

Natural Area Preservation News

Protecting and restoring Ann Arbor's natural areas and fostering an environmental ethic among its citizens.

Volume 14, Number 3

Autumn 2009

Park Focus: Ruthven Nature Area

by Jason Tallant

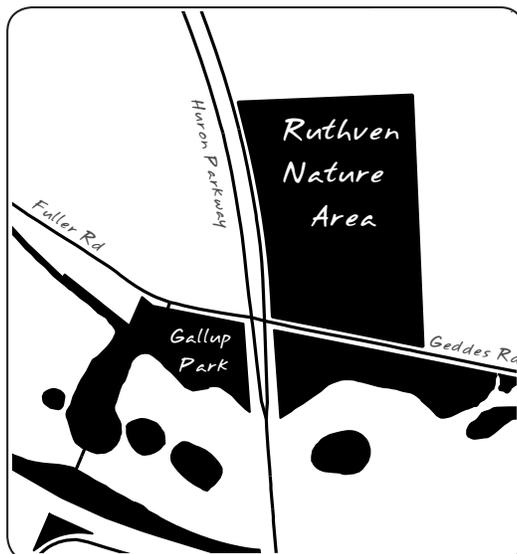
Rarely does a pristine wilderness or an experience of great success inform the perspective and inspire the actions of restoration practitioners. More often, they are experiences rooted in a sense of place. Actions of adversity, or prolonged toil, while swimming against the tide of insurmountable odds, can catalyze existential crisis in the minds of unsuspecting practitioners. Ruthven Nature Area offers a place and a set of experiences that challenge and inspire the re-visioning of long-harbored assumptions I've held about the process and meaning of ecological restoration.

Ruthven Nature Area - an upland forest, prairie, wetland, and stream complex - was purchased by the City of Ann Arbor as a park in 1966 from the Ruthven family. It has surprisingly remained unknown to many. A prominent glacial land formation exemplified at Ruthven is the kame. Located on the north east corner of Geddes Road and Huron Parkway, this conspicuous feature allows for the existence of complex ecological communities. Kames are irregularly shaped hills composed of sand, gravel, and glacial till. The establishment of vegetation on these well-drained soils is typically dictated by drought and resulting disturbances, like fire. Soils form a foundation upon which plant communities can develop. In the case of the Ruthven kame, sandy loam soils allow drought tolerate plant communities to exist adjacent to wetland systems perpetuated by disturbance of flooding and sedimentation. The geology and the resulting hydrology are a critical factor in the natural



Cedars at Ruthven Nature Area

selection of flora and fauna present at this nature area. Disturbance by fire or flood also shapes ecological communities. These disturbances, while potentially catastrophic to individual species, can recreate the conditions necessary to perpetuate the structure and function of the community.



Little enthusiasm was expressed for the restoration potential of the site when initial biological inventories were conducted in 1995. Other prairies and woodlands exhibited more obvious signs of remnant ecological communities, making it difficult to justify the management of a site like Ruthven. But some indicators are observable and some are not. What was not obvious at Ruthven was the resilience of the ecological community suppressed by invasive species and altered

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Coordinator's Corner

Shifting Perspectives

It was August 1994, I had been here at the newly created NAP for less than a year. I was trying to get us organized to do battle with all the nasty invasives that were taking over our city parks, and scrambling to learn as much as I could about the best way to kill each of these horrible plants. That's how I found myself in Lansing at the annual conference of the Society for Ecological Restoration. I had scoured the conference schedule for all the talks about controlling buckthorn, honeysuckle, garlic mustard, purple loosestrife, or other evil weeds. I was jotting down lots of notes about how to best apply the management tools of prescribed fire, mowing, herbicides, and hand-pulling to get rid of these pests.

Dashing between concurrent sessions, I had the good fortune to bump into Dr. Gerould (Jerry) Wilhelm, a pre-eminent botanist, then with the Morton Arboretum in Lisle, Illinois. Jerry had just finished coauthoring the monumental work, *Plants of the Chicago Region, 3rd edition*, which was the origin of the Floristic Quality Assessment System that NAP was employing to characterize the quality of our city's natural areas. So I certainly knew who Jerry was, although I'm not sure if I had met him before then. Perhaps I had, because Jerry and I had a brief but meaningful talk on this encounter, although Jerry is the kind of guy who will stop and have meaningful talks with anyone.

During this particular discussion, I was telling Jerry what I had just learned in a concurrent session about the best way to eradicate garlic mustard. After a few minutes, Jerry calmly put his hand on my shoulder and gently said, "You're missing the point, Dave. The point is not to kill the bad plants. The point is to restore the native ecosystems." He went on to explain more about why I needed a fundamental shift in my perspective. He wasn't talking as a scientist then, but as a spiritual leader. He patiently explained how focusing positive energy on restoring life to the native ecosystems of Ann Arbor is vitally different than focusing negative energy on killing "bad plants." Some of the steps along the way might be similar, but the entire process originates from a humble attitude of nurturing rather than an arrogant one of destroying.

I'm sure I stood there with my mouth open. Still reeling from the impact of Jerry's words, I think I tried to ask a few questions, pretending I had some grasp of what he was talking about. But my brain quickly filled up, and I think I shuffled off to a corner somewhere to ponder this revelation I had been given.

Of course, Jerry was dead-on in his message, and in his assessment of this greenhorn's misunderstanding of an important truth. I've since relayed this story to him, and thanked him for his wisdom. It was a fundamental shift for me personally, and for NAP's approach to ecological restoration.

- Dave Borneman, Manager



CITY OF ANN ARBOR Natural Area Preservation

A unit of the City of Ann Arbor
Public Services, Field Operations
*The mission of Natural Area
Preservation is to protect and restore
Ann Arbor's natural areas and to
foster an environmental ethic among
its citizens.*

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Adopt-A-Park is Growing!

by Tina Roselle

Adopt-a-Park (AAP) volunteers help out year round, but the capstone event is the spring kick-off held each year in May. Twelve parks participated this year. We planted six trees and countless perennials, and spread 41 cubic yards of trail woodchips, and 18 cubic yards of playground woodchips. At the end of the day, we were all exhausted but the parks looked beautiful! Adopt-a-Park now has over forty parks with adopters. On July 1st, the program expanded to include traffic islands and medians. Don't worry, there are still parks that need adopters!

This year we also put extra effort into celebrating Arbor Day, when AAP volunteers planted a total of 37 trees in five parks. Additionally, Arbor Brewing Company hosted the very first AAP fundraiser. A special Spruce Ale was brewed for the occasion, with one dollar donated to AAP for each mug sold. A big thank you to Arbor Brewing Company and all who came out to support the program!

The Adopt-a-Park Program was started in 2005. Administratively it is separate from NAP, with its own budget, but because staff share office and equipment, and sometimes work on projects in the same park, the distinction can be confusing.

Generally, if the work involves the mowed areas and playgrounds in the park it is AAP's, while restoration in park natural areas is NAP's. Adopt-a-Park volunteers



Park Adopters at Kilburn Park

usually focus on planting flower gardens and trees, and keeping the parks tidy. If you are interested in caring for a park or island, or want to join an existing group, email to: adopt-a-park@a2gov.org.

Park Focus: Ruthven Nature Area

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ecological processes. In my opinion, Ruthven has responded faster and better to management more than any other natural area that NAP has worked in. Areas once visually dominated by monocultures of woody invasive shrubs, now resemble open oak woodlands and prairies, with a profusion of native wildflowers and grasses. In addition, the recruitment of invasive plant species following initial management has been slow to non-existent. Ecologically it is not typical to see rates of 'positive' change paralleling rates of 'negative' change in fragmented and degraded landscapes. This is why Ruthven is so interesting. Areas receiving management have responded in an unexpectedly robust way. Perhaps the soils of the kame allowed for the site to respond so quickly. Increasingly, we observe soil types as being a primary contributor to the success of ecological restoration efforts. Nutrient-rich, moist soils strongly correlate with areas where we struggle to control invasive species; while nutrient-poor, well-drained soils allow easier control. NAP has historically placed little emphasis on soils when prioritizing ecological restoration efforts, but it will be in the forefront of thoughts in the future.

The story of Ruthven speaks to the importance of considering an interconnected set of system attributes

when restoring ecosystems. Soils, hydrology, flora, fauna, and disturbance all influence what we see at Ruthven. Restoration efforts now play a crucial role in this system. NAP and its volunteers have toiled to help shape the assembled ecological communities we see today. We have made the choice to interact with this ecosystem in a way that it has not experienced before in its history. We are acting in concert with the natural systems to create a new ecosystem, a socio-ecological system that incorporates both ecological processes and human influence for a future environment that is healthy, diverse, and valuable.

Editors Note: To visit Ruthven, park at the Gallup boat launch on the south side of Geddes Road, east of Huron Parkway. Then carefully walk across Geddes Road and look for a foot trail at the break in the shrubs along Geddes Road.

THE NAP PUZZLER!

Of our 6 native oak species, which is missing from the drawings on the calendar page? Answer on page 8.

Autumn 2009 Natural Area Preservation Volunteer Stewardship Calendar

September

September 4, Friday
Photo Contest Pictures Due TODAY!!
5:00 pm

Winning photos will be printed in the Ann Arbor News, included in the NAP wall calendar for 2010, and may be used for future NAP educational and promotional materials. We also have prizes! Winners will be announced at the volunteer appreciation party on October 29th. Lots of fun guaranteed! For more information, including how to enter, to get an entry form, and detailed photo specifications, go to <http://www.a2gov.org/NAPphotocontest>, or email nap@a2gov.org, or call 734.794.6627.



September 8, Tuesday
Steward's Circle
Bruegger's Bagels - 709 N University Ave
7:30 am to 8:30 am

Are you interested in learning more about how to care for our natural areas - woods, creeks, prairies, wetlands? Then join the Stewardship Network's Huron Arbor cluster for an informal discussion on a monthly topic with volunteer and professional land stewards and others interested in nature. For more information and topics go to <http://www.stewardshipnetwork.org>.

This month's topic: "Trails run through many natural areas. How do we up-keep trails? What are the best ways to create and fix trails?"



September 12, Saturday *
Miller Nature Area Workday
9:00 am to 12:00 pm

It's shrub-cutting season, and we need your help maintaining this large wooded natural area in the heart of the city, less than a mile from downtown and right on the AATA city bus route! Learn how to recognize the differences between native and non-native trees and shrubs and help us maintain the native species in this area. Meet us at the Arborview Blvd. entrance, just east of Wildwood Ave.

September 12, Saturday *
Hannah Nature Area Workday
1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

This small wooded greenspace, located right near downtown, needs many hands this fall to help remove non-native shrubs! Volunteers of all ages are encouraged to participate. This is a great opportunity to enjoy the outdoors and have fun with the whole family! Meet at the west end of Bath Street, west of 7th between Miller and Huron

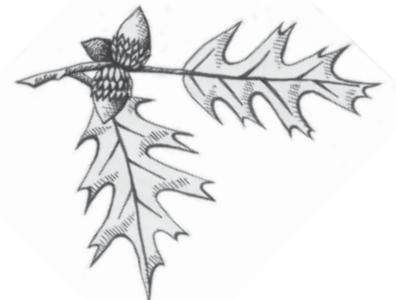
Sept 13-Oct. 31st
Get Out Challenge

Join the "GET OUT" Challenge and Discover the natural world through your child's eyes with Natural Area Preservation, National Wildlife Federation, and the Leslie Science and Nature Center. Explore your city parks and your own backyard by completing 10 out of 15 possible adventure challenges by the end of October and earn a Get Out Patch. The Get Out Kickoff will begin a fantastic fall of family fun with outdoor investigation, scavenger hunts, and guided hikes on Sunday Sept 13th, 2-4pm. Throughout the month choose from a list of exciting programs offered (including NAP workdays and Appreciating Trees hike at Bird Hills) or adventures you can take on your own. Visit the Leslie Science and Nature Center website for more information and a complete list of possible activities www.lesliesnc.org/getout.

September 26, Saturday *
Stewardship Planting Day!
Miller Woods
10:00 am to 12:00 pm
Evergreen Park
1:00 pm to 3:00 pm

Today is National Public Lands Day, let's plant trees! We will work on ecological restoration in these parks while being part of the nationwide effort to protect the environment. Bring a sack lunch to enjoy a picnic with the crew between sites. Meet us at the Arborview Blvd. Miller Woods entrance east of Wildwood Ave. at 10:00 am and at the Evergreen Park entrance at Valley Drive at 1:00 pm to join in the fun and lend a hand!

*Please wear pants and closed-toe shoes to all workdays. Minors must be accompanied by a guardian or contact NAP in advance to obtain a release form. Snacks water and tools are provided.



September 27, Sunday
Furstenberg Native Garden Workday
12:00 pm to 3:00 pm

Join Park Steward and Master Gardener, Aunita Erskine, in taking care of this valuable native garden. You'll have plenty of opportunities to learn about gardening with natives, and help us keep this site looking top notch! Workday orientation starts promptly at 12:00 noon. A short nature walk will be held at the end of the workday, time permitting. Meet in the Furstenberg parking lot off Fuller Road, across from Huron High School.

October

October 3, Saturday *

Dicken Woods Workday
9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Join the Friends of Dicken Woods this fall morning to help preserve this special woodland which borders Dicken Elementary School. Meet in the school parking lot off Runnymede to get started!



October 10, Saturday *

Greenview Nature Area Workday
9:00 am to 12:00 pm

There is a lot to get done this fall! Join us for a fun morning spreading woodchips, clearing buckthorn, and collecting and dispersing native seeds! This is an opportunity for the whole family to enjoy the outdoors and lend a hand improving this special greenspace. Meet at the Greenview Park sign on Greenview Dr, across from Barnard Rd.

October 10, Saturday *

Wurster Park Workday
12:00 pm to 3:00 pm

We need your help to remove invasive plants like buckthorn and honeysuckle in this multi-use parkland! Join us! Volunteers of all ages are encouraged. There are play structures, open fields and picnic tables available for recreating with your friends and family following the workday! Meet at the cul-de-sac of Edgewood Place off of W Davis Ave.

October 13, Tuesday

Steward's Circle

Bruegger's Bagels - 709 N University Ave 7:30 am to 8:30 am

This month's topic: "Factsheets & resources. What educational materials are out there? Which can we use? Bring your favorite and we'll share."

See September listing for more info.

October 13, Wednesday

Prescribed Burn Public Meeting

Leslie Science & Nature Center - 1831 Traver Road

7:30 pm to 9:00 pm

Fire is used as a restoration tool in many of Ann Arbor's natural areas. This meeting provides information and an opportunity for discussion about the Prescribed Ecological Burn Program. This is the perfect opportunity to ask questions, learn more about the ecological benefits of burning, and hear about the specifics of effectively and safely using fire as a restoration tool. Burns are conducted in city parks throughout the spring and fall.

October 17, Saturday *

Swift Run & Mary Beth Doyle Workday

10:00 am to 3:00 pm

This is one of most fun and rewarding stewardship opportunities for people of all ages! You will learn how to identify native plants in the fall, collect and save the seeds, and then have the opportunity to disperse them in the afternoon! We will be collecting native seeds together in Swift Run and dispersing them at Mary Beth Doyle in areas where natives are much less established and where we hope to see many new sprouts growing next spring thanks to our efforts. Meet us at Eddy Street, off of Verle Avenue



October 25, Sunday *

Barton Nature Area Workday

1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

If you have not helped with seed collection, here is your chance! Learn to identify native plants in the important seed-bearing stage of their growth cycle. This will be educational, and fun for the whole family. Snacks, expertise, and seed collection buckets provided. Join us! Meet at the Barton Dam parking lot on Huron River Drive.

October 29, Thursday

Volunteer Appreciation Potluck

Cobblestone Farm - 2781 Packard Rd

Starts at 7:00 pm

All volunteers are invited to our annual appreciation event! Let's share good food, learn a little, and browse all the beautiful pictures from the photo contest. Awards will be presented for Volunteer of the Year, Photo Contest Winners, and the best costumes. After the presentations there will be live music and dancing to celebrate this year's harvest. Please bring a dish to pass, friends or family, and your own place settings. Costumes are encouraged. RSVPs requested- call us at 734.794.6627 or email us at nap@a2gov.org.

November

November 1, Sunday *

Huron Parkway Nature Area Workday
1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

We have made great headway in this lovely nature area over the years controlling invasives and spreading native species. Help us continue that progress! We'll continue removing invasive shrubs near the parkway to extend the prairie. We'll meet at the Park Steward's house at 3470 Woodland Road, off East Huron River Drive.

*Please wear pants and closed-toe shoes to all workdays. Minors must be accompanied by a guardian or contact NAP in advance to obtain a release form. Snacks water and tools are provided.

November 10, Tuesday

Steward's Circle

Bruegger's Bagels - 709 N University Ave 7:30 am to 8:30 am

This month's topic: "Amphibians and Reptiles are Herps. What do herps do in the winter? How can we improve life for herps through our stewardship work?" See September listing for more info.

NAPpennings

Thank you . . .

- ♥ Arbor Brewing Co. for hosting an Adopt-a-Park fundraiser on Arbor Day
- ♥ Downtown Blooms volunteers for cleaning up, planting, and mulching downtown
- ♥ Adopt-A-Park kickoff volunteers for tree and garden planting in 12 neighborhood parks
- ♥ Buhr Park Children's Wet Meadow volunteers for ongoing upkeep and care of the planting in Buhr park
- ♥ Boy Scout Pack 101 for trail re-routing and pulling invasives in Bird Hills Park
- ♥ Bird Hills Neighborhood Coalition for coming out four successive weekends to save plants and re-route trails
- ♥ REI members for working on trails in Bird Hills Park on national trails day
- ♥ EMU VISION-sponsored group for invasives removal in Barton Park
- ♥ Youth Volunteer Corps for enthusiastic, ongoing field work with us all summer
- ♥ Frog and Toad, Salamander, and Bird Surveyors for their dedication and hard work taking inventory of the critters in our parks
- ♥ Huron Arbor Cluster is the winner of Stewardship Network's Garlic Mustard Challenge this year! Thanks to all our dedicated volunteers!
- ♥ Thank you to Keith Miller for his ongoing financial support of NAP's work

New Sighting in Black Pond Woods

Crowded, lying dormant under a canopy of invasive shrubs in Black Pond Woods, a Michigan orchid waited for volunteers and staff to liberate it from the shade. Fall shrub cuttings and a spring burn were enough stimuli for the lily-leaved twayblade (*Liparis liliifolia*) to break free. Inconspicuous when mixed with competing ground vegetation, one could just make out the delicate purple petals along the stem, rising from large paired leaves. Tway is from the Old English for "two." This uncommon plant was previously unknown in this part of the park.



Lost and Found

A woman's wedding band was found in one of our NAP gloves in April (!)! We have turned it in to the Ann Arbor Police lost and found department.

Stewards in the Spotlight

Ann Hubbard became a Park Steward at Huron Parkway Nature Area eight years ago. Her curiosity about the activities of the NAP staff she saw in the park



led her to ask about their restoration efforts and ultimately to join NAP as a Park Steward and burn volunteer. Ann enjoys gardening, especially growing food. She is an avid tennis player and is an assistant tennis coach at Huron High School.

Ann is a volunteer with Youth for Understanding and a member of the Ann Arbor Thrift Shop. She enjoys working with and learning from the fun people at NAP.

NAP & MMBA Work Together

NAP and the Michigan Mountain Biking Association have been working together for the past few years to coordinate park use and stewardship to maximize enjoyment for park users. Over the past year we have coordinated a number of trail re-routes to minimize erosion and maximize fun by improving trail layouts. This follows many successful years of awareness raising to keep trail use minimized during the early spring when trails are more wet and prone to erosion.

Michigan Prescribed Fire Council Annual Conference

September 24 to 26, 2009: Department of Natural Resources, Ralph A. MacMullen Conference Center, Roscommon.

This is the tenth anniversary of the Michigan Prescribed Fire Council and a great annual meeting at the DNR's "Center in the Woods" conference facility is being planned, with many interesting sessions, field trips and evening activities. Visit www.firecouncil.org.

Get Out Challenge

September 13 to October 31

Join the "GET OUT" Challenge and discover the natural world through your child's eyes with NAP, National Wildlife Federation, and the Leslie Science and Nature Center (LSNC). Explore city parks and your own backyard by completing adventure challenges by the end of October, and earn a Get Out Patch. Kickoff date is September 13th at LSNC. For the next six weeks choose from exciting programs offered or individual adventures. Visit the LSNC website (www.lesliesnc.org/getout) for more information and a complete list of activities).

Staff Updates

hello...

Robb Johnston

Robb is happy to be a new member of the NAP crew. In aught-six, he had his baptism by fire pulling garlic mustard alongside Molly Murphy as a research assistant at Michigan State University. Robb spent the following two years working in Japan and traveling the world. He's been in Ann Arbor since May learning new things every day, and having a great time working with the NAP folks. His copious amounts of free time are spent honing his skills as an author/illustrator of children's books.



Omotara Jewel Kufeji

This summer is one of the rare times in my life that I have had the pleasure of exploring my personal connection to nature, in addition to learning about improving the efficacy of ecological work. During the summer, I am working on a research project to figure out why the NAP volunteer base is not representative of the diverse population of the City of Ann Arbor. Ann Arbor is privileged to have many opportunities to connect with nature by visiting a park to jog, walking the trails, playing disc golf, or just taking in the fresh air. Because of NAP, I have regained my appreciation for nature. Through my research, I hope to assist NAP in broadening their volunteer base so that more people will have the opportunity to embrace everything that Mother Nature has to offer.



goodbye...

Shira Diem

I will be spending the summer exploring the swirling Hudson River Valley and concrete jungles of Brooklyn. I have delighted in this phase at NAP getting to know some of the wonderful volunteers, and I can only imagine what the next chapter in my life may bring. Perhaps phase IV at NAP is just around the corner....



Evelyn Frenzel-Wright

One of the first things I did when I moved to Ann Arbor in January of 2001, was to sign up to attend NAP's burn crew training. Not much later, I landed a job as a teacher with the Leslie Science Center, and later in the fall with the NAP crew. Since then, NAP and the Leslie Science and Nature Center have been integral portions of my life. Leaving NAP has not been easy. I miss all of the wonderful people! While I'm busy with my new job as Stewardship Coordinator for Legacy Land Conservancy, I'll still be around visiting folks at workdays here and there, and hanging out at the Science Center. Thank you, NAP volunteers, for being such a great group of people to work with.



staff alumni...

Eric Ellis — Conservation Crew, 2002-2004

Many roads since Ann Arbor (Idaho, Marquette) have led my wife Diana and I to Traverse City. Diana is the lead dentist at the county public health clinic and I work for the non-profit Conservation Resource Alliance as a Biologist (www.rivercare.org, please send money). I work with landowners along regional wildlife corridors to help them manage their property for improved wildlife habitat and water quality. It is a good job and I get to use the skills I acquired at NAP regularly. We enjoy doing our bit to keep northern Michigan a great place to live and visit. We are building the first LEED certified residence in Grand Traverse County. We also welcomed baby Genevieve Rose to the family on April 26th. Building a house and having a baby at the same time is challenging but we are managing well. We spend a lot of time hunting with our English setter Ruby. Life is good. I hope all the old NAPpers are still fighting the good fight and living well.



If you would prefer to receive your next newsletter via e-mail, please call NAP

Turtles in the Parks

By Lara Treemore Spears

Turtles are often given credit for being environmental indicators. They also participate in the ecological balance as seed dispersers. For example, may-apple seeds are found to germinate much better after passing through a box turtle's digestive tract. Many turtles are scavengers, detritivores, and mollusk-eaters that remove and break down rotting vegetation and dead animals and potentially help to control undesirable parasites such as "swimmer's itch".

When is the last time you saw a tiny yellow-spotted turtle in a forest or wetland? Understandably, not many of us have. Many of Michigan's rarest turtles, such as the spotted turtle and Blanding's turtle, need to be more than seven years old before they can have young (Some species need to be at least 15!). Because of the large amount of predation on eggs and young turtles by raccoons and other similar opportunistic predators, it may take a lifetime—20 to 70-plus years depending on species—for a turtle to successfully replace itself with a single offspring that grows to adulthood. Biologists have noticed that turtle populations are tending to have

fewer juveniles, a sign that some turtles may be at risk of extinction even though the relatively easy-to-see adults give the impression that the population is healthy.

Humans have negatively affected turtle populations by fragmenting and destroying habitat, altering the natural vegetation of aquatic ecosystems, and shifting the predator-prey balance toward mid-level predators. In a recent survey of ponds with vegetation left intact, NAP staff and volunteers observed many individuals from juvenile to adult representing four different turtle species: common map, midland painted, common snapping, and spiny soft-shelled. In contrast, similar ponds that have had their vegetation removed or altered had very few individuals of only the common map turtle. Continued efforts will be made to assess this trend toward lower diversity in altered aquatic habitats.

Our new fact sheet has more information on what you can do to protect turtles. Find it on our website.

Answer to the NAP Puzzler: red oak

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