

Conservation Watch

Robert E Lee Park Update



Cutting Virginia Pines at RE Lee Park in late February. Thanks to Jeffrey Budnitz for use of his gator.

There has been much activity at RE Lee Park since 2010 when Baltimore County took over stewardship of the park and a group of citizens formed the RE Lee Nature Council. The park's infrastructure has been improved, including repair of the old railroad trestle across Jones Falls, and a new boardwalk, picnic pavillion, and dog park. Heavily used by dog walkers, RE Lee Park is now the only park in the county that employs rangers to enforce park rules, including leash laws. Several local garden clubs are planning to install a native plant garden in an area close to the Lake Roland dam. With advice from MNPS, they have compiled a list of suitable species and expect to begin planting this year.

From a naturalist's perspective, the park's most interesting features are the wetlands around Lake Roland, beloved by birders, and the serpentine barren, home of several rare and uncommon plant species including *Phemeranthus teretifolius* (Fameflower). Over the last several decades this grassland/prairie community has been impacted by the spread of Virginia Pine. With the full support of park staff and the Nature Council, a project has begun to find out whether quality prairie community

can be expanded by removal of pines. This project is under the leadership of Dwight Johnson of MNPS and the RE Lee Nature Council, Charlie Davis of the Natural History Society of Maryland, and paleobotanist Bill Hillgartner, who has maintained a serpentine study plot in the park for over 10 years. They selected an experimental area of about one acre that still retains a healthy prairie plant community despite scattered trees. This spring, members of the Nature Council Trails Committee will cut the trees in that area and they will be removed by a group of boy scouts as part of an Eagle Scout project. The hope is eventually to expand this quality area outward. The preferred tool would obviously have been fire as is used in Soldiers Delight, but that is not possible given the proximity to a residential area. Dwight, Charlie and Bill plan to perform a complete biological survey of the experimental area this year, and then to observe changes over the next several years.

Starting in 2012 Dwight Johnson is conducting a plant survey of the entire park, which includes over 320 species so far. Participants in MNPS field trips will undoubtedly add to this list.



September 21-22, 2013 at Frostburg University in Allegheny County

The Threatened Natural Communities and Rare Plants of Maryland's Mountains

The Allegheny Plateau and the Ridge & Valley regions of Maryland harbor many unique natural communities and rare, threatened, and endangered plants. Human threats include forest fragmentation and non-native invasive species as a result of timber harvesting, housing development, and energy development including coal mining, industrial wind energy development, and natural gas extraction. In 2013 we

will explore the unique flora and efforts to mitigate the impacts of land use change in Maryland's mountain region. The conference committee, headed by Sunshine Brosi of Frostburg U and Liz McDowell, our Western Mountains Chair, are busy lining up speakers and field trips. Details will be posted on the website, and an email announcement will be sent to members and friends when registration opens.