



NJ Invasive Species
Strike Team

FoHVOS
FRIENDS OF HOPEWELL VALLEY OPEN SPACE

Strike Team Report March 2021

Winters' cabin fever is at its height, but spring is starting to take hold! Our thoughts are turning to getting out into nature and connecting with colleagues later this year. We are starting to plan for getting us all together -- Professional Conference to be held on October 13th at Duke Farms, Community Conference for late summer, and Potluck Social for fall. It would be great to see you at the Social, please set your foraging schedule and planning your dishes to ready!

This month's Live and Learn was contributed by Jillian Stark from the Mercer County Park Commission. The County has been expanding its stewardship efforts and taking the very important step of incorporating fire into its toolbox to maintain their fantastic grassland bird habitats located at Mercer Meadows (a.k.a. Pole Farm) and control invasive species.

We hope that you will consider [a donation to the Strike Team](#) to support our critical work.

Mike Van Clef, Ph.D.
FoHVOS Stewardship Director
Strike Team Program Director

Lisa Wolff
Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space
Executive Director

Invasives: Burn them to the Ground!



At Mercer County Park Commission, we have been thrilled to add prescribed fire as a tool in our toolbox for invasive management. We conducted our first burns last winter in 2020 on our 500-acre restored grasslands at Mercer Meadows in Hopewell and Lawrence Townships, with one major goal being to reduce invasive woody cover. These grasslands provide critical habitat to imperiled bird species with specific nesting and/or overwintering requirements, and keeping them in primarily native herbaceous cover is a priority.

Though we have historically rotationally mowed the grasslands to prevent woody cover from overtaking, burning provides other benefits including fuel/thatch reduction, nutrient cycling, encouraging native fire-adapted species, and decreasing emissions from mowing. Target species we aim to control through burning include autumn olive, Callery pear, and American sweetgum (which though native, tends to eagerly invade grasslands in the region). We saw the suppression of many individuals of these species throughout the 190 acres of grasslands burned, though some did re-sprout from the roots. About 90 acres of woodlands were burned as well, and we aim to use fire as a tool to control invasive understory in more of the forests of our Parks this year. We are interested to see if prescribed fire can be used effectively to reduce the accelerating invasion by non-native understory species in response to ash tree and subsequent canopy loss.



For invasive management, prescribed fire is not a fix-all –some species may not be affected, or may even benefit from fire. On our lands in Mercer County, we plan on using an integrated approach that combines fire, mechanical, and chemical treatments in priority areas to maximize effectiveness. Timing is also important – growing season burns, conducted between mid-April and the end of June have the ability to inflict more damage on invasive plants, as they have come out of dormancy and sent resources upward from their root system at this point. We have not performed any growing season burns yet at Mercer but plan to, weather permitting, in 2021.

Prescribed fire for ecological uplift has become more accessible since 2018 when Governor Murphy signed the “The Prescribed Burn Act,” which expanded acceptable uses of prescribed fire from reducing hazard fuels to recognizing it as a beneficial tool for habitat management. To learn more about how you might be able to use fire as a tool for managing invasive species on public and private lands, visit the NJ Forest Fire Service website:

<https://www.state.nj.us/dep/parksandforests/fire/> .

Jillian Stark, Senior Land Steward
Mercer County Park Commission



SAVE THE DATE!

13th Annual Professional Conference
Duke Farms Coach Barn
October 13, 2021

***As the year progresses, we'll keep tabs on COVID restrictions and set an agenda and open registration once we have confidence that we'll have an all clear by fall. We're very much hoping to see you all!*

Volunteer with us!

Looking for a volunteer opportunity?
The NJ Invasive Species Strike Team is the organization for you!
Visit our sign up genius below to share your interests with us.
Contact lhovath@fohvos.org for more information.

[I'm Interested!](#)

The Strike Team needs your help to fight invasive species throughout New Jersey. By making a membership donation, you directly fund our efforts to keep invasive species at bay and protect our native plants and wildlife. Donate through the link below!

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