

Strawberry Hill Nature Preserve

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Strawberry Hill Nature Preserve is a 609-acre property in southwestern Adams County, managed for public recreation, education, and wildlife habitat. In response to large populations of invasive and noxious plants across the property, the Preserve developed an invasive plant management plan as part of their earlier Forest Stewardship Plan in 2010. Invasive plants, particularly hay-scented fern and Japanese stiltgrass, were so prevalent that the forest community was changing, with little or no regeneration by common native trees like oaks, poplars, and maples. Prior to 2010, the Preserve lacked the funding and ability to make real progress toward controlling their invasive problems.

Through involvement with both the Pennsylvania DCNR and Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), the Preserve learned of the technical and financial assistance for forestry management available through USDA's Environmental Quality Incentives Program, or EQIP. Earlier this year, the Preserve received an EQIP contract to help restore a more natural forest and native plant community within the Preserve through weed management, installation of exclusionary deer fence, and interplanting desirable native trees and shrubs.

The first phase of weed management consisted of treating 62 acres of invasive plants with herbicides, and was completed in June with great success. With this treatment, the hay-scented fern and stiltgrass were badly damaged, and in most situations killed completely, with little or no incidental damage to other plants in the area. Although many might consider the herbicide treatment (and subsequent die-off) of 62 acres of ferns to be very unappealing since it caused the previous "park-like" appearance to look like a dead patch, that park-like appearance was a disguise for what was really happening: invasive plants were thriving and preventing forest regeneration to take place.

The dead ferns certainly don't look park-like anymore, but what's happening under those dead ferns is cause for hope-- without the smothering blanket of invasive plants, there are many tiny native plant seedlings that are alive and well, and the forest is already trying to return to its natural plant community. In this case, all that brown vegetation doesn't mean the forest is lifeless; instead, it signals the potential rebirth of the forest.

Strawberry Hill Nature Preserve, DCNR, and NRCS all have very high hopes that the forest will begin regenerating in the coming year, now that the competing, dense invasive plants have been removed.



Before: A view of Japanese stiltgrass covering the forest floor.



After: A view, showing the effectiveness of herbicide treatment.



Before: A view showing the total domination of the forest floor by hay-scented fern, totally excluding everything else.



After: A view with both dead ferns and live natives visible.

Current forest regeneration on this site is good, but promises to be even better in the coming year. The EQIP contract includes additional weed control, if needed, and interplanting with trees and shrubs in 2012 and 2013.