

Land Legacies

BLUE RIDGE FOOTHILLS CONSERVANCY

A Local Resource for Madison and Greene

Volume 18

Spring 2017

Invasive Plants on the Rise and on the Run in the Blue Ridge

Invasive plants are increasing exponentially up and down the East Coast and pose a genuine threat to our area's natural plant communities and wildlife.

BY SUSAN AUSTIN ROTH

On this mid-March day here in Greene County, Virginia, the temperature has reached an unseasonable 73 degrees. My partner, Jim Hurley, and I take advantage of the pleasant weather to climb the hilly path into our forest. For the past three years, we've worked diligently to control the non-native invasive plants on our land – 110 acres of forest and 46 acres of fields. We are also active members of the Blue Ridge PRISM (Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management), which is a program of the Shenandoah National Park Trust. The PRISM was founded in 2014 with the mission of reducing the impact of invasive plants in communities along the northern Blue Ridge. Jim will be speaking about invasive plants and the PRISM at The Greene County Public Library at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, April 24.

I reflect upon our hard work as we bushwhack toward the Water Rocks, the intermittent, three-tiered, greenstone waterfall in one of the forested ravines on our land. Jim's planned and managed this endeavor to turn the parts of our land that are wrecked by invasives into a more natural habitat. We've made a serious dent by our dedicated weed-control efforts, which involve hiring contractors as well as employing our own sweat equity. Methods include totting into the forest 3-gallon backpack sprayers of herbicide to spot-spray stiltgrass and other herbaceous weeds; clipping the thorny stems of multiflora rose and wineberry near the ground and dabbing concentrated herbicide onto the fresh cuts (very taxing on the back!); and axing notches around tree trunks then spraying herbicide into the cuts. And a lot of hand-pulling where noxious invasives grow amongst desirable plants.

It's at the Water Rocks where we've worked the hardest at



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Native redbuds and tulip trees are the first native plants to return to this fallow field, however, invasive Japanese honeysuckle vines are suffocating and strangling them.

removal. As I hike toward the cliff, I poke my walking stick at the still-crisp, brown leaves on the forest floor. I'm seeking hepatica blossoms, the earliest of the spring wildflowers. Instead of finding the spotted, kidney-shaped leaves and purple or white blossoms of my favorite wildflower, the first signs of spring I note are petite green leaves festooning a few shrubs and vines and frilled rosettes of foliage standing above the leaf mold.

While hepatica flowers blooming atop their furry stalks would delight me, this rush of spring foliage dismays me. It is unwelcome and unnatural. This is because almost all plants that leaf out this early don't belong here – they are nonnative invasives and they represent plants that escaped us last season. These bullies of the plant world smother, strangle, and poison

INVASIVE SPECIES, CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



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Two miles of the banks of the Middle/Conway River looks like this – engulfed by a shroud of kudzu vines, which can grow as much as 50 feet a year.

native trees, shrubs, and wildflowers, as well as threaten timber stands, pastures, and hayfields. Without native plants for food and shelter, wildlife decline because their habitats are ruined. For the most part, animals and insects eat only native plants, so the nonnative invasive types grow unchecked by herbivory and spread rapidly. Leafing out earlier than native plants is another trick that nonnative invasive plants use to outcompete, and thus displace, the plants that belong in our natural plant communities.

As I scrutinize our land on this balmy March day, I note six species from the list of 90 nonnative invasive plants listed by The Virginia Department of Conservation & Recreation as threats to the state’s ecology. These six, which are easy to spot by their early leafing, are: Japanese honeysuckle, multiflora rose, garlic mustard, Chinese privet, wineberry, and chickweed. I also observe dried mats of Japanese stiltgrass, a few seedstalks of perilla mint, and the smooth bark and stout branches of tree-of-heaven. For several years now, Jim and I worked to reduce these nine species on land.

Although I observe these survivors, I feel heartened at how few there are. And I chortle out loud to see the dead Japanese honeysuckle vines that now form see-through curtains over the blackhaw viburnum, slippery elms, dogwoods, and redbuds that top the falls at the Water Rocks. When we first set out to work on them, these invasive vines formed such dense shrouds that the trees and shrubs they grew upon could barely be made

out underneath. Now the brittle vines crumble as I snap them off to reveal the trees’ unencumbered structures. In the fall we had snipped, and even sawed at, these vines and sprayed concentrated herbicide into the cut ends. The vines are now dead as doornails with no harm done to any nearby desirable plants.

I thank our lucky stars that we find no more wavyleaf grass, which we would recognize by its dried winter form. This fearsome, recently-arrived invader has the potential to blanket the forest floor and discourage all wildflowers and forest regeneration. Wavyleaf hails from the Caucasus and was first discovered near Baltimore, Maryland, in 1996. It is still a mystery how it got to Maryland. Wavyleaf was first noticed in Virginia in Shenandoah National Park in Rockingham County in 2005, and it now covers hundreds of acres of forest floor in the park. As of January 2017, wavyleaf is known to be in 15 Virginia counties: Albemarle, Arlington, Augusta, Clarke, Culpeper, Fairfax, Fauquier, Greene, Page, Madison, Nelson, Rappahannock, Rockingham, Spotsylvania and Warren and has been reported in Pennsylvania and West Virginia. Jim and I found four small patches on our property last year, their sticky seeds probably carried here from the park by deer or bear. We live in fear that more is inevitably on the way.

Be forewarned: kudzu, the exotic vine known by the nickname “the vine that ate the South” is here in Greene and Madison. This invasive is obliterating two miles of trees along the shores of the Middle/Conway River in Greene and Madison. Jim happened to spot it growing in two places in Greene along Swift Run last fall. Kudzu and wavyleaf assuredly infest more locations than these, probably growing with abandon, yet unrecognized or unnoticed by landowners.

If you are concerned about invasives on your land or in our parks, you can find more information and event announcements at the PRISM’s website www.blueridgeprism.org. There you’ll be able to download factsheets on identifying and controlling the Terrible Twelve Invasives in this area. The PRISM may even be able to help defray the cost of controlling invasives on your property. In January 2016, the PRISM was awarded a substantial pool of funds to be administered over the course of three years through the NRCS EQIP program (Natural Resources Conservation Service/Environmental Quality Incentives Program.) These grants proved so popular that most of the funds are already assigned, but the PRISM is pursuing additional funding. You can go to the website to sign up for PRISM’s news updates and find out the latest about funding opportunities.

Susan Austin Roth is a writer and photographer specializing in gardening, landscape design, and Nature.

Lecture: Invasive Plants On Our Land

April 24, 7:00 - 8:30 pm

Greene County Library



Event Sponsored By:



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What can be done about plants like Tree of Heaven (Paradise Tree), Honeysuckle, Multiflora Rose, and Stiltgrass, spreading all over our properties? The answer is, plenty. Jim Hurley, who with Susan Roth has been managing invasive plants on their 156 acres at the base of Snow Mountain in Greene County, has had much success with this vexing problem.

Jim will cover some of the worst exotic plants in our region, how to identify and treat them, financial assistance for landowners, and the Blue Ridge Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM), a regional effort to reduce the impact of invasive plants in our area.

This event is free. Contact Carl Schmitt at chschmitt@firstnetva.com or 434-985-9815 for more info.

Photo credits: (left) Tree of Heaven by NatureServe, Flickr. (top right) Removing yellow flag iris by G. Peebles/USFWS. (bottom right) Japanese honeysuckle by cultivar413, Flickr.



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Conservation Score Card

As of the beginning of 2017, the total acreage under conservation easement stands at 16,365 acres in Madison, and 10,543 acres in Greene. In 2016 Madison gained 845 acres under easement.. Holding the easements are the Virginia Outdoors Foundation, the Virginia Department of Forestry, the Piedmont Environmental Council, the Natural Resource Conservation Service, and the Land Trust of Virginia, who co-holds easements with the Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy. This affords considerable diversity to landowners as to who may hold their easements.

Also noteworthy is that 13 Conservation Areas have been established, areas where neighbors have joined together to put their land under easement. By preserving areas much larger than a single property, they protect larger view sheds, contiguous farmland and forests, lands critical to wildlife habitat and watersheds essential to our drinking water. Being in a Conservation Area also can serve to enhance the property values of the Area’s landowners because of the local protection collectively afforded against future development. From the 2000 to the start of 2016, the number of Conservation Areas in both counties has gone from 0 to 13.

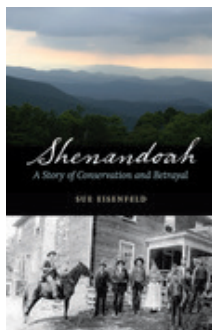
Conservation Easements from the start of 2000 to the end of 2016

	Land Under Easement	Number of Landowners	Percent of Private Land
Madison 2000	1,181 acres	5	0.7%
Madison 2016	16,365 acres	75	9.25%
Greene 2000	374 acres	3	0.5%
Greene 2016	10,543 acres	61	12.7%

BRFC Annual Meeting

During our Annual Meeting November 13th, the BRFC was pleased to honor eight landowners who placed their land in a conservancy easement during from last November. The landowners included Jim & Lougina Ballard, Cathy Horyn, Gordon & Faye Lohr, Algis & Mary Penkiunas, Bill & Lindy Sanford, Mike Long, James Douglas & Rachel Vere Nicoll, and Thomas Williams. Their contributions bring the total amount of land placed in easement since the inception of the BRFC to 16,365 in Madison and 10,543 in Greene. Stated President Carl Schmitt, "Being in Virginia, we have among the best tax benefits of any state in the Union for land conservation"

Also during our annual meeting, we were very pleased to have Sue Eisenfeld give us an insight into the land and people that were displaced for the creation of the Shenandoah National Park (SNP). Over 15 years, Ms. Eisenfeld and her husband, Neil, traversed the off-trail areas. During this process she uncovered stories of the residents of the land that were forced to relocate so that the SNP could be formed. It is a story of the conflict between conservation for the benefit of a nation versus private land ownership, a struggle that continues in our nation today.



Ms. Eisenfeld (above right) is the author of *Shenandoah, A Story of Conservation and Betrayal*. During her presentation she read excerpts from the book and later signed copies for our members.

Courtesy Pat Fitzgerald, Greene County Record.

Upcoming Events

APRIL 24, 2017

Presentation by Jim Hurley of the Blue Ridge PRISM (Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management), "Invasive Plants on our Land".
Greene County Library at 7:00 PM.

OCTOBER 10, 2017

Presentation: "The Life and Health of Native Brook Trout".
Greene County Library at 7:00 PM.

NOVEMBER 12, 2017

BRFC Annual Meeting. PVCC Eugene Giuseppe Center
Greene Co., Second Floor of Library Building in Stanardsville at 4:00 PM.



Left to right Jim and Lougina Ballard, Cathy Horyn and Carl Schmitt.
Photo: Courtesy Pat Fitzgerald, Greene County Record.

President's Message

I have noted a shift in the meaning of a particular word, "bi-partisan". The dictionary says it is an adjective "consisting of or supported by members of two parties, especially two major political parties". In our current political environment, it is my observation that the word "by-partisan" has generally come to mean a tag line indicating an issue so polarized that two major political parties cannot come to agreement.

There is, however, one area where the use of the word remains fitting, and that is in land conservation law. Starting over one hundred years ago, federal and state laws promoting land conservation have been enacted with strong bi-partisan support. One example is the action in 2015 when Congress permanently enacted expanded federal tax benefits for those placing a qualified conservation easement on their property. Another is in this year's Virginia Assembly, where a bill introduced to lessen the Virginia tax credit benefits was soundly rejected in subcommittee and never made it to the Assembly for a vote. In land conservation, what is reflected in legislative bi-partisanship is the direct result of strong public support.

I hope you find the lead-off article by Susan Roth of PRISM insightful concerning the significant problem of invasive plants in our area. Please join us for the April 24th presentation by Jim Hurley for a more in-depth look at these uninvited intruders on our landscape.

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Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy, Inc.
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Hood, VA 22723

It is the mission of the Blue Ridge Foothills Conservancy to help facilitate an effective partnership between all of the various conservation groups and willing landowners who desire to make a commitment today for the benefit of future generations.

www.BlueRidgeFoothillsConservancy.org | Email: TheLegacyoftheLand@gmail.com
Telephone: (540) 948-5444

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If you wish to receive your newsletter by email, please let us know at TheLegacyoftheLand@gmail.com

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