites in northern Virginia and DC. We hold regular sittings in Old Town, Alexandria, at 211 King Street, third floor, Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, 7:00-9:00. For more information on either volunteering or sitting, call Lisa Bright at (703) 764-4830.

The background photo, above, was taken in July 2008 and shows part of our Native Pollinator Garden at the Marie Butler Leven Preserve, the home of our Native Arboretum project. (See the next page.)

The Acorn

The *Acorn*, an occasional publication of the Earth Sangha, is created with "print on demand" technology, which consumes far less energy and materials than does conventional printing. This paper is 100% post-consumer waste recycled, process chlorine-free, and manufactured entirely with wind-generated electricity.

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RESTORING HABITAT AT MARIE BUTLER LEVEN

One of the DC region's biggest conservation problems is that many of our natural areas are no longer very "natural." Increasingly, they are being overrun by invasive alien plants, which are displacing native plants, along with many of the native animals that depend on them, and converting forest to thicket. There is no simple remedy; invasives-control is very hard work, and is complicated by the continual risk of reinvasion. Invasives-control is also a politician's nightmare: What elected official would want to spend huge amounts of public money on a chronic problem that does not lend itself to a clear solution, and that, despite its severity, is invisible to most taxpayers?

But predicaments like this are fertile ground for grass-roots activism. Sometimes amateurs can turn a problem on its head, by drawing on their greatest strengths: Cheap labor and idealism. You can see the results of that combination in the photo above, which shows our Restored Habitat Area at the Marie Butler Leven Preserve in McLean, Virginia.

Since 2004, the Preserve has been home to the Native Arboretum project, which the Sangha developed in collaboration with the Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA), the Preserve's owner. The project objective is to create an extensive collection of the local native flora. But our animating ideal—the vision that drives our work forward—is the hope of one day seeing the Preserve's 17-acre forest completely free of invasives. Invasives-control is an enormous undertaking—but at the Preserve, it has become an opportunity to rediscover the native forest.

On line: For more on the Native Arboretum project, go to: <http://www.earthsangha.org/dca/na.html>

Photo: Our Restored Habitat Area in July.

The Restored Habitat Area is a kind of window on that possibility. In April 2007, before we started work in this half-acre, it was a botanical zoo of creeping green crud. It was covered with English ivy (*Hedera helix*), Asiatic tear-thumb (*Polygonum perfoliatum*), porcelainberry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*), Japanese honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*), Japanese stiltgrass (*Microstegium vimineum*), and various other invasives. Now it's almost completely clear; there are virtually no invasives left in it. (Of course, we still have to weed it regularly but it is stabilizing.)

We are also achieving a fairly high level of control in several nearby plots. Over the course of the next year or so, the Restored Habitat Area and these other plots should coalesce into well over an acre of restored forest. You can see a map of our work areas on the Native Arboretum page of our web site.

Of course, we're doing more than just controlling invasives. We're conserving soils, preserving the valuable natives already growing in the Preserve, and we're reestablishing a full complement of native herbs, shrubs, and trees in the areas that we've cleared.

We're also building a community of people around the forest, and we are very grateful to all the forest volunteers who contributed so much time and effort to the Preserve this spring and summer. Many of them have come out repeatedly—and some now probably know the park better than the deer do! We would like to thank: Our volunteers from EPA and Georgetown University; the FCPA Invasives Management Area (IMA) interns; our own IMA leader, Alan Ford; our summer intern, Joe Hayes; our Diva Team (the expert spot-weeders working downslope from the Restored Habitat Area); and, of course, the Sangha's varied troop of indefatigable volunteers (you know who you are).

We hope to see everyone back out at the Preserve soon. Only 16 more acres of forest to go! Somewhere out there, there's at least a quarter of an acre with your name on it.

OUR WILD PLANT NURSERY GOES HIGH-TECH



Photos: Above, Nursery Manager Philip Latasa and Volunteer Valerie Nye organize the stock in a recently completed trough. Below, Valerie transplants while Volunteer Kris Unger (at right) places more stock.



Our Wild Plant Nursery is growing larger, more diverse, and more, well, technically refined. Our notion of “refinement” involves, for example, the troughs shown above. The troughs are about six feet wide and 70 feet long—and they hold a lot of plants. They’re lined with pond-liner, fitted with run-off valves, and there’s a thin layer of sand in the bottoms to act like a giant sponge. The troughs allow us to manage water very efficiently; they will also allow us, for the first time, to grow large quantities of wetland species.

We are making procedural refinements as well. We can now sprout more hard-to-handle species—for example, pinxterbloom azalea (*Rhododendron periclymenoides*) and mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*). We are growing more and more species that are rare or uncommon in local natural areas—for example, the herb purple milkweed (*Asclepias purpurascens*), the shrub Virginia sweetspire (*Itea virginiana*), and the trees red mulberry (*Morus rubra*) and hophornbeam (*Ostrya*

virginiana). And our volunteers now have considerable experience in caring for all our plants, rare or common. Our total species count now exceeds 150.

The nursery is also benefiting from a substantial infusion of botanical advice. Local natural-areas experts are helping both to guide our seed collecting (all our plants are grown from wild native-plant populations), and to direct the resulting production into areas where it will do the most good.

Our stock is used to revegetate many degraded places. But increasingly, some of the DC area’s best remaining natural areas are mapping themselves into our inventory. It’s almost as if those areas are reaching into the nursery, and through it, reaching out to a more stable future.

On line: For more on the Wild Plant Nursery, go to: <http://www.earthsangha.org/dca/wpn.html>