



Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission
Project Accounting July 2016

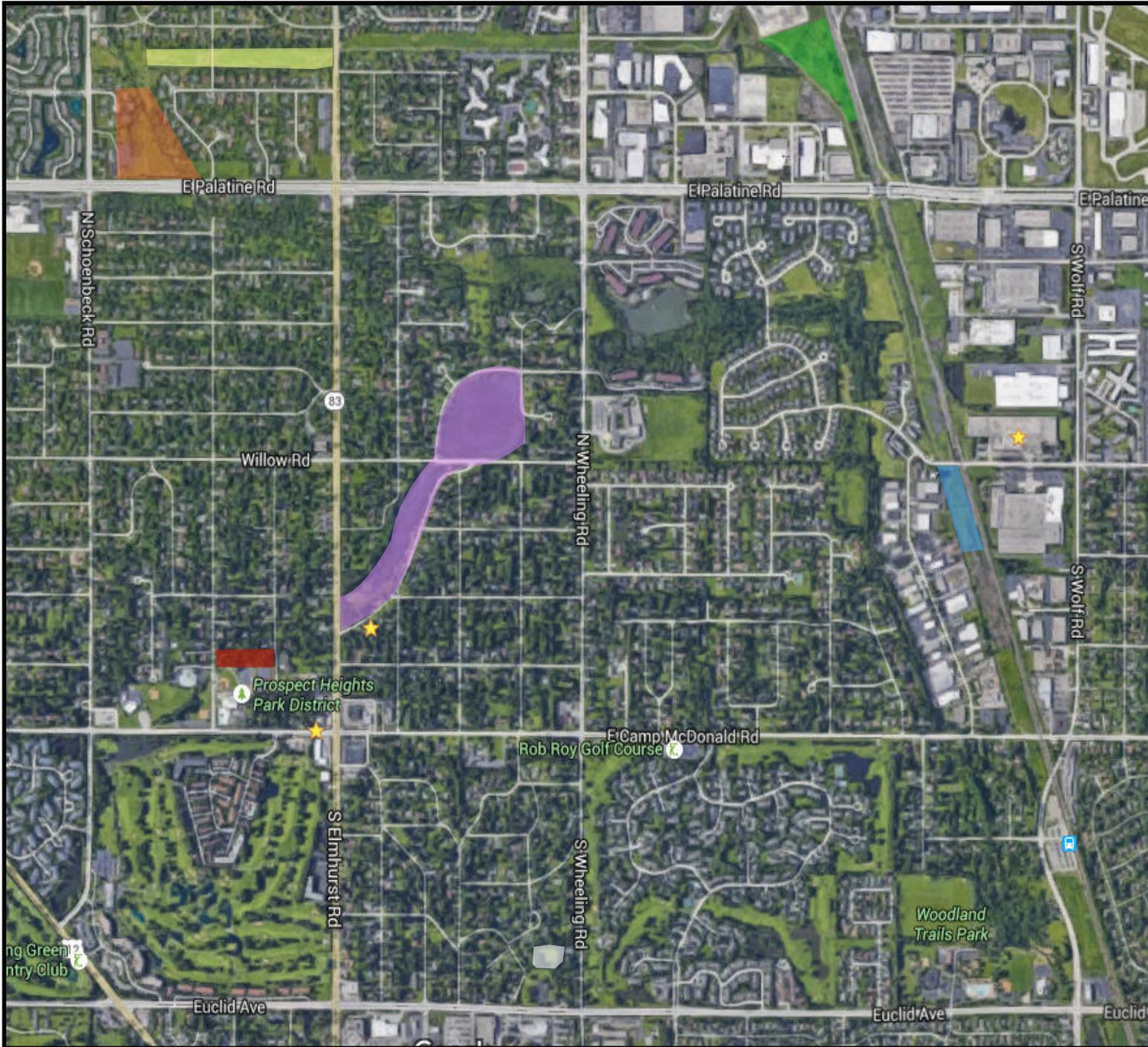
Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Overview.....	1
Slough & Lake.....	4
ComEd Prairie Restoration.....	7
Morava Center Nature Preserve.....	10
Remnant Prairie.....	13
Remnant Sedge Meadow.....	15
Somerset Park.....	18
Tully Park.....	20
Greenhouse Program.....	22
Outreach & Education.....	23
Appendices	
Appendix A.....	Restoration plan for the Slough
Appendix B.....	Slough and Hillcrest Lake Ecological Management Schedule
Appendix C.....	ComEd Prairie Restoration Ecological Management Schedule
Appendix D.....	Morava Nature Preserve Ecological Management Schedule
Appendix E.....	Remnant Prairie Ecological Management Schedule
Appendix F.....	Remnant Sedge Meadow Ecological Management Schedule
Appendix G.....	Tully Park Ecological Management Schedule

Introduction

This is an accounting of the state of the current projects under the management of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission. There are many important things to note that apply to all of the projects.

- The PHNRC is a completely volunteer organization that conducts work days every other Sunday year round in addition to seed collection Wednesdays and extra work days when necessary. Volunteers log in thousands of hours every year.
- Our volunteer base consists of a core group of approximately 13-15 and expands to meet work demands with occasional volunteers and groups like the boy scouts when really needed.
- Until this year, PHNRC activities have been completely self funded by Commissioners. Contributions are still made by Commissioners to supplement the budget.
- This year PHNRC had its first summer intern, funded through the generosity of one of our dedicated core volunteers.
- With the exception of Hillcrest Lake and a portion of the Slough, all of the PHNRC projects are on land holdings owned by or governed by the Prospect Heights Park District.
- PHNRC has received two ComEd Green Regions grants.



PHNRC Project Sites July 2016

-  ComEd Prairie Restoration
-  Somerset Park
-  Remnant Prairie
-  Remnant Sedge Meadow
-  Slough & Hillcrest Lake
-  Morava Nature Preserve
-  Tully Park



Overview

All of the PHNRC projects are located within a 5 mile radius. With the exception of the remnant prairie and sedge meadow which are located in Wheeling, all of the projects are located in Prospect Heights. Only Hillcrest Lake and a portion of the Slough are City property. All the rest of the land based projects are on Park District property or under the governance of the Park District through a lease agreement with Commonwealth Edison.

The Greenhouse activities occur on private property. The overview map shows the location of the land based projects.

In general, all of the projects are in the very early phases of restoration as the commission is only in its second year of existence. Restoring natural areas takes time and has many different requirements not only from site to site, but often within the individual sites. The ComEd prairie restoration and the Slough are case in point.

As we are a small organization, we have to work smarter, not harder. This does not always seem to make sense to the general public who may not understand the principals of restoration. It means that we consciously choose to let things go until the timing of a certain plant or the application of a specific management tool would be the most effective. Pulling dandelions in the prairie is not and never will be a priority. Restoration is not gardening. Cutting buckthorn re-sprouts and herbiciding mid summer makes absolutely no sense when a fall burn will effectively take care of the entire area in a matter of minutes. Leaving things looking a little “weedier” makes perfect sense in the majority of cases because they are place holding ground, preventing invasives that would have to be managed if they were removed. As the native plants mature, they will succeed the weed species and the only cost was a temporary eyesore.

As a result, management must be done with a global view. Invasives like Canadian thistle and reed canary for instance, spread through rhizomes, creating massive colonies if left unchecked and must be treated with herbicide before they go to seed. A single seed head from the highly invasive teasel plant can create 50,000 new plants. With 10 to 20 seed heads per plant, it creates an urgent time line to prevent the prolific spread. Seed collecting, managing other invasives, planting, seeding, community outreach, education and defending ourselves to community and council all are unique events, all driven by their own agenda. It is all about the timing of things and applying the workforce to the tasks in the most efficient and meaningful way.



PHNRC Project Sites
Slough & Hillcrest Lake - 2016
Joint Park District Project & City Project
■ Work area City
■ Work Area Park District



The Slough and Hillcrest Lake

Site Description

The Slough and Hillcrest Lake are a wetland located in the City of Prospect Heights that is partially owned by the Park District and partially the City of Prospect Heights. The wetland was formed by glacial retreat thousands of years ago and is on the original land surveys maps prior to heavy human settlement as one wetland. Sometime after 1938, Willow Rd was constructed through the wetland, now delineating it into the Northern “Hillcrest Lake” and the Southern “Slough”. Decades of neglect and lack of natural areas management have allowed invasive plants to choke out the native plant community that was here prior to settlement. The PHNRC has been managing the area known as the “Slough” since 2014. Restoration efforts have already resulted in many species of conservative plants to reappear, such as the Michigan Lily. These plants were dormant for decades and are coming back with restoration activity.

Despite the history of neglect, the Slough and Hillcrest Lake wetland supports a diverse assemblage of native species that are being conserved through ecological restoration work. These efforts are focused on the removal of invasive species and on conducting regular prescribed burns to restore ecosystem processes and conditions under which the wetland evolved.

The restoration plan for the Slough was presented at the PHNRC regular June 2016 board meeting and is attached as Appendix A. The Hillcrest Lake area would be scheduled to have the same type of restoration as the Slough but **no work will be scheduled there until the MWRD road project is completed.**

Status: In the second year of restoration

Work performed to date:

Spent 1 1/2 years removing invasive buckthorn.

Planted 7,206 native plant plugs representing 70 + species. See addendum B

Seeded 25 pounds of native grasses

Managed invasive plants

Burned the west Marion / Maple corridor.

Work scheduled for 2016-17

Removal of 8 acres of turf grass and non native species replace with Riparian buffers.

Create Mow paths and hiking trails.

Continued planting and seeding of native plugs and seed.

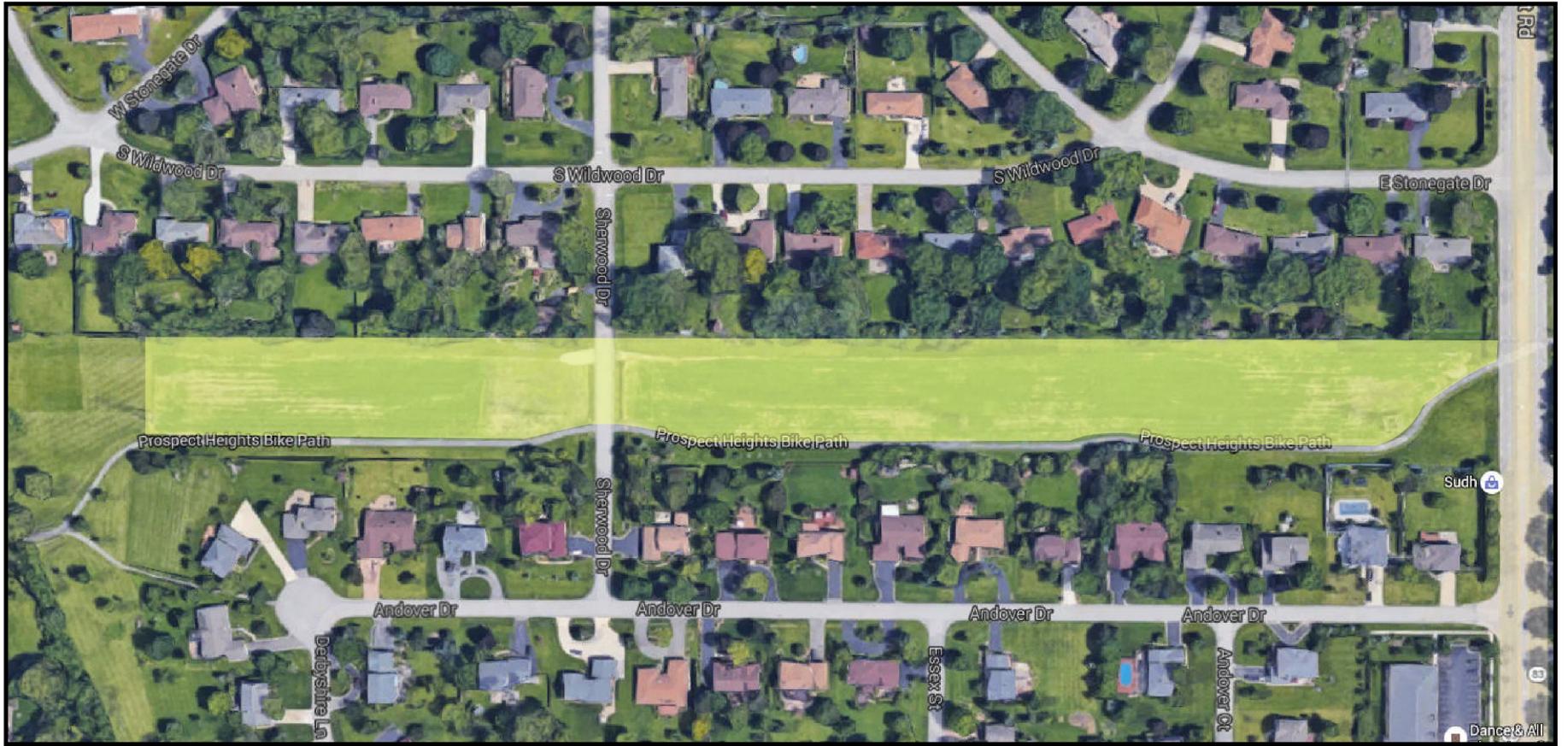
Continued maintenance

Prescribed burns in the fall 2016 and spring 2017.

Manage invasive plants.

Manage aesthetics.

See Appendix B for the complete Slough and Hillcrest Lake Ecological Management Schedule

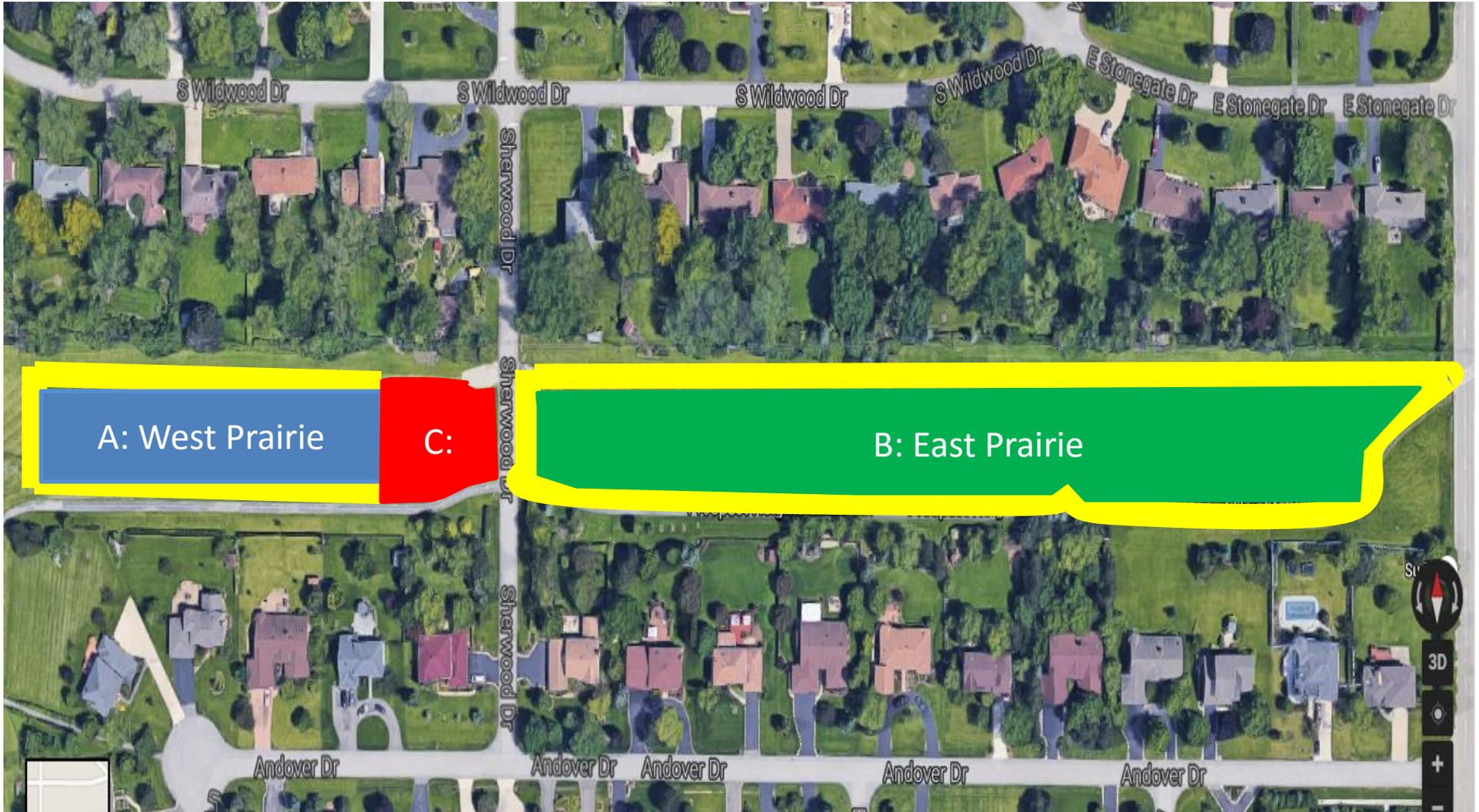


PHNRC Project Sites - ComEd Prairie Restoration - 2016

Park District Project - ComEd Lease Agreement

■ Work area





A: West Prairie
 Dec 2014 seeded
 Fall 2015 Transline
 Dec 2015 seeded

**C: Frequently mowed,
 low inv seedbank prairie**
 Dec 2014 seeded
 Fall 2015 Transline
 Dec 2015 seeded

B: East Prairie
 Dec 2014 seeded
 Fall 2015 Transline

6-15 ft wide planned mowing margin

Com Ed Prairie Restoration

Site Description

Com Ed Prairie Restoration is located in the Com Ed right of way, nestled between Route 83 and Somerset Park, along the Prospect Heights Park District Bike path. The 4.5 acre site was likely prairie until the late 1800's, when it was converted into agricultural use. Sometime after 1938 high voltage power lines were installed and the area has been maintained by Com Ed as a right of way since then. The area is under a lease agreement from Com Ed to the Prospect Heights Park District, originally for the Park District to maintain the area next to the Bike Path. In 2015, the lease agreement was amended and updated to include all restoration activities of the PHNRC.

In 2014, a Com Ed Green Regions grant was awarded to restore the area back to prairie. The starting conditions were a nonnative turf grass and a seedbed of nonnative weedy species that had accumulated due to Com Ed mowing practices, except for one section labeled C that was mowed weekly for the last 30 years. In December 2014, 80 lbs of prairie seed mix were seeded after removing the turf vegetation with herbicide.

In December 2015, a very thick mat of clover came in from the seed bed in addition to the prairie seedlings. Area A was herbicided with a selective herbicide and reseeded. Area C was herbicided and not reseeded.

Unfortunately, approximately 20% of the entire site was erroneously mowed down low, effectively killing most of the prairie seedlings coming up in those areas.

The current efforts are and will be focused on the removal of invasive species, encouraging the young prairie seedlings by selectively cutting, plugging and seeding plants, and on conducting regular prescribed burns to restore ecosystem processes and conditions.

See Appendix C for the ComEd Prairie Restoration Ecological Management Schedule



PHNRC Project Sites - Morava Center Nature Preserve - 2016

Park District Project

■ Work area



Morava Nature Preserve

Site Description

Gary Morava Nature Preserve is 1.6 acre property that is owned by the Park District. Historically, the area was in agricultural use for decades until it was purchased by the Park District. Many invasive species of plants have been allowed to grow there, choking out desirable species. There is a meandering creek that is tributary to McDonald Creek, eventually emptying into the Slough and Hillcrest Lake wetland.

This is a Park District project. The project was just recently awarded a ComEd Green Regions grant administered through Openlands. The idea for the project was to create an interpretive nature park, providing ecological benefits and wildlife habitat while nurturing children's connection to nature through education. The parcel of land is adjacent to The Gary Morava Recreational Facility, which offers a variety of classes and programs, including preschool, after school care and summer day camp for elementary age school children. The area is easily accessible, across the street from the Prospect Heights Library and within walking distance of Eisenhower Elementary School.

Status: In the first year of restoration.

Work performed to date:

- Spent last winter removing invasive buckthorn.
- Planted 500 native plugs
- Seeded 5 pounds of native seed
- Managed invasive plants

Work scheduled for 2016-18

- Stabilize the shore line with native plugs.
- Create hiking trails.

Continued planting and seeding of native plugs and seed.

Install interpretative signage

Install interpretative bridge

Create interactive nature areas

Create prairie area

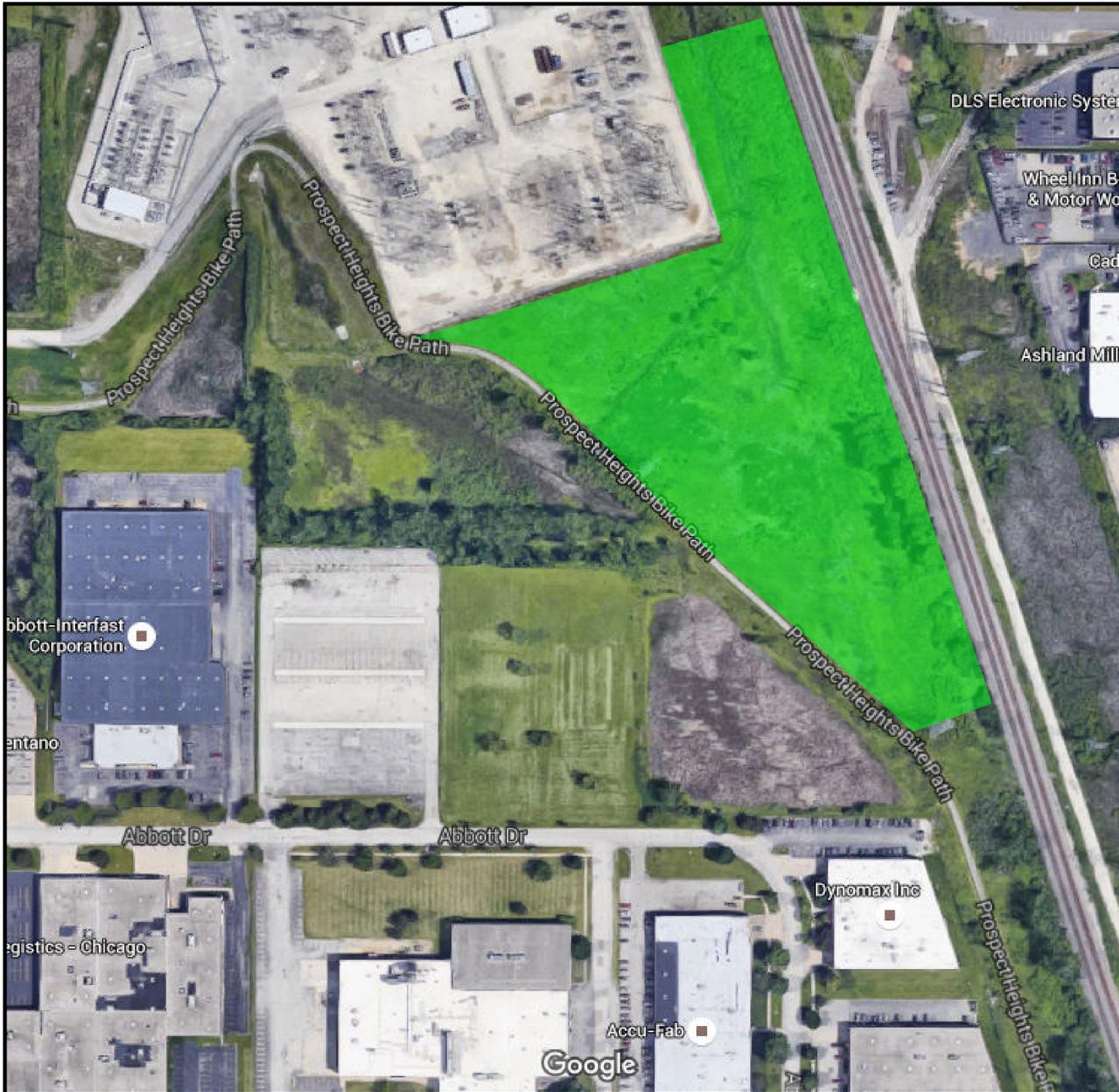
Plant native shrubs and trees

Continued maintenance

 Manage invasive plants.

 Manage aesthetics.

See Appendix D for the Morava Nature Preserve Ecological Management Schedule



PHNRC Project Sites
Remnant Prairie - 2016
Park District Project
ComEd Lease Agreement
■ Work area



Site Description

The Remnant Prairie is a 7 acre parcel of land in Wheeling that is owned by Com Ed, with a lease agreement with the Prospect Heights Park District. The lease agreement was amended in 2015 to allow for ecological restoration of the site. Historically, the land was prairie and wet prairie based on the original pre-settlement land survey maps. It was converted to agricultural use in the late 1800's and later became ComEd right of way sometime between 1938 to 1960 when the high tension power lines were installed. For some reason, a community of native prairie plants survived, likely due to the railroad and right of way that was installed prior to agricultural conversion. This site is severely degraded and contains a very thick invasion of invasive plants, notably teasel and crown vetch. This site has however become a very important area for the PHNRC to collect locally genetic seed from an assemblage of over 50 native prairie plants. The PHNRC has spent very little time managing the site, mostly by removing teasel. Even with limited management, the plant community has responded very positively and several new species have been found since management started. PHNRC will continue to manage the site on a limited basis and collect seed.

See Appendix E for the Remnant Prairie Ecological Management Schedule

Status:

In the second year of limited management by PHNRC.

Area has never been mowed and contains many different species of prairie plants and is an important seed source.

Heavily infested with invasive species.

Limited management has improved quality and number of species of plants

Grade C prairie by INHS standards.

Work Done:

Limited invasive plant removal, mainly teasel and crown vetch

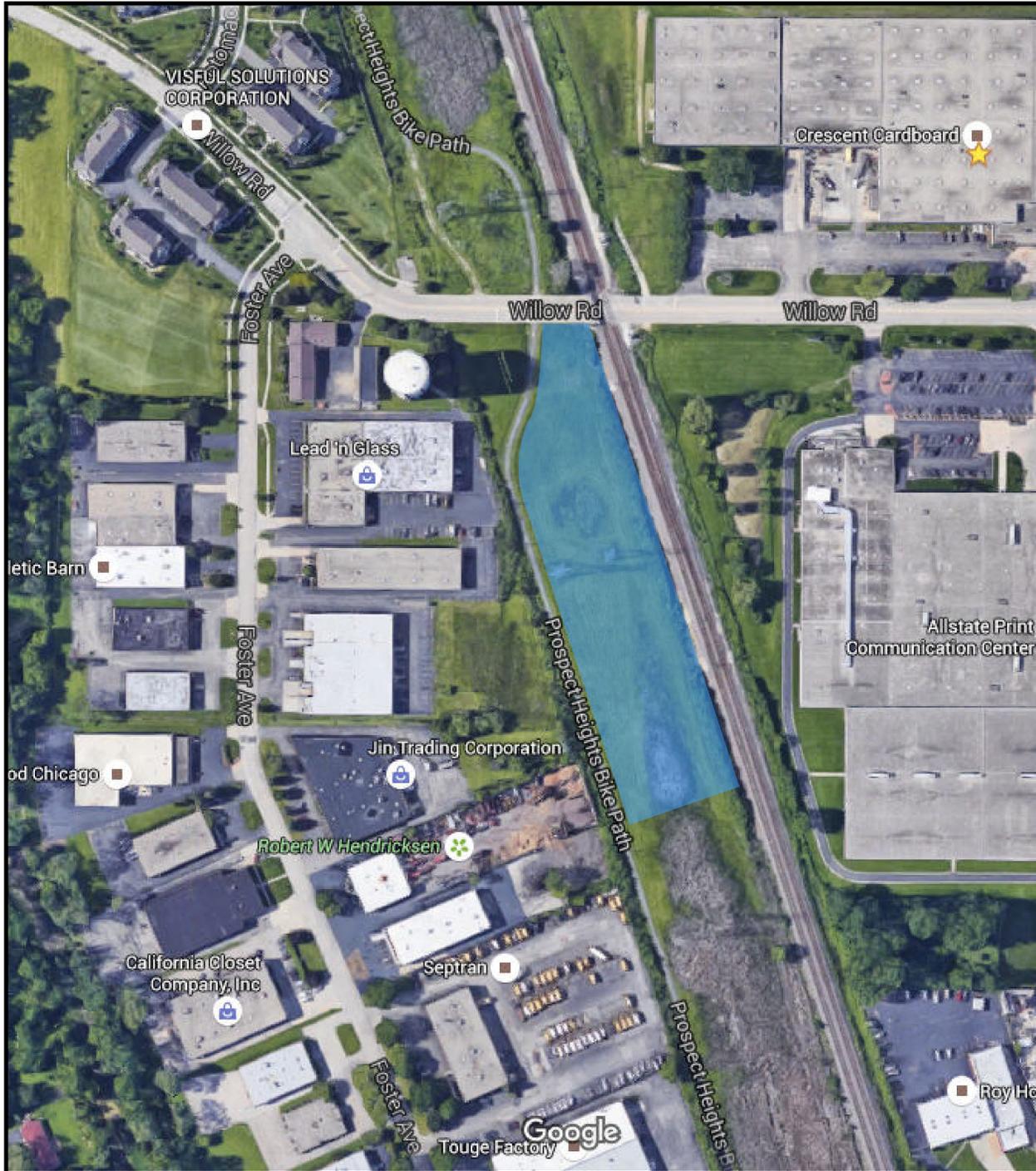
Almost a hundred pounds of seed has been collected by volunteers.

Future Work:

Increase invasive management to bring the area up to a grade B prairie, at which point it will be burned by Com Ed.

Continue seed collection

FQI analysis (monitoring). To date, several new species have been identified even with limited management.



PHNRC Project Sites
Remnant Sedge Meadow- 2016
Park District Project - ComEd Lease Agreement
■ Work area



Remnant Sedge Meadow

Site Description

The Remnant Sedge Meadow is a 5 acre parcel of land in Wheeling that is owned by Com Ed, with a lease agreement with the Prospect Heights Park District. The lease agreement was amended in 2015 to allow for ecological restoration of the site. Historically, the land was wet prairie based on the original pre-settlement land survey maps. It was converted to agricultural use in the late 1800's and later became ComEd right of way sometime between 1938 to 1960 when the high tension power lines were installed. For some reason, a community of native wet prairie plants survived, likely due to the railroad and right of way that was installed prior to agricultural conversion.

This site is in very good condition and hosts dozens of species of wet prairie sedges, rushes and grasses, as well as several very conservative plants, ie., the narrow leaved loosestrife and native orchids. A very large section has been invaded by cattails, notably there before any restoration activity. The area is an important site for seed collection.

The PHNRC has spent very little time managing the site, mostly by removing teasel and purple loosestrife. Even with limited management, the plant community has responded very positively and several new species have been found since management started. The threatened narrow loosestrife has expanded its range from a single plant to almost a dozen. PHNRC will continue to manage the site on a limited basis and collect seed.

See Appendix F for the Remnant Sedge Meadow Ecological Management Schedule

Status:

In the second year of limited management by PHNRC.

Area has a STOP MOW order since 2015.

Contains many different species of wet prairie and sedge meadow plants and is an important seed source.

Scarcely infested with invasive species.

Limited management has improved quality and number of species of plants

Work Done:

Limited invasive plant removal, mainly teasel and purple loosestrife

Almost 20 pounds of seed has been collected by volunteers.

Future Work:

Increase invasive management of teasel.

Seed into drier areas with seed from adjacent areas (remnant prairie)

Continue seed collection



PHNRC Project Sites
Somerset Park - 2016
Park District Project
Work area



Site Description

Somerset Park is a small swath of open space between two suburban neighborhoods in Prospect Heights, Illinois. The area is owned by the Prospect Heights Park District. The park sits at the intersection of three important pedestrian and wildlife corridors; Prospect Heights bike path, McDonald Creek, and the Com Ed right of way.

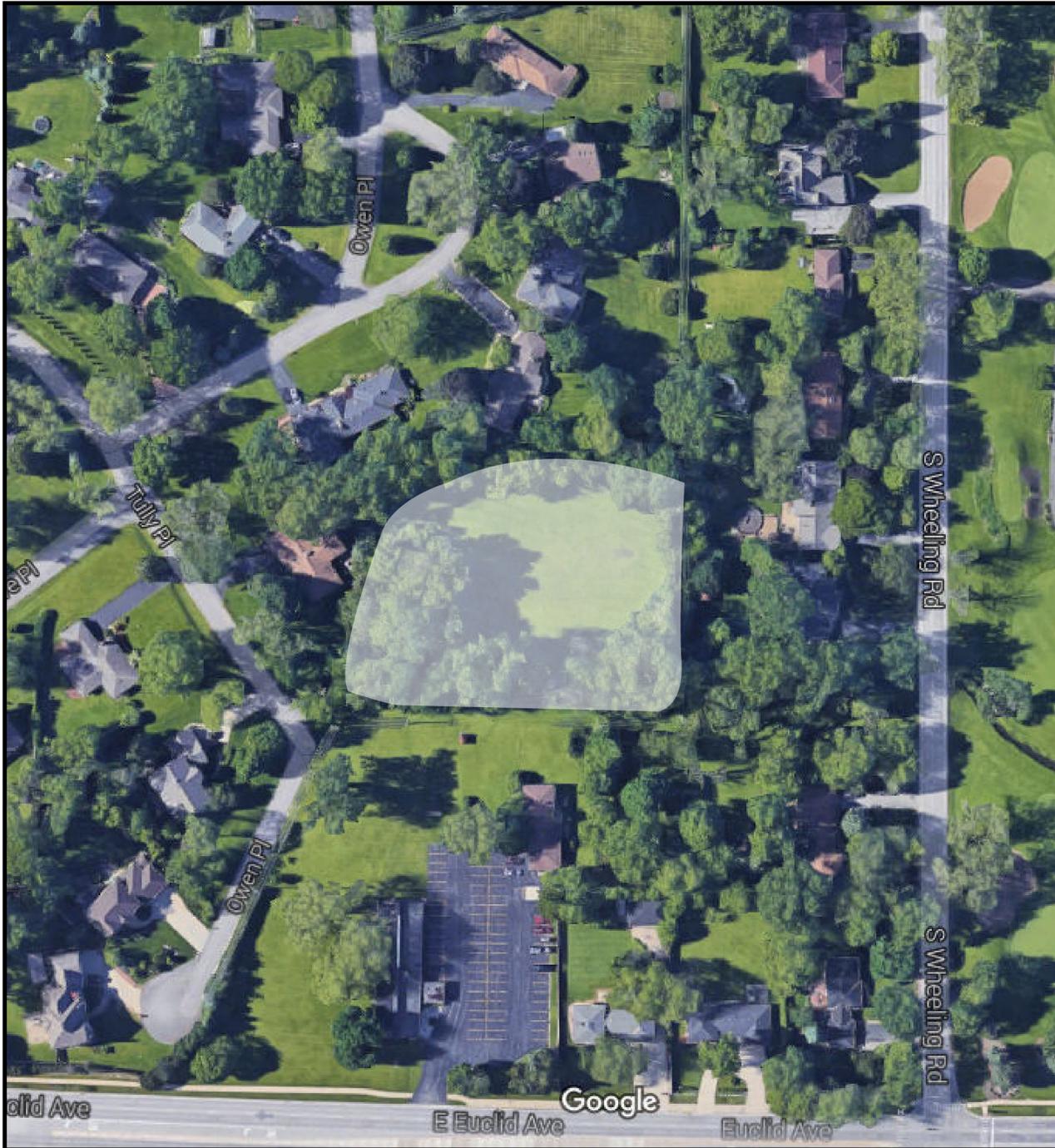
In 2014, the PHNRC and the Prospect Heights Park District applied to the University of Madison Wisconsin for the Capstone Project with a vision of creating a network of healthy native plant and wildlife communities in the area of Somerset Park. The Capstone project was awarded and as a result, a student spent his entire senior year working on the plan as his thesis project in the field of Landscape Architecture.

The completed product is a detailed design of the area as a native prairie garden. As it currently stands, the site is simply a large expanse of mowed, underutilized grass. This design repurposes it as a native prairie plant community, reestablishing natural, native plant and wildlife habitat throughout the area of Prospect Heights. The design brings the public directly into the natural landscape. By providing the residents of Prospect Heights a beautiful natural setting that they can truly interact with and make a part of their community, Somerset Park can help to foster the public appreciation for natural spaces needed to transform Prospect Heights into a thriving community for people and wildlife alike.

The design plan has been presented to the Park District Board with great positive response. The Park District, along with the help of PHNRC plans to apply for the Chi-Cal River Funds Grant later this month to fund the execution of the design plan.

Hardscape and labor will be sourced out. The project will likely need to be done in phases over the next several years. According to the vision of the project and the landscape architect, the plants that were chosen are also locally available to the PHNRC. With a very strong greenhouse program, this will enable the Park District to move forward with a much lower cost of implementation.

As this is a future project that requires thoughtful planning and funding, there is no ecological management schedule. This project will need to be managed with Park District time and labor. The PHNRC will help with the initial stages and installation if needed. The PHNRC will also advise the Park District on any ecological management issues as the project progresses.



PHNRC Project Sites
Tully Park - 2016
Park District & Tully Park Residents Project
□ Work area



Tully Park

Site Description

Tully Park is a 2 acre piece of land that is owned by the Park District within the City of Prospect Heights. Historical land survey notes , 1957 aerial topography maps and 1938 and 1960 satellite imagery indicate that the area was prairie mixed with wet prairie. Following settlement, the area was in agricultural use prior to acquisition by the Park District. The area is surrounded by homes.

Local area residents reached out to the Prospect Heights Park District and PHNRC requesting that the area be converted into a natural area. After the Park District approval of such a conversion, PHNRC has been working strictly in an advisory position to help the residents with this conversion. PHNRC has offered knowledge, resources and limited time to help the residents of Tully Park.

This Management schedule will help them to define the activities necessary for restoration of the site.

See Appendix G for the Remnant Sedge Meadow Ecological Management Schedule

Greenhouse Program

The PHNRC has successfully propagated thousands of plant plugs of native prairie, wetland and woodland species for the second year in a row.

To compare the cost of the savings to restoration projects within the City by having a greenhouse program, 7206 plant plugs were purchased for the ComEd Green Regions Grant that was awarded in 2014 at a cost of \$10,000.00

PHNRC propagated an additional 8,000 plugs in 2015 and more than 30,000 plugs of plants in 2016. This year, close to \$50,000 of plants were grown.

In addition to PHNRC greenhouses, Horcher Farms and Oakton Community Greenhouse have been growing plants and shrubs for PHNRC for free, as well as sharing invaluable information about proper propagation techniques.

Seed collection, processing and planting are all done with PHNRC volunteers.

Currently, there are over 80 species of plants that are represented. Roughly 70 % are from locally remnant sources of seed, 30% are from seed that were collected from the ComEd grant plantings. The species that were purchased with the grant were thoughtfully selected to increase the number of plant species available for restoration, thereby increasing biodiversity of all of the restoration sites.

The greenhouse program will continue with even greater success as seed scarification, stratification and germination methods are constantly improving with advice from professionals, dedication and experience.

Community Outreach Program

Realizing the need for community engagement and education about natural resources and restoration activities in the City of Prospect Heights, the PHNRC has created many venues that all community residents have access to. Below is a brief description of each.

PHNRC Website

The phnrc.com website is a clearing house of information about everything PHNRC. The site contains two years of the archived Resources Journal, a calendar of events, project descriptions, complete information about the Nature Speaks program and links to the Hey report, the PHNRC implementation plan, and other assorted Management and restoration plans

Journal

A monthly Journal is electronically delivered to any person that signs up for the listserve. The Journal contains articles about PHNRC activities, all of the happenings around the sites, as well interesting educational articles about plants, wildlife, ecology and nature. The Journal reaches almost 200 people each month. Workday notices are also sent out via email, as well as weather cancellations and special events.

Library Programs – Nature Speaks!

Nature Speaks is in collaboration with PHNRC partner, the Prospect Heights Public Library.

The series features four speakers annually, one each season and is designed to bring important national and regional speakers to Prospect Heights to discuss important, informative and entertaining topics affecting our city, our state and our planet. Prior speakers have been John McCabe, Director of the Department of Resource Management for the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, Doug Taron, Curator of Biology and Vice President of Research and Conservation at Chicago Academy of Sciences' Peggy Notebaert Nature Museum and Bruce Shackelford, President and principal project director of Environmental Consulting Operations, Inc. (ECO, Inc.) of Benton, Arkansas.

Our Future Speaker in September is Kurt Dreisilker, Head of Natural Resources at the Morton Arboretum.

Park District Programming

Partnering with the Park District, the PHNRC has organized numerous programs that residents can enjoy. Professionally led bird walk tours have been the most popular to date, with experts from the Bird Conservation Network volunteering their time and expertise to our community. Bird walks have been offered for free to local residents. Other classes that are offered are native plant ID and basic botany and walking tours of the prairie and wetland sites.

This year, the PHNRC has extended the educational opportunities to families and children, with classes such as "Hop, Skip and Jump!" inviting the entire family to learn about frogs and toads, their habitat, how they develop, what they eat and why they are so beneficial, and "Critters in the Creek", Where kids get to put on waders, grab a net and a bucket as we go creek wading in search of macroinvertebrates that live in the creek under rocks and logs and tell us an important story about how healthy our tributary creek is.

Facebook

Keeping in times with the era of social media, PHNRC maintains a Facebook page with 165 followers. Posts are made almost on a daily basis, with interesting environmental updates and photos of PHNRC activities.

Video Series

PHNRC has begun a new educational series of videos that will appear on our website. These videos are focused on management tools, best practices, plants and plant ID, prescribed burns and sight tours. Viewers will soon be able to watch future Nature Speaks speakers from our Nature Speaks series.

Tours, Walks and General Outreach

PHNRC routinely conducts a short walk with volunteers after the workdays to show them progress and interesting changes in the sites we are managing that day.

Special tours are provided on an individual or a group basis as the need arises or anytime we are asked to do so.

Commissioners always engage community members any time we are out, answering questions, addressing concerns and listening to feedback and suggestions.