

Stewardship Network Notes

16 Aug 07

New Center

The Stewardship Network meets the second Tuesday of the month at Bruegger's Bagels on North University, UM--Ann Arbor Campus, from 7:30 to 8:30 AM. The same topic is repeated on the third Thursday of the month at The Nonprofit Enterprise at Work (NEW) Center, 1100 N. Main, Ann Arbor, from 12:00 to 1:00 PM.

Topic: What is a natural area?

Jacqueline Courteau, Ecologist, Huron River Valley Watershed Council

Matt Heumann, retired County naturalist, consultant, and owner-manager of Braeburn Marsh Preserve and Cottage Gardens

Definition of a natural area is one which retains the character of presettlement vegetation, and comprises a large enough area to be viable.

Assessing a natural area for land use or preservation purposes, look for:

--species composition

*quality of diversity of species, not just an isolated rare plant

*what is coming up; does it indicate stability or succession of species

*highest value natural areas contain diversity of habitats as well as species. A very large natural area may contain large disturbed areas, while a small urban single-habitat natural area may be free of invasives.

--size/viability of the area: Different habitats required different size areas to maintain viability. A prairie can be viable in a small area where competition is controlled, as by fire along a railroad track; while a viable woodland needs a larger area because the edge effect--encroachment of farming, development, or other habitat--can be extensive.

--imminent threats: likelihood of development, presence of invasives, current land use, run-off from adjacent development or industry, or the "fort problem," that is, the tendency of neighboring kids to play there, neighbors to build illegal gardens there, or any unauthorized encroachment.

Destruction and restoration of natural areas

--agricultural plowing and herbicides reduce the native seed bank to next to nothing; corn and wheat fields are easier to restore than hay grass fields.

--roadsides are impossible to restore. The county road commission spreads seeds of invasives every time it plows or builds; all passing vehicles do the same to a smaller extent. Old roads have a non-native seed bank that has been built over centuries. Even deer paths have this effect.

--some of the worst invasives

*garlic mustard--10 years of seed bank make it impossible to remove. When the

infestation is younger, treat the individual rosettes in early April (Heumann believes that pulling only spreads the seeds; others prefer pulling to chemicals.)

*purple vetch cannot be pulled

*yarrow and phragmites both have nonnative genotypes that act invasive

*knapweed and garlic mustard are both alleopathic, changing soil chemistry to favor themselves vs the natives; apparently no woody alleopaths

--conclusion: the more natives present at any site, the greater is the likelihood of other natives' responding to restoration efforts on the site.

References:

Michigan Natural Features Inventory gives the species composition of various habitats.

<http://web4.msue.msu.edu/mnfi/>