

Natural Area Preservation News

Volume 5, Number 4

Winter 2000

The mission of the Natural Area Preservation Division is to protect and restore Ann Arbor's natural areas and to foster an environmental ethic among its citizens.

Natural Area Preservation is funded by the Ann Arbor Department of Parks and Recreation's voter-approved Park Maintenance and Repair Millage.

Vinca minor: Delicate Menace

by Kee Condict

Old man winter seems to have finally arrived in Ann Arbor. The trees have dropped their leaves, snow showers have dusted the town, and most plants have gone dormant for the season. There are, of course, a few exceptions to this rule, one of them being *Vinca*. *Vinca minor*, commonly referred to as periwinkle or myrtle, is a common trailing groundcover plant found throughout Ann Arbor. Prized for its dark, glossy, evergreen leaves and its blue, star-like flowers, *vinca* is touted by the horticultural industry as the wonder plant that can grow just about anywhere—semi-shade, deep shade, good soils, poor soils. Sounds great, doesn't it? It does until you take a stroll through your local natural area and see it thriving all too well in wooded areas. In the winter it is particularly noticeable because of the dark green backdrop it creates in an otherwise brown landscape.



A member of the Dogbane Family (Apocynaceae), *Vinca minor* is native to much of the Mediterranean basin. Found throughout the northeastern and north central United States, *Vinca* was first introduced to the U.S. as a medicinal herb and aphrodisiac and has subsequently been used as an ornamental groundcover throughout the country. It is most often seen "escaping" from residential yards, cemeteries, and other localities where it has been planted extensively as groundcover. *Vinca major*, its close relative, which can be distinguished by its larger blossoms and leaves, is troublesome in sheltered canyon bottoms and floodplains in the Southwest, but generally cannot survive cold temperatures.

Once established in an area, *Vinca* forms a dense, smothering carpet, spreading vegetatively to the exclusion of all other herbaceous vegetation. The versatility and hardiness that make it ideal for the garden make it an equally troublesome plant to

continued on page 4



Natural Area Preservation is a Division of the City of Ann Arbor Department of Parks and Recreation.

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In this Issue	page
<i>Vinca minor</i> : Delicate Menace	1
Coordinator's Corner	2
NAP•penings	3
Never a Dull Botanical Moment	3
Park Focus: Hollywood	4
Staff Update	5
Reflections from the Field	5
Fall Burn Season Update	6
Volunteer Year in Review	7
Volunteer Calendar	back cover

Special Place

It happens nearly every time I go to a conference. I'll be running between sessions, or standing in line, or killing time waiting for a really important presentation, or doing something else that I'm not expecting to be memorable, when all of a sudden I have an experience that makes the whole conference worthwhile.

At the Natural Areas Conference in St. Louis, which I attended in October, it hit me during a forum discussion led by writers from the Orion Society's "Forgotten Language Tour." I admit that I dropped by only because there was nothing else on the schedule that really appealed to me. But the discussion drew me in and I ended up skipping the next talk I had planned to attend. The topic turned to experiences which allow children to develop a deep sense of wonder and connection with nature, and how most of the time that requires a close connection to a particular piece of land—a special place. It doesn't need to be a pristine wilderness. In fact, more often than not it is a backyard ravine or a vacant lot (which, as any kid can tell you, is definitely *not* vacant), or some other tiny site which we adults may dismiss as having no great ecological value. But to a child, who can spend significant portions of his or her free time unraveling the mysteries of this site, it can become a goldmine of exploration and discovery. It may offer a child her first exposure to, or at least her first *discovery* of, a bee pollinating a flower, or a bird building a nest, or a tree starting its life from a seed. It doesn't matter if the flower is a dandelion, the bird a house sparrow, or the tree a buckthorn. What matters is that the child is exploring, discovering, and *connecting*.

For me, this special boyhood spot was the 15-acre "timber" on my family's farm in Illinois. I spent time there nearly every day after school, and all summer long—climbing trees, tracking animals, sneaking up on wildlife, and pretending I was Daniel Boone. I found arrowheads there. I learned to build a one-match campfire there. I hung my first birdhouse there and I'd sit silently for hours and watch the red-headed woodpeckers. I also first became aware of soil erosion there. I loved that place

and cared deeply about what happened to it. Somewhere in amongst those activities, something happened: I connected with nature. It got in my blood and started the development of a land ethic that has been with me ever since, and that has directed me down this path in life. From those childhood experiences came my adult values and attitudes toward nature. That special spot and those experiences have had a profound impact on my life.

How about you? Did you have a special place? Do your kids have one now? Will your grandchildren? Read Katherine O'Brien's article on page 4 about her special spot in tiny Hollywood Park and how she's back there now as an adult, volunteering as a Park Steward. Ann Arbor is fortunate to have many potential special places, only some of which are now protected in city parks. Perhaps you missed having a special spot as a child, or perhaps, like me, you had a place which is now too far away to visit regularly enough to keep you connected. If so, then maybe it's time to look for another one—your very own special spot, where you can go to escape the hustle and bustle of everyday life, where you can rediscover nature, where you can get reconnected.

No one else can pick such a place for you. You have to find it for yourself. But if you need suggestions on where to look for a special spot, we at NAP can point you in the right direction to begin your search. And, if you're interested, we'll give you some suggestions on how to give back to that site as much as it gives to you. Treat yourself this holiday season—find yourself a special place.

—David Borneman,
Natural Area Preservation Coordinator



NAP·penings

NAP was honored recently at the **17th Annual Michigan Municipal Achievement Awards Competition** sponsored by the Michigan Municipal League. We received Honorable Mention (and a nice plaque!) in the Growth Management category for our Natural Features Inventory Program, which is helping us identify and record the biodiversity of Ann Arbor. A special thanks to all the inventory volunteers who make these surveys possible! Your efforts can now officially be called “award-winning!”

NAP got some other national exposure this fall during the **27th Annual Natural Areas Conference** held in St. Louis. The theme this year was “Managing the Mosaic: Connecting People and Natural Diversity in the 21st Century.” Conference planners invited NAP to give two presentations to showcase our program, one under the heading of “Public Natural Areas Programs,” and the other under “Conservation Lands in an Urban Setting,” where the focus was on our volunteer program and its role in restoring our natural areas. The talks were well-received and prompted many compliments to Ann Arbor for a job well done. We pass those compliments on to all of you!

NAP continues to play a role in two new groups working at a regional level. The Steering Committee of the **Southern Michigan Prescribed Fire Council** meets regularly to coordinate the actions of its larger membership as prioritized at the first meeting of the full council in August. David Borneman serves on that committee and is also the contact for the Public Outreach subcommittee, which will include many individuals from the general council membership.

The **Michigan Invasive Plant Council** is a state-wide effort and meets quarterly. The big decision at the October meeting was to officially affiliate our new chapter with the Southeast Exotic Pest Plant Council in order to give us legitimacy and participatory power at the national

continued on page 4

Never a Dull Botanical Moment

by Bev Walters

Even as long as NAP has been conducting plant inventories, new species continue to be discovered in Ann Arbor. This summer pinesap (*Monotropa hypopithys*) turned up on a dry slope in Bird Hills Nature Area. Like its more common cousin Indian pipe (*Monotropa uniflora*), this plant produces no chlorophyll. It is dependent on soil fungi that supply it with nourishment they get from tree roots. But while the Indian pipe is a pure white, this population of pinesap is a striking rosy red.



Bush honeysuckle*

The bush honeysuckle (*Diervilla lonicera*) was also found nearby. Although frequent north of here, this is our first sighting of it for the NAP inventory. While most of the honeysuckles (*Lonicera* spp.) appearing in our natural areas are aliens, this yellow-flowered shrub of lower stature is a native species.

I'd been told that there was goldenseal (*Hydrastis canadensis*) in Eberwhite Woods, and a 1940 specimen in the U of M Herbarium verified its historical occurrence there. After five years of searching, I was thrilled to finally stumble across a small population of it this summer.

This species, whose roots are used in herbal remedies, has become quite rare due to over-harvesting. It's easy to miss things when out in the field with only one pair of eyes, as was also certainly the case with the large tulip tree



Goldenseal*

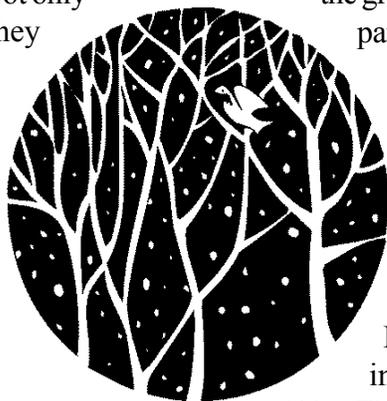
(*Liriodendron tulipifera*) that I recently found in this same woods. Even more noteworthy was Dave Borneman's discovery of red mulberry (*Morus rubra*) in Bird Hills, overlooked in a ravine that many good botanists have traversed. This specimen was actually first reported to NAP six years ago by Neal Biletdeaux, of Johnson, Johnson & Roy, Inc., but it took us that long to find it. Both goldenseal and red mulberry are listed in Michigan as threatened species. On my way out to have a look at the red mulberry, I came across the broad-leaved puccoon (*Lithospermum latifolium*), a plant listed as special concern that has not been collected in Washtenaw County since 1868. This brings Ann Arbor's tally of endangered, threatened, or special concern plant species to 15 species in 29 distinct populations. (We had even more than this until last year when several species were de-listed, perhaps because of better documentation by NAP of the actual status of these species in Michigan.)

continued on page 5

Vinca minor: Delicate Menace *continued from page 1*

control in natural areas. It grows well in deep shade, seems to thrive in poor soils, and can tolerate extremes in temperature. Dry or cold weather may temporarily set back its growth, but *Vinca* quickly resprouts and regains lost ground coverage.

What can you do to help control the spread of this invasive plant into Ann Arbor's natural areas? A few simple things come to mind. As you plan landscaping projects, consider using plants native to southeastern Michigan. Not only do they add natural beauty to your yard, but they also conserve and promote the aesthetics and health of plant communities native to this area of Michigan. Secondly, avoid extending your yard and dumping yard waste into the natural area behind your home. Yard waste piles serve as a source of many invasives throughout our parks. For more information about efforts to control this invasive, call our NAP office at 996-3266.



Park Focus: Hollywood by Katherine O'Brien

Having grown up in the Hollywood Park area, I have a lot of memories associated with the park. I remember taking hikes through the woods with my Abbot school classes and looking at all of the plants and wildlife. I walked by the park everyday on my way home from school, and also learned to ride my bike there. In the spring the wildflowers would come alive and decorate the forest floor. The summer brought lush green radiance to the neighborhood. In the fall there was an array of colors from the trees, with plump squirrels persistently digging in the grass, foraging for winter months when the park slept in its quiet white solitude before awakening in the spring. When I found out that NAP had opportunities for people to adopt a park of their choice and become the park's steward, I didn't hesitate about Hollywood.

Hollywood Park is located on Sequoia Parkway near Miller and Maple Roads, in northwestern Ann Arbor, adjacent to Abbot Elementary School. It is a small, mesic forest habitat of only 2.97 acres with 130 total plant species, 100 of which are native. There are several entrances to the park, mainly off of Sequoia Parkway. There you will find a lawn area with large, open-grown oaks. Walking east you can grab a trail that will take you into the wooded area. There you can see an array of plants and wildflowers. As you keep walking you will come to Abbot Elementary School. Within the wooded area there is an invisible line that divides the site. Most of the land is owned by the City Parks Department, but part of it, adjacent to the school, is owned by the public school system. Because of this, Abbot Elementary School and NAP are developing a partnership in the interest of Hollywood. The Abbot Woods Committee, three third grade teachers from the school, and NAP are discussing possible activities and learning experiences for Abbot School kids. This will help keep Hollywood a great natural area and wonderful park to visit as well as educating our youth about the importance of these beautiful green spaces.

Hollywood has many noteworthy botanical highlights. Bev Walters, NAP Botanist, says she likes to "pop" in there because she always finds something new and nice. "If you could drop a two-acre cookie cutter on any natural area in Ann Arbor (except Gallup Wet Prairie) it would be difficult to find an area with such

NAP-penings *continued from page 3*

level. There was also much discussion about federal efforts to control invasive species following President Clinton's Executive Order last year. Because of that order, a National Invasive Species Council has formed and drafted a National Invasive Species Management Plan. The draft plan can be found online at www.invasivespecies.gov. Written copies can be obtained by calling (202) 208-6336.

More locally, the Huron River Watershed's **Volunteer Stewardship Network** (a partnership of NAP, the Huron River Watershed Council, and the University of Michigan Nichols Arboretum and Office of Safety and Environmental Health) continues to hold regular activities open to all interested. One relatively new event is the "Steward's Circle," an informal gathering for bagels and discussion from 7:30 to 8:30 a.m. on the second Tuesday of each month. Contact Lisa Brush at lbrush@umich.edu for more information.

continued on page 6

Never a Dull...Moment

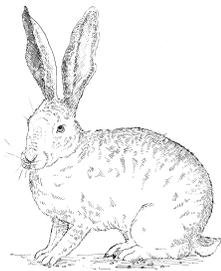
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In some of the burned areas, plants are appearing that I'm quite convinced weren't there before. New to our NAP inventory, common rockrose (*Helianthemum canadense*) has turned up at South Pond. Its large, bright yellow flowers would be hard to overlook. Also, a small prairie rose (*Rosa setigera*) has sprouted up in the Swift Run prairie where it had not previously been seen.

As well as the discovery of new populations of native species, the expansion of existing species in some of the burned prairie areas is very impressive. Big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), switch grass (*Panicum virgatum*) and stiff goldenrod (*Solidago rigida*) at Bandemer Park have extended their reach almost the entire length of the park along the railroad tracks to the west. At Furstenberg Nature Area, the yellow flowers of smooth false foxglove (*Aureolaria flava*), the bright pink spires of rough blazing star (*Liatris aspera*) and the sky-blue flowers of prairie heart-leaved aster (*Aster oolentangiensis*) light up the prairie with far more color than seen in the recent past.

Because I've been with NAP for seven seasons now, I can especially appreciate how much our natural areas have improved over time. To the NAP staff and volunteers who are responsible for this restoration—keep up the good work!

* Voss, Edward G. *Michigan Flora, Part II and Part III*. Bull. Cranbrook Inst. Sci. 59 & 61 and Univ. Michigan Herbarium, 1985 and 1996.



Staff Update

Ending her second stint as Outreach Coordinator with NAP, **Catriona Mortell** has moved on to the Ann Arbor Housing Commission. Thank you for all of your hard work, Triona!

Filling her shoes will be **Tara Griffith**. Tara has served as Volunteer Coordinator at Neighborhood Senior Services for the past two years and has also worked with Project Grow in creating the Wise Roots Senior Garden. She is looking forward to connecting folks with our local natural areas!

She started at NAP as an intern this summer, then moved into a temporary administrative position; now **Katherine O'Brien** has become our official Clerk II!

Reflections from the Field

by Jen Lewis

Prompted by a discussion with NAP coordinator, Dave Borneman, after he got back from the Natural Areas Association conference, I recently began to ponder the origins of my personal connection with the natural world. You see, Dave had attended a session at the conference where they discussed the idea that adults who care about the preservation of our natural areas probably had made an important connection with the natural world as a child. So I figured, "Hey! I'm an adult who cares about our natural areas. I, too, must have had some special outdoor experience that forged that bond in me!" The romantic in me struggled to recall some defining moment in my childhood when the cosmos came together to kick-start my sense of enlightenment to all things natural. I mean, I'd spent a lot of time outside as a kid. But as I reminisced, I began to think about having been born and raised in southeast Michigan by parents who also grew up here. My connection to nature, I realized, was forged not in some glorious moment that included rays of light breaking through the clouds, but in bits and pieces or bite-sized chunks like the natural landscape here. Alas, I had no epiphany. I couldn't deny this bond, however, so my thoughts turned to thinking about how it grows stronger every day I go out into the field for my job with NAP.

This past season was my first on the conservation field crew. I certainly had a lot to learn, and it was in this learning that my connection with the natural world grew and changed. Here are some of the big things—the "a-ha" kinds of things—that I've picked up during this year's restoration efforts. I came to this job from a university setting, so first and foremost was learning that conservation work is nothing like a closed laboratory experiment. For example, when someone tells you that garlic mustard is a biennial that is a rosette during the first year and flowers in the second, and that if you pull it out or burn it up it will go away...tell them to try telling that to the garlic mustard! "Managing" a natural area, I realized, is a *wee bit* more complex. Second, as I participated in conservation work, I experienced a change in my idea of "natural beauty." (I rather like to think it *matured* ecologically.) For instance, magenta waves of purple loosestrife swaying in the wind—ugly. A burned patch of land, black with the ash of the previous year's growth—terrific! The third thing, and there's no way around this: killing is a part of our efforts. (And I don't just mean

continued on page 7

Fall 2000 Burn Season Update

by David Borneman

The 2000 Fall Burn Season has already far surpassed any of its predecessors even though, at the time of this writing, it's only officially one-half over. Last year, the dry fall weather hit us unexpectedly and we weren't prepared to take advantage of it. This year was different. We sent out all of our pre-burn season notices early, got our permits, held our public meeting, got all our equipment ready, and then just had to sit back and wait for good weather.

It was well worth the wait. When the clouds parted toward the end of October, we were treated to a string of near-perfect burn days with clear skies and low humidities. We burned every day during the week of October 30th, gave the



crew a break, then came back and burned on Monday the following week. In those six days, we conducted very successful woodland burns on about 70 acres at the following sites: Furstenberg; Oakwoods, Kuebler Langford, Bird Hills, Black Pond Woods, and Bluffs. These sites were high on our list because they all have a diverse, native ground flora which is being shaded out by encroaching shrubs. Ironically, although our burns are good for the wildflowers in the long run, they can set back the spring wildflowers if we conduct the burn late in the spring. So we were glad to be able to treat those sites to a fall burn this year when we have no worries about the wildflower display.

The lesson for me this fall was how well the new-fallen oak leaves burned—much better and hotter than in the spring after they've been compressed by a winter's worth of snow. Most of the sites we burned were thoroughly blackened when we finished. You may still have a hard time identifying the burn sites as you walk through the woods this fall and winter because a fresh layer of leaves and snow has obscured much of the black! But it should be easier in the spring, when they'll be a conspicuous lack of green honeysuckle and buckthorn shading out the native wildflowers!

Park Focus: Hollywood

continued from page 4

rich plant diversity as Hollywood, and a number of the species are uncommon," she says. A few of the unusual plants that can be seen there are fringed loosestrife (*Lysimachia ciliata*), rue anemone (*Anemonella thalictroides*), bluegrass (*Poa nemoralis*), and tall bellflower (*Campanula americana*), a rare sighting in our plant inventory.

Recently there was some restoration work done within the park. Several interested and very helpful neighbors came to work at NAP's second ever Hollywood Park workday on September 16. We lined the trails (mainly with Norway maple logs) so hikers and kids would not be confused about which trails were permissible to walk on. We also closed some others to help protect plant diversity. We put up trail signs and cut down the usual shrubby invasives, honeysuckle and buckthorn. It was very productive and we hope to have another workday soon. This kind of neighborhood involvement is key to sustaining community green spaces. It shows that parks mean something to local residents and are worth the effort to maintain.

If you have a chance, pop in yourself and check out what Hollywood has to offer. Spring is a perfect time to visit to really appreciate the floral diversity. By having Abbot School involved and motivated to teach about natural areas, we can help children to understand and appreciate the importance of our natural environment. Local parks can foster many wonderful memories for people of all ages. So go out and start some memories of your own by visiting a city park, such as Hollywood, today.

Looking for something special for a Nature Enthusiast or Gardener this holiday season?

How about a book or some brochures from NAP?

Explore natural areas in the Huron River corridor with our *Along the Huron* guide book.

Get a friend started with native plant landscaping with our five-brochure series, *Your Landscape and Our Natural Areas*.

Call 996-3266 to place your order today!

Volunteer Year in Review

NAP would like to extend a resounding “Thanks!” to all who contributed this year! From Garlic Mustard Weed-Out to the Natural Features Inventory, from Park Stewardship to photomonitoring, our programs would not exist without the ongoing help of many volunteers. In 2000, **342** volunteers contributed an impressive **2,176** hours to NAP projects! This included 41 workdays throughout the season. Too many groups took part to mention them all, so we will highlight one group whose impact was outstanding. **Aina Bernier**’s class at the former NEW school made stewardship of Brown Park a class project. Over the course of the semester, the students cleared an astounding amount of buckthorn from the northern edge of the park. To these students and to all other groups of volunteers, thank you for sharing your collective person-power!

For the sixth year, Natural Features Inventory volunteers have surveyed Ann Arbor’s natural areas for butterflies, breeding birds, and frogs and toads. Our initial calculations reveal 22 butterfly survey volunteers logged well over 90 hours; 40 folks listened for the calls of amphibians for almost 210 hours, and 23 birders spent over 300 hours in search of feathered friends! As these numbers indicate, surveys of such a scope are possible only with this kind of volunteer participation.

We would also like to highlight a few special volunteers who put in more than 50 hours each this year. Thank you, **Aunita Erskine** (57 hours), **Barbara Powell** (66 hours), and **Bill and Gloria Stapp** (72 hours), for your invaluable individual contributions to Ann Arbor’s natural areas!



These numbers mean so much more than helping our small staff accomplish our goals, or helping our division of the city government to function. NAP is founded on a sense of responsibility to protect and restore the environment and on a vision of what people can do to that end. But we do not simply draft a plan for stewardship of our local natural areas and hope that NAP staff can complete the task. We know that other people in the community feel a commitment to the health of their local environment, that many want to be a part of these efforts and some already are, and that the process of stewardship establishes and maintains an essential connection between people and nature. Furthering this connection is as important a part of our work as the ecological restoration that results from it because it ensures the future of that restoration. You are the embodiment of this connection! You are essential to maintaining the diversity and sanctity of Ann Arbor’s natural areas. You are the reason we have hope that people can rectify damage done and protect the world we love from further damage. For these reasons, above all, we thank every one of our volunteers for doing what you do.

Reflections from the Field *continued from page 5*

mosquitoes, although many were sacrificed by the crew this year.) Buckthorn, black alder, honeysuckle—may you rest in peace. After a while, though, it can really get to you. I think our German intern this summer summed it up best when he said, “What did they ever do to you?” Part of the learning was finding an answer I was comfortable with. Fourth, it is a lot harder to undo ecological damage than to cause it in the first place. Five crew members in a small spotted knapweed-infested plot in Furstenberg prairie seemed no match for the jillions of seeds produced by the alien plants surrounding us. Talk about faltering hope! We definitely had to be each other’s cheerleaders out there. And my final lesson: not everyone has made the same connection as me and some have not made it at all. People resist our efforts, pull out our signs and trail liners, dump yard waste. . . I even met a woman who fertilizes her honeysuckle! Some days the frustration just burns; other days I can laugh it off and joke that these are the people keeping me in this line of work! Always it strengthens that connection I was talking about.

As most who are reading this newsletter no doubt know, it *is* possible for us city dwellers to make our connection with nature. We are used to getting our “fix” in little hits: in the not-so-wide-open spaces in Ann Arbor or on weeklong vacations that take us to the wilderness areas left in the world. And although I was disappointed about not remembering some epiphany from my youth, I am thankful to have the chance to renew my connection daily, alongside my co-workers and the volunteers of NAP!



Volunteer Calendar ...on hiatus

As the colder weather sets in, plants become dormant, animals retreat from the cold, and the opportunities for outdoor work become more scarce. But don't despair—many of our most important opportunities for volunteer involvement begin in February!

• With February comes the start of the Spring Prescribed Burn Season. This is NAP's opportunity to give native plants a competitive advantage by clearing out invasive species. Ever wondered what it was like to conduct controlled burns? The annual **Burn Crew Training**, on **Thursday, February 15, 12-5pm**, is your chance to become an official volunteer member of the NAP burn crew! Then you may assist NAP staff with burns in natural areas throughout the spring (and fall). Burns take place on weekday afternoons. **Call 996-3266 to register!**

• Are you a birdwatcher? A butterfly lover? Are you interested in listening for frogs and toads? In February, March, and April we will call on volunteers to begin the **2001 Natural Features Inventory**. NAP uses these surveys of frogs and toads, butterflies, and breeding birds to manage park land in

an environmentally sensitive way. Join NAP staff in this important inventory of Ann Arbor's natural features. The **Frog & Toad Inventory Kick-Off** is planned for **7:30-9pm, Tues., February 20**.

• Also check out the

Michigan Chapter of The Nature Conservancy's Volunteer Stewardship Days. Pre-registration is required. Contact Liesl Bhan, Volunteer Coordinator, at (517) 332-1741 or lbohan@tnc.org. Stewardship Days are Saturdays, 10am to 2pm, and involve shrub removal.

Jan. 6, 20; Feb. 3, 17 – Ives Road Fen
Jan. 13 – Lawton Prairie

How Can I Find Out About Upcoming Events?

- Join the mailing list if you haven't yet!
- Sign up to receive a monthly calendar of events by email
- Email our office any time at nap@ci.ann-arbor.mi.us
- Call our office at (734) 996-3266 and either
 - ask to speak with Tara Griffith, Outreach Coordinator
 - or
 - if you get the voice mail message, listen to up-to-date, pre-recorded event information on the Volunteer Stewardship Hotline

If you answered yes to any of the above questions, please let us know at (734) 996-3266 or nap@ci.ann-arbor.mi.us so we can keep our database up-to-date and cost effective.

- *Have you moved?*
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- *under the wrong name?*
- *Would you like to be removed from our mailing list?*

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