

Stewardship Network

Notes 14 October 2008

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.

Topic: Co-Existing With Deer

Attendees: Jason Frenzel (NAP Volunteer Coordinator), Tina Roselle (Ann Arbor Adopt-a-Park), Scott, Tyrrell (South Michigan Land Conservancy Volunteer & Stewardship Coordinator), Yen-Chu Weng (Masters Student, U Madison), Diane Macaulay (volunteer/landowner), Tom O'Dowd (SNRE/volunteer), Maggie Allan (Atwell-Hicks), Jim Mohr (YMCA Camps), Jim Rogers (volunteer).

Problem: Deer eat plants from restoration, mitigation, gardening projects and rare/important plants (i.e. trillium). Deer can stand/jump high (above our heads). People feed deer, and deer management techniques have set up deer habitats/feed stands to increase the herd (e.g. cutting all trees but poplars which they love). Certain methods of feeding deer have spread deer diseases. Excess deer from north have been (re?)-invading S-E MI (evidence?). Deer live in hiding places (trees in highway belt, parks, etc.). On some places in S. MI “deer were laying in the garlic mustard not eating it, even though they were mangy, half-starved, and docile.” If we could only teach them! Once deer know where a safe habitat is they go and come back often (safe = from hunters).

Solutions:

Predators: Cougars and wolves (hahaha). Coyotes (serious—they do most of the population management of deer in MI, besides cars). Train border collies/etc.?

Exclosures/fences: to protect plants on the inside (must be super tall). Expensive? Hudson Mills deer enclosures: tall, covered with black netting, topped with barbed wire.

Hunting/“Culling”: issue near cities/towns, but do-able. [Example of the Huron Metropark: 1) survey deer by helicopter, 2) set a sustainability goal, 3a) pick hunters through a lottery (hard to be fair this way), 3b) Rangers trained as sharp-shooters (with quiet or silenced guns!) get permission to hunt at night (4AM lull time?) with a spot light]. Other cities do night-culling too (parks closed, presumably people back at home), but need trained/insured marksmen. Luckily there's a demand for hunting in S-E MI. Some programs donate culled deer meat to local food shelters. One option is to close the park for 1-2 days and day-cull.

Education/Inclusion of the public: Teaching people about deer management strategy through signage? Visitors either 1) already know about what's going on, or 2) think everything is already pretty and fine the way it is.

Ask the experts: Ask the TNC for help. Ask the Washtenaw County Conservation District. Oakland County Parks had an online web session on deer management with the Stewardship Network.

Deer Control Alliance of diverse groups: Create it to have coordination between highway safety, gardeners/nurseries, ecologists, farmers, botanical societies, NAP - groups should work together.

Other Ideas: “Deer safe” labels on nursery plants. (???) Select for deer that eat invasives? Seeing Deer for some is there “wow” moment in nature. Birth Control for deer? (serious—DNR conducted studies→outcry from hunters; other animals eating the poison. Tree collars expensive.

Invasive Species Surprise Topic!

What would an invasive species forest look like? Absence of plants/animals, less diversity, more of the common critters (squirrels, blue jays, raccoons).

How does buckthorn grow in its native Asia (in Europe, our native red oak is invasive!!).

Garlic Mustard bio-control testing is well underway. Once you let that cat out of the bag though... However, the Purple loosestrife-eating beetles have not caused additional concerns (like the cane toads in Australia once did). Is Spotted Knapweed-research being done??? Federal and land-grants groups study biocontrol.

Ethanol plant in the UP, what are the Invasive Species Implications?

Next time: Winter Restoration. Thanks to Bob Grese for recruiting Tom. These note may go up on web soon. Thanks to all for sharing your time/experience.