

## **Volunteers In Action**

### **Volunteers and Invasive Plants at Chesapeake Marshlands National Wildlife Refuge Complex**

#### **Rachel Cliche, Invasive Species Specialist:**

The Chesapeake Marshlands National Wildlife Refuge Complex encompasses a variety of refuges along the eastern shore of Maryland. These refuges were set aside specifically to provide habitat for migratory waterfowl, such as, black ducks, mallards, snow geese and tundra swans.

Our invasive species management goal is to restore native plant communities to refuge habitats that meet refuge objectives, such as, provide food for waterfowl, provide habitat for any endangered species that we might have on the refuges, such as bald eagles and the Delmarva fox squirrel.

If these invasive plants are not managed then we fear that it may very well impact the habitats which these threatened and endangered species rely on.

We prioritize our invasive species management based on various criteria. These include, one, how aggressive the invasive plant is and how hard it is to manage.

Two, where the invasive species is located. For instance, if it is in our impoundments like purple loosestrife and pragmatism then that specific plant—those specific plants—are going to be our priority because they are in an area that is highly managed.

And three, the number of acres. The lower the acres, the higher the priority. And this is due to the fact that it takes less time, manpower and funding to manage that specific invasive area. And also we most likely will not need to go in there and do any site restoration because the native plants' seed banks should already be in the soil and the native plants should come in on their own.

Well, we have between twenty and twenty-five volunteers that assist us with invasive plant management throughout the complex and they assist us in a variety of ways. They GPS infestations which gives us the distribution and the acreages of the infestations of the invasive plants.

They also assist us with some mechanical control. For example, they will help us pull invasive plants or assist with mowing some invasive plants. They also assist us with monitoring. We have some vegetation plots and some photo points. And they also assist us with site restoration.

**Volunteers and Invasive Plants—Learning and Lending a Hand**

**Ben Bennington, Volunteer:**

What we are trying to do today was map mile-a-minute vine; map where it is before attempts are made to destroy it. And then year by year we go back we can map how it is growing and so on. And that way you can get a good idea of what works and what doesn't work.

I started by coming here just to walk and then ran into volunteers and realized I could volunteer as well and help keep it the way it is. Because that's the objective, I think, of all of us is to keep it the way it is. And keep it beautiful, because it is so beautiful.

What I get out of it is the satisfaction of feeling you're helping keep it the way it is, rather than helping destroy it. Kent County's a beautiful area and it's well preserved. And within it, I think Eastern Neck is the most beautifully preserved part of it. And it just must never be allowed to not be the way it is naturally.

I knew nothing about invasive plants until I came here. Another advantage is of learning things. And I didn't even know the names of the plants until Rachel, the project manager, trained us and taught us and then I began to see the difference between the invasives and the native plants. And begin to get a feel for why the native plants should be preserved. That's something I've learned and now understand so much better.

**Rachel Cliche, Invasive Species Specialist:**

Without the volunteers we definitely would not be able to do everything we have accomplished. We just don't have the staff to do it.

**Text:**

Over 38,000 volunteers dedicate almost 1.5 million hours of their time every year at refuges throughout the United States. Their contributions are making a difference in protecting wildlife and habitat.