



## Local Forest Communities Worksheet

### Instructions

Read the passage below and use it to answer the questions on the following page.

### Forest Communities

The success of a plant or tree **species** varies in different environments. The growth and survival of trees depend on their ability to adapt to existing—and sometimes changing—environmental conditions. Nutrient types, soil **composition**, moisture levels, and climate zones determine what kinds of plants and animals are found within a given environment. Because of this, distinct forest communities exist in various parts of the Potomac River watershed. See the “Forest Cover in the Potomac River Watershed Map” to discover what types of forest are found in your county, and compare them to other areas in the watershed.



Courtesy of Ed Neville



Courtesy of Anthony Hathaway

### Native Plants

**Native plants**, including trees, have evolved in their local environment. Native plants are adapted to local conditions and have developed natural defenses against many local insects and diseases. As a result, these plants can thrive with a minimal amount of maintenance by humans. Local wildlife have evolved to rely on native plant communities for food and habitat, so native trees preserve the balance of nature. However, humans have introduced many nonnative species to the Potomac River watershed, greatly altering the region’s **ecology** and, in some cases, endangering the livelihood of native plants and animals.

### Problems with Nonnative Plants

When plants that are not native to an area are introduced, they can cause devastating long-term consequences to the local ecosystem. Without natural predators, some nonnative plants can spread out of control. These types of nonnative species, known as **invasive species**, are able to grow aggressively and out-compete native species for sunlight, water, and nutrients. This can cause a “**ripple effect**” in the **ecosystem**, impacting wildlife that relies on native plants for food and shelter.



Poolesville High School students remove oriental bittersweet, an invasive species that is choking trees. Minnies’ Island, 2006



## Local Forest Communities Worksheet (con't)

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_

### **Instructions**

Answer the following questions in complete sentences. Ask your teacher for help if you do not understand the questions.

1. Give two reasons why, for restoration projects, native plants are better than plants from a different area.

a) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What harm do invasive plants present to a local ecosystem? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. What factors influence the types of plants that grow in a given area? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_