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FIRST PUBLISHED IN THE WINTER 2018 EDITION OF *THE STEWARD*
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“WWC Habitat Restoration Frequently Asked Questions”

By Jeffrey Ginter

So...you’ve heard that the WWC is looking for volunteers for “habitat restoration” and while you’re tempted to get involved, you’re wondering what you’re getting yourself into? Well, let’s see if we can put your mind at ease with these answers to Western Wildlife Corridor habitat restoration Frequently Asked Questions.

Give me the Cliffs Notes version: what are we going to do?

The typical WWC habitat restoration project looks like this. Everyone meets at the designated time and place. The group size can vary, say from 5 – 30 people. The WWC project leader (also a volunteer) gathers the group together, passes out a few spray bottles of diluted glyphosate (a herbicide) and some hand tools, and then the group walks from the meeting area into the woods (typically a 5-10 minute walk). The project leader will explain details of the project, for example what types of plants are being removed, and where in the preserve to work. Then the group splits into smaller teams, and begins working. Often we work to remove Amur honeysuckle (*Lonicera maackii*), a highly invasive alien plant species. This is done by cutting the honeysuckle as close to the ground as possible (with a saw or loppers), and then quickly treating the stump with glyphosate. The chopped honeysuckle branches are dragged to piles, where they will slowly decompose.

Where will we go?

The project location varies, but it’s always in the Western Wildlife Corridor. The WWC does these projects only on specific areas such as nature preserves that we own or properties that we have agreements to manage.

What are the key tasks to remove honeysuckle? Is this hard to do?

No, this isn’t particularly difficult but it is significant exertion. You should be healthy enough for outdoor physical activity for approximately three hours. While we get volunteers of all ages, many are sixty or older. Be prepared to hike and work over uneven ground as there may not always be a regular trail to the worksite. Many of our properties are on slopes. That said, this work doesn’t require special skills. The key tasks are cutting/sawing branches, spraying the stump, and dragging branches to a pile. Volunteers can work individually or as a team of 2-4, taking turns or just doing some of these tasks. A more experienced volunteer can help you identify the honeysuckle, until you get used to what it looks like.

Will I be muscle-sore afterwards?

Well, maybe. Depends upon what kind of shape you are in, your level of exertion during the project, and so forth.

How should I dress and what do I need to bring?

Of course, wear clothes and footwear appropriate for the woods and the expected weather. If you have a favorite saw or loppers, bring it along; if not, we'll have tools you can borrow. Please bring a water bottle. Gardening gloves are also a good idea (we have spares you can borrow). We also have protective goggles that you can borrow. These can be a good idea to avoid a stick poking you in the eye.

Is it this work safe?

Over the course of nearly 15 years we've found these projects to be very safe, but of course everyone should use caution and common sense. Hand tools such as saws and loppers are very sharp and must be treated accordingly. Adults are expected to supervise any children they bring. Power tools are a special concern and WWC policy requires that any use of power tools (such as a chain saw) must be in an entirely separate location from other volunteers using hand tools. New volunteers should stick to hand tools and should not bring or use chain saws.

Are there bathrooms?

Sorry, no toilets in the woods. For projects at the Kirby Nature Preserve, we do have bathrooms in the Nature Center, which is a short walk.

Can I leave early if I need to?

Yes, and people do all the time, but be aware that our projects are in the woods, so it means hiking out. While I am not aware of cases of anyone getting lost, we suggest you hike out with someone.

What does Amur honeysuckle (*Lonicera maackii*) look like?

Check out the accompanying photo – that's public enemy number one!



Is this work really worth my time?

Oh, you bet it is! We cannot emphasize enough how important this is. We've seen an Amur honeysuckle bush well over thirty feet tall (!), and these plants live to be thirty years old or more. These invasive plants are extremely bad for our natural environment. In the eastern U.S., Amur honeysuckle can practically take over a forested area, forming dense thickets which crowd out everything else except existing tall trees. Native plant species are then gone, and unsurprisingly, animals which depend upon those native plants are impacted too, sometimes severely. But our habitat restoration projects change the narrative, and within a year or so native wildflowers and other native plants come back! After you've finished your patch, you'll be pleased with the visible progress. Personally, I find removing honeysuckle extremely satisfying, and often a decent workout, too. It's great for body and soul!

Okay, you've convinced me. How do I learn about upcoming projects and sign up for one?

All our events, including habitat restoration projects, are posted at our **online calendar**:

www.westernwildlifecorridor.org/calendar. Our **WWC newsletter**, *The Steward*, has the dates, times and locations of many upcoming habitat restoration projects, when known at the time of publication. A copy of our most recent newsletter can be found on our website, www.westernwildlifecorridor.com. To get on the **email distribution list** to be notified of future habitat restoration and trail maintenance projects, just send us a quick note at wwc7@yahoo.com.

Individual participants don't have to sign up in advance. Just show up on time! However, we ask that volunteer groups contact us well in advance so that we can make sure that we can accommodate the group. The name and phone number for the coordinating Project Manager for each project is indicated in the calendar entries, the newsletter articles and the announcement emails.