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Cascade September 2021

The Accotink Gorge is Infested with Chinese Wisteria

By Avril Garland
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Few people have heard of the Accotink Gorge, in Springfield. That's because it's one of the few natural areas in Fairfax County with no roads, parking lots, playing fields, maintenance buildings, bathrooms, benches set in asphalt aprons, picnic tables, garbage cans, or other accoutrements of development save Dominion's power lines. Its only paths are those made by deer or foxes. Its wooded slopes, broad sunlit meadow, and creek are home to an astonishing variety of flowering plants. [Accotink Gorge Images 2015](#)

Call it a mini-wilderness in the heart of Fairfax County.

If all that sounds too good to be true, it is. Alas, Chinese wisteria infests much of the gorge and is spreading fast. The following photos were taken by Friends of Accotink Creek.





Chinese wisteria vines wrap tightly around the trunks of young trees, and will cut through the bark, and kill the trees by girdling.



This larger tree better withstands the girdling, but Asian wisterias also kill by shading. Like other invasive vines, wisteria grows faster than its host trees and soon blocks the light from the trees' foliage.



Wisteria starts out small...



before colonizing the entire understudy.



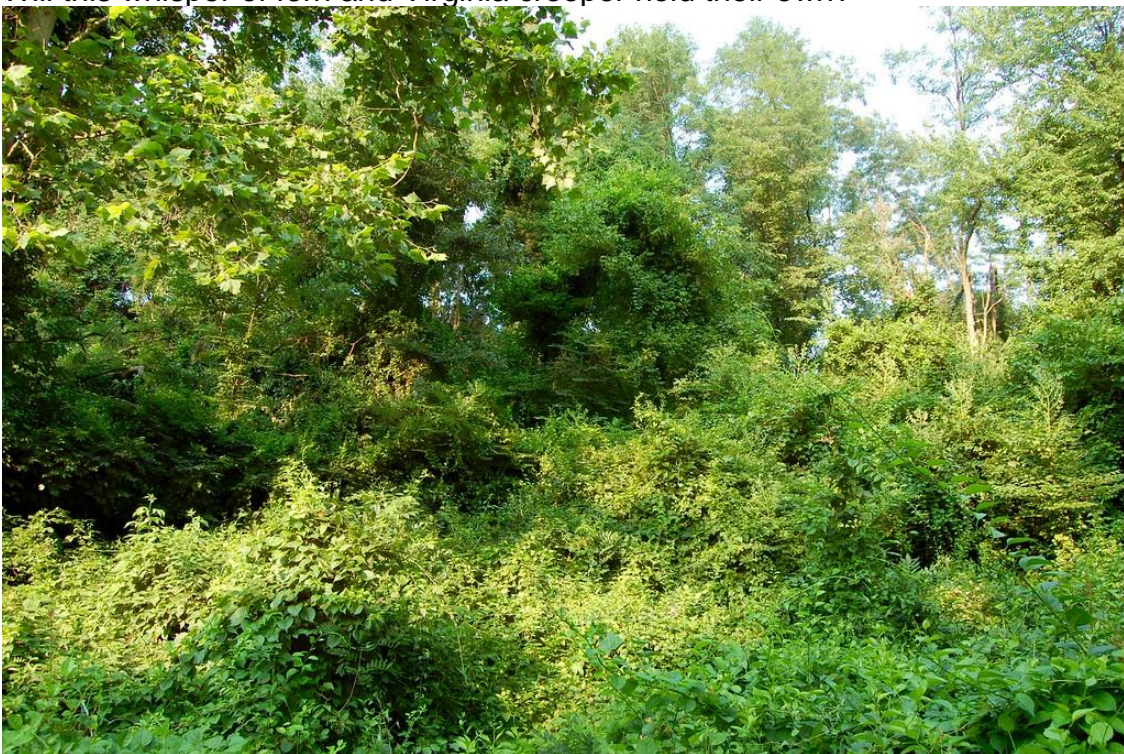
Its vines crisscross the ground like cables.



Its foliage smothers a native oak sapling.



Will this whisper of fern and Virginia creeper hold their own?



In many areas the wisteria forms impenetrable thickets.



If we lose the trees, deprived of shade, the stream will heat up and its fish and aquatic life will perish.



Action is urgently needed. A good start by student Kathie Lau, a member of Save Accotink Gorge Committee.

What Sierra Club members can do:

1) Join our wisteria workdays. Since 2017, Friends of Accotink Creek has been hosting volunteer events to cut back the wisteria.



Our last workday was in April. The next one will be this fall. We are hoping to have a herbicide crew follow us to spot-spray the freshly cut vines.

2) Ask your legislators to ban sales of all invasive plants! Chinese and Japanese wisterias are sold in garden centers all over the Commonwealth. American wisteria is just as attractive and doesn't kill trees.



Asian wisteria for sale at the Merrifield Garden Center, Fairfax County

Friends of Accotink Creek plans to work with Fairfax County Park Authority (FCPA) and other landowners of the Gorge to control the wisteria. VDOT has property here, and Fort Belvoir owns the property upstream from the VDOT parcel and much more beyond that where wisteria infestations occur along Accotink Creek. Dominion has an easement on the park property, as well as the private property under their wires. Dominion also has environmental grants as well as some sporadic programs of its own to improve habitat in its easements.

Last Saturday, August 21, 2021, a group from Friends of Accotink Creek visited the gorge to choose a sample area for a GIS survey we plan to do in September.

With FCPA we are trying to set up a county invasive area management site, and are seeking a site leader willing to undertake this responsibility.

For more information on the Accotink Gorge, go to <https://www.accotink.org/2015/AccotinkGorge2015.htm>