

MAY 2015



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**Hello MPEA Friends & Volunteers!**

May has been a great month for the environmental area. Staff has been investing lots of hard work on several projects and this month is when everything came to fruition. A new meadow, the pilot goat project, and the volunteer Milkweed planting event occurred all in rapid succession. Please do make time to come out and visit this summer to enjoy the dividends of everybody's efforts.

**Fieldwork**

It is a good thing that we have had a few extra staff working this year. More people power allowed us to find and treat more Lesser celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*) than we have in any previous year. Thankfully the time period for treating this plant in 2015 has passed and we have moved onto other projects. We also performed more cut-stump treatments of Autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) around the property but the majority of it was focused on the areas for the goat grazing project and the volunteer Milkweed (*Asclepias sp.*) planting event. Next we will switch to treatments of invasive Wavyleaf basketgrass (*Oplismenus hirtellus ssp. undulatifolius*). If you are unfamiliar with Wavyleaf basketgrass you may like to know that we will be hosting a guest speaker to tell our volunteers about it. Tuesday morning, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, at 9 AM over at the South Wind Circle entrance Dr. Vanessa Beauchamp will be present to speak about her research and a citizen science project you can help with.

Not all of our time is spent removing unwanted plants. Volunteers have been assisting Davey Rogner with other tasks including the planting of the remainder of trees that the Howard County Forest Conservancy District Board purchased for us. Plus, there were many perennial plants installed in the environmental area that we received as a benefit of Davey's recent MPEA native plant sale. Thank you to everyone who bought plants for themselves which simultaneously supplied plants for us too!

Directly across from the outdoor classroom, work on creating the new meadow is completed for the time being. All of the trees which needed removal were taken down, the soil was prepped, and the seed mix was planted. The seed mixture contains several species which are good nectar sources for pollinators: Ox eye sunflower (*Heliopsis helianthoides*), Tall white beardtongue (*Penstemon digitalis*), Spotted beebalm (*Monarda punctata*), Wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*), and Heartleaf aster (*Aster cordifolius*). Of course there were a few grasses, some other wildflowers, and milkweeds in the mix too.

**Upcoming Projects**

There are two minor activities that you should know about. Of greater significance is the construction project to repair a stream bank alongside Cricket Creek and Trotter Road. Work should start as soon as schools let out for the summer. Our involvement is limited to providing



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## Upcoming Projects (cont'd)

a staging area for materials in the small meadow behind our shed. A few years ago we provided the same spot for storage and everything worked out well. The other, smaller scale, activity which will be taking place involves the Managed Hunt Program Volunteers who will be working on various tasks in the MPEA. Because this is not customarily the time visitors are used to seeing activity associated with the hunt it is prudent to let you know that the volunteers will be inspecting, maintaining, and perhaps relocating a few of their trails to and from their tree stand sites. Work usually occurs relatively early in the morning so it may even go unnoticed by most. What you may notice are slight changes to the bright yellow reflective markers which can be seen from the main trail system.

## Goats & Milkweeds

The last week of May was our busiest. The highly anticipated and talked about arrival of sixty goats took place. It remains to be seen how much foliage the four-legged visitors will consume before their departure in early June although we are going to have some help determining the answer. Two graduate students majoring in Conservation Biology and Sustainable Development at the University of Maryland College Park will be taking pre and post treatment measurements. After the goats are gone there will still be plenty of work to do to within the treatment area so you will certainly hear more about this later.

Late May also signaled the conclusion of our volunteer Master Gardeners' wonderful project to increase milkweed numbers within our meadows. Approximately 500 total plants of Butterflyweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*) and Common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) were grown and planted in addition to a smaller number of Swamp milkweeds (*Asclepias incarnata*) from the plant sale. Milkweeds are vital to the lifecycle of the Monarch (*Danaus plexippus*) butterfly and that is a reason why we plant them. Monarch populations were at an all time low in 2014 and everyone needs to pitch in and restore Monarch habitat if they want to assist in their long term survival. Here is an update on the Monarch population status from Monarch Watch:

<http://monarchwatch.org/blog/2015/05/06/monarch-population-status-23/>

I hope to see you out in the MPEA,

Jeff



Here is a photo of a Copes' gray treefrog (*Hyla chrysoscelis*). One must hear the call to properly identify this species from Gray treefrog (*Hyla versicolor*). A volunteer heard, found, and photographed this frog.



The Newsletter of the Middle  
Patuxent Environmental Area

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The Middle Patuxent Environmental Area (MPEA), established in 1996, is 1021 acres in size and contains a diversity of habitat types. There are upland and bottomland hardwood forest, fields, wetlands, ponds, and riparian (riverine) habitats. The primary components of the MPEA's mission are natural resource management, education, research and recreation. **Successfully delivering our mission depends on the efforts of volunteers such as you!**

We're on the Web!

<http://www.howardcountymd.gov/mpea.htm>

AND

[www.middlepatuxent.org](http://www.middlepatuxent.org)

## Conservation Stewardship Project

No experience necessary, one-time volunteers are welcome.

### MILKWEED PLANTING& BUTTERFLY TALK

May 26 / 9-11:30 AM/ Trotter Road Entrance

Come out this day to learn about the Monarch Waystation Program and help plant milkweeds, the sole food source (host plant) that Monarch caterpillars eat. Also, learn two easy things that you can do at home to help Monarchs! This event is one in a series about Monarch Butterflies that we have conducted over the past few years.

### BARBERRY & BASKETGRASS

June 23 / 9-11:30 AM/ South Wind Circle Trailhead

Non-native, invasive plants are a real threat to our ecosystems and our habitat restoration efforts. Come hear Dr. Vanessa Beauchamp, Assistant Professor of Biology at Towson University, speak about the ecology of Wavyleaf basketgrass, a relative newcomer and very challenging species, and a citizen-science initiative to map its current distribution. The remaining time is spent dealing with our nemesis, Japanese barberry.