



Invasive Plant Removal

Chinese Lespedeza (*Lespedeza cuneata*)
Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge
September 15 2002



On Sunday, September 15, nine volunteers with the Prince William Conservation Alliance cleared Chinese Lespedeza, from a riparian area at the Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge. This cleared area, less than one-eighth acre, is miniscule compared to the total area throughout Prince William that has been invaded by this non-native plant.

Non-native plants arrive in Prince William in a number of ways. Chinese lespedeza, a member of the pea family, was planted throughout the southern United States as a source of food and cover for wildlife, and for erosion control. Chinese lespedeza is drought-resistant and forms dense stands which choke out native plants.

At the Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge, Chinese lespedeza is quickly dominating an area with many valuable native plants. One such plant is the wild senna (*Cassia*), host plant for the bright gold Sleepy Orange butterfly. A rarely-seen butterfly that appears anything but sleepy, the presence of wild senna is a key to the presence of the Sleepy Orange. While the Sleepy Orange nectars on a variety of flowers, eggs are laid exclusively on senna plants . . . no senna plants . . . no caterpillars . . . no Sleepy Orange butterflies.

Citizen volunteers concerned with reclaiming native plant habitats contributed a total of 35 manhours, and filled 30 large bags, to remove this years Chinese lespedeza growth. That's about 1 hour to fill one bag: slow going because the plant is difficult to remove and often difficult to access. Because Chinese lespedeza's root reserves are low during the flowering period, removal of the plant at this time greatly helps reduce its presence in the future. Seeds of this plant, however, can remain viable in the ground for many years. These seeds plus additional seeds carried into the area on feet and tires will make this years work the beginning of a multi-year task.

A variety of non-native invasive plants are well established throughout Prince William's natural resource areas. Hats off to all Prince William volunteers who are working hard restoring and protecting our important natural resources. ***Citizens, youth organizations and civic groups interested in finding out more about invasive plants, helping with upcoming projects or adopting this site can contact the Prince William Conservation Alliance at 703.367.0069, pwca@pwconserve.org.***