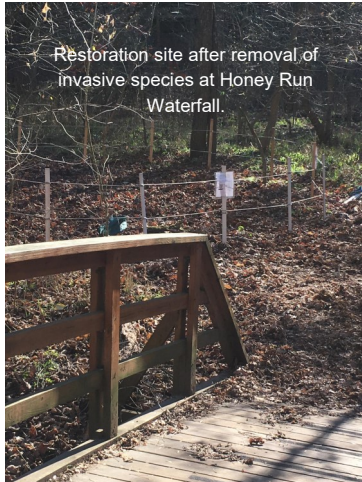


FRIENDS OF THE WOODS

December/January



Invasive Species

The purpose of our newsletter is to raise awareness of invasive species and the harm they can do to an environment. A group of volunteers known as “Friends of the Woods” have begun to make improvements to the Honey Run Waterfall area by implementing a restoration area within the park. The volunteers have been removing invasive plant species such as garlic mustard, multiflora rose, poison hemlock and barberry throughout the Knox County Parks. This project at Honey Run Waterfall is just the beginning of restoration areas in the parks. Invasive plants make it very difficult for native plants to flourish. Honey Run Waterfall is a fragile ecosystem (a community of plants and animals) and requires careful stewardship. The volunteer group hopes this task will allow space for native plants to continue to thrive in the Park.

Can you spot a Plant Invader?

By: Susan Hagan

There are invaders in the Knox County parks, and they go by many names: Amur honeysuckle. Garlic mustard. Multiflora rose. Barberry. Some do not seem very scary, and many even look and smell kind of pretty. But they are wreaking havoc, and Ohio’s native plants are the victims.

Many invasive species have moved into the state – plants, insects, and others. Most Ohioans know about some of the insects, including the emerald ash borer, which has destroyed the ash forests of Ohio. The destruction is pretty dramatic.

Damage done by invasive plants is more subtle. They do not wipe out big trees seemingly overnight. But, in a fight for sunshine and nourishment, these fast-spreading and hardy plants crowd out more desirable plants, and in doing so can potentially change the local ecosystem.

Let’s say a plant that serves as host to a particular insect is crowded out, and that insect no longer has a source of food. Maybe that insect is a pollinator for a specific flowering plant. Now that plant is not pollinated and it, too, disappears from the area. Maybe an animal needed that second plant for its winter food – a source now lost to it. So, the animal moves on as well. The delicate balance of life, developed over thousands of years of evolution, is disrupted by an interloper.

This past year, a small group of volunteers for the Knox County Park District started tackling the plant invaders. We began by pulling garlic mustard out by the roots at Honey Run Waterfall, Zuck Riparian Preserve and Wolf Run Regional Park.

As the seasons wore on, hundreds of multiflora rose shrubs and barberry were uprooted or cut down to the ground in the woodland areas at Honey Run Highlands Park, Honey Run Waterfall, and Wolf Run. If you walk through these parks now, you will see dozens of brush piles back off the trails, filled with multiflora rose and barberry remnants.

The trails – rather than being hemmed in by thickets of invasive shrubs – are now wide open and surrounded by cleared forest floor with room next spring for woodland wildflowers and other native plants. Already, we have discovered the presence of ferns and vernal ephemeral plants, and have opened up areas for small native trees.

The volunteers (usually four or five of us at a time) concentrated mostly on ecologically sensitive areas and trail edges. We had to refrain from pushing deeper and deeper into the parks, knowing that we could only impact small sections of the parks at a time.

But we couldn’t help but think how much could be accomplished with 50 volunteers, rather than eight or so. That’s the hope for the future, when COVID-19 is behind us, or at least better managed, and groups can gather together for the betterment of the park district.

Please watch the Knox County Park District website and social media for a post focusing on restoration work planned for Honey Run Waterfall. It will be followed by articles in the coming months that will discuss specific invasive plants, such as autumn olive, multiflora rose, poison hemlock, and others, and what you can do to help remove them from some of the most beautiful and botanically diverse areas of the county.

(Pictured left is Garlic Mustard and right Multiflora Rose.)

