

Volunteers help rid parks of invaders

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The invaders were a tall bunch, unruly and tough to eradicate. But they met their match Sunday against a group of more than 20 kids and adults.

With cutting shears in hand, volunteers circled Tarkill Pond at [Brookhaven State Park](#) in [Ridge](#), snipping away at tall stalks of Phragmites -- an invasive species of grass.

Chinese Mystery Snails -- an invasive species of snail -- were also pulled from the murky pond, as part of the Volunteer Day organized by the state parks department and the [Long Island Sound Study](#), a coalition of state, federal and

local environmental agencies.

"We're hoping that by coming out here and making a difference, we're also encouraging people to learn more about nature and become good stewards of the environment," said Larissa Graham, outreach coordinator for the study.

Graham said removing the wild reeds and snails was necessary to ensure that native plants, snails and amphibians in the pond are not forced to compete for resources.

The black-shelled Chinese Mystery Snails, which are native to Asia, are most commonly used in aquarium tanks, but may have been released into the pond, Graham said. Phragmites typically spread through an underground root system and block sunlight to native marsh grass.

"Consider the invasive species like big bullies, out-competing everyone, and taking their food and space," Graham said. "We want to give the other guys a better chance for survival."

Ariana Newell, regional natural resource biologist for the state parks department, said the extra sets of hands came in handy, as state budget cuts have trimmed park staff and hours.



"We're trying to organize more projects because it really helps us," said Newell.

She said the park is applying for a protective designation from the state called the Invasive Species Prevention Zone, which is given to parks with less than 10 percent invasive species. The designation would make the park eligible for additional state and federal funds to battle nonnative plants and wildlife.

Peter Marrello, of [Center Moriches](#), said he brought his daughter Chiara, 11, and son Lucas, 8, to volunteer to help them develop "an appreciation for the environment and its beauty. . . . That's part of the beauty of living on [Long Island](#)."

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