The mission of Natural Area Preservation is to protect and restore Ann Arbor’s natural areas and to foster an environmental ethic within the community.
It is more difficult for non-native species to take over healthy, intact natural areas, but many of our natural areas are neither healthy nor intact because of fragmentation. As the human population of southeast Michigan has increased, we have developed much of the land, preserving only small, disconnected natural areas. This isolates plant and animal communities, leaving them especially vulnerable to changes in their environment. Larger, connected natural communities tend to be more stable and better able to withstand disruptions such as the introduction of non-native species.

How does NAP fulfill its mission?
Protection and Restoration
NAP staff and volunteers work to protect natural areas with high species diversity from degradation and to restore, or repair, severely disturbed natural areas, such as those that have been taken over by non-native plants. First, inventories are conducted to determine which species inhabit a natural area and to assess the overall health of the natural area. Based upon this information, NAP develops a plan outlining the stewardship activities necessary to protect or restore the site. Then the plan is put into action. Some stewardship activities, such as prescribed ecological burning, are used to mimic absent natural processes (in this case, wildfire). Other stewardship activities, such as manually removing invasive plants, do not mimic natural processes but still favor native species diversity by limiting competition to native plants. Monitoring is an ongoing part of any stewardship plan. NAP conducts annual inventories of breeding birds, salamanders, frogs, toads and now mud puppies, to monitor the effects of our stewardship activities on natural communities. NAP also uses photo-monitoring (taking periodic photographs from set points) to document changes in our natural areas over time.

Fostering an Environmental Ethic
NAP works to foster an environmental ethic within the community through public education and participation. Community involvement is an important component of the work done at NAP. Volunteers assist in most aspects of our programs. NAP also publishes a quarterly newsletter filled with information about Ann Arbor’s natural areas and issues which threaten them. We distribute fact sheets, such as this one about natural areas, and others about prescribed ecological burns, non-native species, wildlife, and volunteering. NAP staff often present displays about our natural areas at local festivals and workshops. We work with individuals, school groups, and community organizations doing hands-on restoration projects. Finally, NAP has developed 5 brochures about using native plants in landscaping, and a book, *Along the Huron*, about the natural communities along the Huron River Corridor.

How can I help?
Follow park regulations when you visit city natural areas. Dogs off leashes can damage sensitive vegetation and disturb wildlife. Biking off-trail can compact soil and cause serious erosion problems. Dumping yard waste into the parks will overload the natural system, disrupt restoration efforts, and may smother native plants. You can also help by landscaping your home with plants native to southeastern Michigan. Many non-native plants invading natural areas were originally planted in yards and gardens as ornamentals. Participate in NAP’s Volunteer Stewardship Workdays where we engage in restoration activities such as erosion control, seed collecting and sowing, and removing invasive, non-native plants from city parks. Volunteer for NAP’s breeding bird, salamander, or frog and toad inventory. All you need is a willingness to learn, desire to wander the parks, and keen observation skills. Join our prescribed burn crew. Burning is done in the spring and fall on weekday afternoons; training takes place in early March. Become a steward for your neighborhood park and organize your neighbors to help with restoration projects coordinated through NAP. Other volunteer projects, both long and short term, are available. Please call 734-794-6627 for more information.