HMCA Activities Update

by Diana Todd

for sharing at the July 2020 meeting of the HPC

A summary of what HMCA has been doing in the interval since the last submission in early March 2020.

* Due to the corona virus emergency that began in mid-March, HMCA has not hosted any public walks, work days or other gatherings, and does not plan to do so until the situation stabilizes.
* Although HMCA had to abandon plans for a public program hosted by Eric Slayton to observe his bird banding project during spring migration (which had been approved using the Facility Use Agreement process), several HMCA Directors visited the project while it was underway. They enjoyed observing the banding process and learning more about Eric’s long term goals for the project, and felt the effort was an excellent example of using the conservation area for research and education.
* HMCA Director Pieter Van Loon has installed two Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) traps near hiking trails to determine whether this alien invasive pest has reached the conservation area. Information signs have been posted near the traps and near the kiosk at the entrance to the south side trail system to educate the public about the pest. Pieter has also selected an ash tree not near the trails to be part of a state-wide EAB inventory. Following the protocol developed for the scientific survey, the tree has been physically stressed (girdled), since stressed trees seem to attract the EAB. The tree will be cut down this fall so that it can be closely examined from top to bottom for evidence of the pest. This is a much more accurate way of determining if the pest is present than the purple traps.
* HMCA Directors have walked all the trails in the conservation area to check for potential maintenance issues.
  + Trails appear to be being used, but not over-used.
  + No trash problems have been found.
  + The Tower Trail continues to have problems with drainage. As part of their contract with the Town, the National Grid was supposed to fix those problems.
  + The culvert that crosses the hiking/VAST trail near the Quonset Hut at the bottom of the former ski area continues to erode. A wooden plank currently is the only way for hikers to cross the area with dry feet. The crossing is no longer viable for a mowing machine or tractor, which will create summer trail maintenance issues. (It is crossable by snow machines in winter when temps are low enough for a solid freeze.) Installing a new culvert would be the best long term solution to the problem.
* Trail Committee members have done standard annual mowing and clearing. Later this summer, Bob Anderson will be bringing his tractor to mow additional grassy and ferny trail sections.
* The highly invasive plant Wild Chervil was found growing on the leaching field at the hairpin turn on Rim Run. This area is not part of the conservation area, but is right over the border. Concerned that the infestation might make the leap onto conservation area land, Pieter Van Loon received permission from the land owner to uproot the plants. A small group spent two mornings working on the project, and pulled up and hauled away an estimated 100 pounds of Wild Chervil before it went to seed. If we want to keep this invasive plant at bay, we will need to repeat the effort for at least several years, due to the seed bank that has likely built up in the soil over the years.