

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EARTH SANGHA

THE ACORN

NOVEMBER 2013



TWO NURSERIES, ONE SANGHA

We have a lot to be proud of here at the Sangha, as 2013 wraps up. We completed our first parkland purchase for the Tree Bank Hispaniola, along the Dominican Republic / Haiti border. We grew our membership through new outreach activities like the DC Green Festival. Rising Forests Coffee sales have nearly doubled from the previous year. The Native Arboretum at the Marie Butler Leven Preserve is now the ongoing focus of intensive invasives management. We've proven that novel techniques in meadow management can yield results. (See page 2.)

Yet as the Sangha's ecological restoration efforts continue to grow, we are mindful of what is at the core of what we do: the propagation of native plants. The Wild Plant Nursery (WPN) and the Tree Bank Nursery remain the engines that drive our work, and neither has ever been more productive. In 2013 we will distribute over 15,000 plants from the WPN through our own plantings, distribution to partner organizations, and our Nursery Open House. The Tree Bank Nursery is on track to produce 30,000 trees this year—an all-time record.

But to keep pace with growing demand, we need to expand production and renovate our facilities. Many of you who have volunteered at the WPN may be wondering if I'm about to tell you that we need some new shade cloth or more pots—and we do need those things—but that's not all. We need to prepare our nurseries to meet the demands for the next decade, not simply the next year or two, and

that means we need to think big, both here in the DC area, and in Los Cerezos in the Dominican Republic.

This isn't the worst problem to have. After all, it means that we've been doing something right for the last decade or so if this whole native, local-ecotype idea is really catching on. But we're now up against several constraints: the WPN needs more space for equipment, and that means more fencing and shelving. We need to collect more seed, and that will increase our need for secure seed storage. About 3,500 square feet of raised-bed space has to be converted to container yard, so we'll need to regrade that area, build more steel canopy, and stretch more shade. Over 1,000 feet of aging hoses are rotting away, springing leaks, and almost all of them need to be replaced.

The Tree Bank Nursery needs work too, and the repairs can't wait. Without a constant flow of seedlings, our farmers won't be able to restore their forests, replant their orchards, and regenerate their Rising Forests Coffee groves. We've already replaced shade cloth destroyed by hurricanes (twice); we also need to truck in soil, and buy more pots and basic supplies. And the nursery needs a "secadero"—a concrete-floored hoop house for drying seed; this structure is essential to several Tree Bank programs.

We've already started to fix some of these things. At the WPN, Chris designed and tested a new sprinkler layout that should last

Continued on page 3 ...

Photos: Local wild plants—from two very different locales. Above left, in our Tree Bank nursery near the Dominican Republic / Haiti border, Frankie, our Nursery Assistant (left) and Gaspar, our Program Director, weed native-tree stock. The trees will help restore local forests. Above right, our DC-area volunteers perform the same tasks in our Fairfax, Virginia, Wild Plant Nursery. Most of these plants are also destined for local restoration projects.

INVEST IN RESTORATION!

Your gift will be matched! Two very generous anonymous donors have agreed to match, dollar-for-dollar, up to \$100, every gift to our nursery-upgrade campaign through the year-end!

HELP UPGRADE OUR COMMUNITY NURSERIES!

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS . ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION . TROPICAL AGROFORESTRY
NATIVE PLANT PROPAGATION FROM LOCAL ECOTYPES . GREEN BUDDHISM

Doesn't
always
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STUDIES RESULTS



We now have evidence that the scythe, the ancient tool for managing grainland, can help restore mid-Atlantic meadows. You can see some of that evidence in these photos. They were taken at the end of September, at the Occoquan Bay National Wildlife Refuge, along the Potomac River in Prince William County, Virginia. The photos show two end-of-season measurement plots in our 12.5-acre meadow-restoration patch at the Refuge.

Over the past two years, Chris Bright has been mowing certain acres of our patch with his scythe, to see if this very green form of management could coax something like a meadow out of the current vegetation. That vegetation is dominated by a tall native grass called eastern gamagrass. (Chris calls it the “EGG,” as in “the EGG is mighty high.”) Although the EGG is native, its growth here is not natural: it was sown as a dense monoculture and has become infested with many invasive alien plants. A high-quality meadow would contain fewer invasives and more natives. It would also have more structural variety—there would be tall patches and lower, more open patches.

To see if the scythe was working, we took a 10-foot by 10-foot square of plastic pipe and dropped it at random three times in an

acre subjected to the scythe regimen, and three times in an adjoining acre that had not been treated that way. The top photo shows an untreated plot; the bottom one shows a plot subjected to the scythe.

Within each plot, we noted down a few simple features of the vegetation. That’s what Diana Prado, our George Mason University intern, is doing in the photos. She’s recording maximum EGG height, number of EGG seed-stalks, and the amount of goldenrod, narrow-leaved boneset, and broomsedge—native meadow plants that, in our patch, the EGG generally tends to suppress.

The findings, in brief: the scythe seems to have forced a dramatic reduction in EGG height and seed production, and encouraged the growth of those other native species.

So far so good! Now we need to figure out whether scythes could help manage the invasives. To do that, Chris and Diana are going to form a team of “Green Reapers”—scythe-equipped volunteers—to mow larger portions of our Occoquan Bay patch regularly in 2014. In addition to rehabilitating the meadow, we want to reinvent this ancient tool by creating a new purpose for it. Want to join us? See the note on page 4.



EARTH SANGHA

BUDDHIST VALUES IN ACTION

The Earth Sangha is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) charity based in the Washington, DC, area and devoted to ecological restoration. We work in the spirit of Buddhist practice, but our members and volunteers come from a wide variety of religious and secular backgrounds.

Want to contact us or make a donation? You can support our work by becoming a member. Membership starts at \$35 per year. Donations are tax-deductible. You can mail us a check (made out to "Earth Sangha") or donate on our website. We will send you a receipt and include you in our mailings. (If your name and address are correct on your check, there is no need to send us anything else.) [Contact us at: Earth Sangha, 10123 Commonwealth Blvd., Fairfax, VA 22032-2707 | \(703\) 764-4830 | earthsangha.org](mailto:Contact us at: Earth Sangha, 10123 Commonwealth Blvd., Fairfax, VA 22032-2707 | (703) 764-4830 | earthsangha.org). Complete program information is available on our website.

Want to volunteer or meditate with us? We work with volunteers at our Wild Plant Nursery and our field sites in northern Virginia. We meditate in the Del Ray section of Alexandria on Tuesday evenings. For more information see our website or call Lisa Bright at (703) 764-4830.

The Acorn: Our newsletter is produced with "print on demand" technology, which consumes far less energy and materials than does conventional printing. This paper is 100% post-consumer waste recycled, process chlorine-free, and manufactured entirely with wind-generated electricity. This issue © copyright 2013, Earth Sangha.

One of the best: The Earth Sangha is recognized by the *Catalogue for Philanthropy* as "one of the best small charities in the Washington, DC, region."



**From the Tree Bank's farmers
To you:**

Rising Forests Coffee.

Revive yourself.

Restore the forests.

earthsangha.org/coffee.html

Follow us on Twitter @RForestsCoffee

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longer and be easier to maintain. We've started to replace the most damaged hoses. And we're looking at options to expand our storage.

For the Tree Bank, I'm trying to get a grant for the secadero, which will be used to dry staple crops (beans, corn, guandules, and peanuts), as well as our Rising Forests Coffee beans. It will also provide secure storage for especially valuable native tree seeds, such as the threatened West Indies Mahogany. If we can find the funding, either from a foundation or from our generous individual donors, we will build the secadero next year.

Despite our progress—or maybe because of it!—we need your help. We have a great deal to do this coming year, at both of our nurseries, and we won't be able to do it without you. If you live in the DC area, please keep an eye out for our field-schedule emails (or check the Field Schedule page of our website, at earthsangha.org).

And please think of the Sangha as you plan your year-end giving. Your donation will make an even bigger difference than usual, because two very generous anonymous donors will match it, up to \$100. The match is good through year-end. With your help, I'm confident that we can prepare both the Wild Plant Nursery and Tree Bank Nursery for all the growing to come.

— Matt Bright, Conservation Coordinator

Photo: In August 2012, Steve (with camera) and Matt (with UFO) get some stills of Tree Bank farmers Fausto Mateo and Suna, in their forest parcela. All the trees in the photo were grown from seed at the Tree Bank nursery.



LIFE GOES ON

Replanting along Long Branch: We have finally returned to our half-acre wet-meadow site along Long Branch stream in Fairfax County's Rutherford Park. This area was just turf back in 2010, when we began restoring it. The initial plantings did well but work was interrupted a year later for a large—and lengthy—Washington Gas excavation. We're pleased to report that the pipes are back underground and some of our original planting survived. But there's plenty of work to do here, and an energetic group of 18 Dimension Data employees and their families got our replanting off to a great start on October 19.

Rising Forests, rising sales: We're on track to double our annual Rising Forests Coffee sales. Rising Forests is the brand that we created for the coffee produced by our Tree Bank farmers, along the Dominican Republic / Haiti border. All Rising Forests Coffee is de facto organic and grown under native forest cover—so the brand conserves threatened tropical forest—and all profits return to the Tree Bank's project area. We're still only selling boutique quantities but we cleared \$5,000 by the end of September. Not bad for us! For more info, click Coffee on our home page, at earthsangha.org

Catalogued again! As we mentioned in the previous *Acorn*, the Sangha has been selected to appear in the 2013-2014 Catalogue for Philanthropy. Our selection is an important endorsement by the 115 independent experts who screen Catalogue applicants. This is our third time in the Catalogue. Check out the Catalogue website at cfp-dc.org, where, among other things, you can order a free pdf or hard-copy of the Catalogue. While you're there, you can also donate to your favorite charity. That, we hope, would be us!

Very wet meadow: On October 12, we planted a test patch of wet meadow in a Fairfax County Park along Difficult Run. The meadow proved wetter than we anticipated: after a couple of days of hard rain, the place was under water! Fortunately for us, St. Matthew's United Methodist Church in Annandale had adopted this event as part of its fall service day, and our eight waterproof St. Matthew's volunteers plunged right in! They did a great job under less than ideal circumstances, and we're looking forward to seeing how well our patch does against the invasive alien plants that dominate much of this site.

Looking for a few Green Reapers: Diana will soon be assembling a hearty band of scythe-equipped meadow restorationists. (See page 2.) Want to join? We're looking for a few almost-suicidally tough, enthusiastic, botanically inclined volunteers with a very high tolerance for repetitive motion in uncomfortable circumstances. This is how you see yourself, right? We knew that! Send Diana a note at info@earthsangha.org.

Native Arboretum: Matt is working out a strategy for banishing invasive alien plants, forever, from the 20-acre Marie Butler Leven Preserve in McLean. The Preserve is the site of our Native Arboretum project, and the invasives are in our way, as they have been since we started working there in 2004. Now that we have a strategy, of course, that's all going to change. Why didn't we think of this sooner? Whatever the reason, this would obviously be a great time to volunteer. Contact Matt at info@earthsangha.org.

Director Adjunto: This probably won't sound very exciting but it's an important step. We're working with Gaspar, our Tree Bank Program Director, to create an "Assistant Director" position for the Tree Bank's staff in the Dominican Republic. Currently our Dominican staff consists of Gaspar himself, and Frankie, Gaspar's nursery assistant. We've got lots of volunteer muscle down there, but the Tree Bank has expanded considerably over the past several years and it's time to build some administrative capacity.

One more reason why it was really stupid: Not that Congress is likely to care about such things, but the federal shutdown didn't do local restoration work any favors. Our projects in three national parks came to an abrupt halt because we couldn't get into them. We also lost a big contingent of volunteers—up to 80 people—when a large federal contractor (Northrop Grumman) had to cancel a field day with us. But we're back out in those parks now—and we can report that the invasives were not furloughed. For more on our field work, click Field Schedule on our home page, at earthsangha.org.

Photo: Good hats, good company, good work! Volunteers weed the meadow section of our Wild Plant Nursery in August. Both of our nurseries are maintained almost entirely by volunteers.