

## STEWARDSHIP PROFILE: Cedar Ridge Preserve

A walk through Cedar Ridge will take you along thickety hedgerows, old fields teeming with wildflowers and native grasses, and into the shady alcoves of a Christmas tree farm gone feral. Cedar Ridge is a preserve in which to enjoy the rebirth of the wild landscape. Follow the newest trail to its terminus, however, and you will emerge in a relict patch of ancient forest along the Stony Brook.

As stewards of Cedar Ridge, we are guiding the evolving landscape towards several habitat types, each containing diverse communities of native plants—communities which are beautiful, intricate, cooperative, and supportive of a broad array of wildlife.

A young landscape like that at Cedar Ridge presents unique challenges. Abandoned farm fields start their return to wilderness as something of a blank slate. They contain little in the way of a seedbank for native plants, and none of the rhizomes, corms, tubers, and bulbs which characterize many of our native herbaceous species.

Exotic invasive species establish themselves with ease in the soils of an old farm field. An overpopulation of deer tilts the odds in favor of exotic colonizers as the deer chew to stubs their traditional food sources—native shrubs, trees and flowers.

In 2006, D&R Greenway received a Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) grant to remove invasive exotic plants, plant native tree and shrub saplings, and create vernal ponds. As we complete the implementation of the grant, the preserve is metamorphosing from a feral landscape to a botanical and avian sanctuary.

We've concentrated our stewardship efforts on enhancing two habitat types at Cedar Ridge: native shrubland and native meadow.

### **From Overgrown Hedge to Native Shrubland**

When we began stewardship at Cedar Ridge, thick brambles girded the four old fields. Primary components of these hedges were the invasive thornbushes multiflora rose and Japanese barberry, the strangling vines oriental bittersweet and Japanese honeysuckle, and the autumn olive, a small but aggressive Eurasian tree.

Using tools ranging from handsaws and loppers to tactically operated brush hogs (skillfully driven by volunteer stewards Robert Baron and Tom Ebeling) we removed invasive plants while safeguarding natives. From the outset, an interesting irony was revealed—deep within the thorny invasive hedges were native shrubs, protected from deer by the walls of unappetizing and painful invasives.

A walk taken along the previously impassable stream corridor to the left of the (soon to be installed) parking area now winds through a diverse collection of native shrubs—spicebush, blackhaw viburnum, wild hazelnut, three different species of dogwood, and native wild roses—all newly liberated from the competition of invasives. Upcoming seasons should be spectacular for native flowers and fruits.

### **Native Meadows**

In thinning Cedar Ridge's encroaching hedges we've also created more space for Cedar Ridge's beautiful meadows. Dominated by native grasses like little bluestem and Indian grass, and wildflowers like foxglove beard tongue, mountain mint, and New England aster, the meadows are maintained in this habitat type by mowing at the end of the growing season.

We invite you to enjoy the fruits of the stewardship which has transformed Cedar Ridge into a preserve of wide vistas and thriving native plant communities—a sanctuary for wildlife and humans alike. Follow the new trail heading towards the far northern corner, for in the small patch of ancient forest along the brook, a truly magnificent white oak resides, which has seen it all, from the days of the first clearing of the old-growth forest two hundred years ago to the stewardship of the reborn wild landscape.

Jared Rosenbaum, Land Steward 1/28/08