

The Leaflet

CHAMPAIGN COUNTY FOREST PRESERVES

Champaign County Gets New Preserve along Sangamon River



With the support of Champaign County residents, the

Forest Preserve District referendum to increase our tax base was approved. Thank-you! Without the increase in funds, maintaining facilities and preserves would become increasingly difficult. First on the list in 2021 is updating heating and cooling systems. Replacing mechanical systems is not the most exciting or visible improvement, but functional heating and air conditioning is a vital part of keeping facilities comfortable. We will chip away at the backlog of heating and cooling replacements over the next few years. This year's work will start with the **Middle Fork Activity Center** and the **Lake of the Woods Elks Lake Pavilion**. Some of these units were originally installed in the 1980s and the efficiency of mechanical units has improved greatly since then. Replacing these dated units will not only keep them comfortable for visitors, but will also improve the energy efficiency of the facilities!



Middle Fork Activity Center



Elks Lake Pavilion

We are delighted to announce the newest addition to the Champaign County Forest Preserve District's preserves - HERON VIEW FOREST PRESERVE!

This 98-acre preserve is now one of five CCFPD properties along the Sangamon River, and is situated north of Mahomet approximately halfway between Lake of the Woods and Sangamon River Forest Preserve. The Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation (ICECF) granted a majority of the funding for the purchase with the requirement that the land be protected as natural habitat. The match for the ICECF grant was provided through a generous donation made by Shawn Tabeling and Brian Keigher of Hidden River Development, LLC., which is developing home sites east of the preserve.

The site is primarily land-locked by private property, but CCFPD staff will be working to provide access to the site from County Road 2600 North in the near future. This will entail installing a culvert across the ditch along the road, so that we can provide an entrance to a parking area. From there, we plan to eventually offer access to the Sangamon River for paddling enthusiasts as well as some trails for hiking.

What might you see on a hike at the new preserve? As the name suggests, great blue herons are plentiful at the site. There are dozens of nests grouped in some large sycamore trees along the river. This gathering of nests is

considered a rookery. Around 75% of the site is bottomland forest, and Virginia bluebells are abundant in the area in the spring. The remaining upland forest area has a good canopy of oak and hickory trees, but the understory needs restoration due to invasion by non-native shrubs like bush honeysuckle, privet, and Japanese barberry.

Fortunately, the ICECF has also generously provided nearly \$10,000 to kick-start that management over the next year!

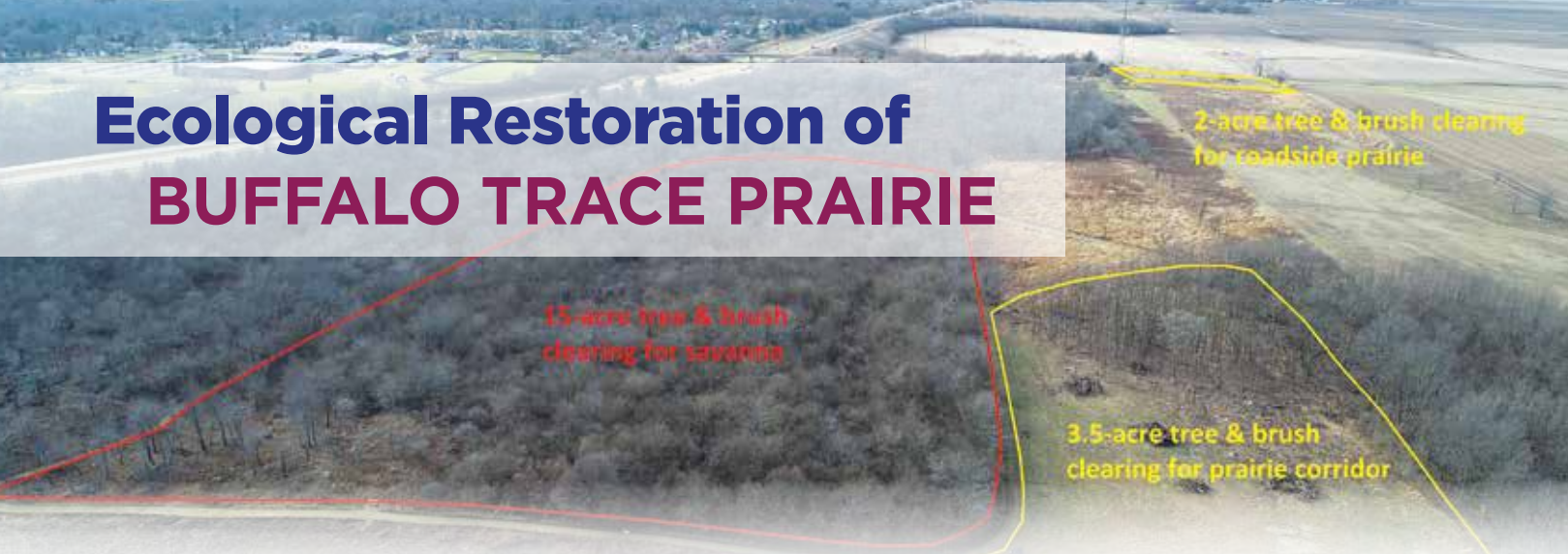
What you won't necessarily see at a glance are all the benefits this floodplain forest provides to the community and beyond! These benefits, often referred to as ecosystem services, include regulating flood peaks by acting as a sponge that stores water during high volume, and releases water to help maintain flow during drier periods.

The forest also removes sediments and nutrients from the river, which increases water quality. We are proud to offer these services as part of our mission to protect Champaign County's natural and cultural resources and

inspire people to care for, enjoy, and explore their natural world!



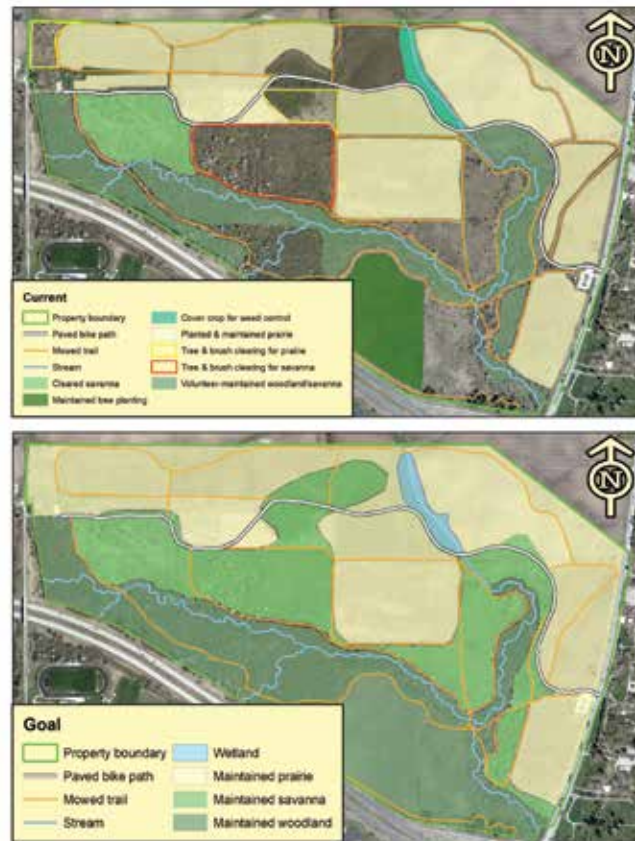
Ecological Restoration of BUFFALO TRACE PRAIRIE



Buffalo Trace Prairie, the 265-acre western section of the Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve, has been undergoing some noticeable changes in the past few years.

Before settlers arrived, Buffalo Trace was a mix of forest, savanna and prairie ecosystems with the forested section in the south, transitioning to savanna and prairie to the north. After European settlement, the land was in pasture or row crops for many years until it became part of Lake of the Woods in 1976. Because of this, there were few native seed sources on the property. Invasive trees and shrubs dominated the landscape, crowding out remaining native trees. In fallow pastures, invasive cool-season grasses persisted in abundance. Ecological restoration at Buffalo Trace began in 2000 with sections of prairie prepped and planted. With the help of dedicated volunteers, generous donations, grants, and District resources, ecological restoration continues at an accelerated pace.

One noticeable project includes a two-acre brush clearing along Crowley Road. This area, once choked with invasive callery pear and autumn olive, will showcase a Buffalo Trace prairie abundant in native wildflowers. Staff will prepare the bed for planting over the next two years. Recently, natural resources staff removed invasive bush honeysuckle shrubs and black locust trees on the south side of the "tree tunnel" along the paved bike path. Although aesthetically pleasing, these trees are beginning to die of old age and pose a hazard to those recreating on the path. Furthermore, parts of the trees are toxic to



animals, including pets. Over time, staff will clear behind both sides of the tree tunnel and will plant native trees to phase out and replace the black locust grove. In its place, the native savanna will not only provide beauty and shade, but will enhance the ecological quality of the area by creating habitat for an abundance of plants and wildlife.

Volunteers, private donations, and a grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation are also helping to restore 15-acres in the middle of the Buffalo Trace property. Currently, the section provides little ecological value as it is overrun with invasive bush honeysuckle. Understory clearing will eliminate these plants and allow District staff to more easily manage the site and restore native vegetation.

Ecological restoration and maintenance will continue at Buffalo Trace, enhancing a site that preserves the natural heritage of the Grand Prairie for future generations to come.

NOTABLE METRICS AS OF 01/13/2021

- 91/110 acres prepped and planted to prairie, 83% of target goal
- 43/54 acres existing woodland understory cleared by volunteers, 80% of target goal
- 46/62 acres savanna understory cleared, 74% of target goal
- 14/25 acres reforested with direct seeding of tree nuts, 56% of target goal

PROGRAMS & VIRTUAL EVENTS

Throughout February and March, watch our website and Facebook pages for pop-up programs and activities, in addition to the following experiences!

See the full program descriptions online, ccfpd.org

JANUARY/FEBRUARY

Thursday, January 21 to Sunday, February 28

CCFPD Snowflake Search

CCFPD Preserves and Kickapoo Rail Trail

See if you can find the 30 snowflakes hidden in the preserves. Follow the Facebook event CCFPD Snowflake Search. Tag your photos #CCFPDsnowflakesearch.

Monday, February 1 to Sunday, February 28

LOOKING FOR LINCOLN

Series on Museum of the Grand Prairie Facebook Page

Tune in to our Facebook series on the Looking for Lincoln signs in Champaign County and learn fun facts about Abraham Lincoln. FREE.



Tuesday, February 9

VALENTINE'S DAY CRAFT BAG WITH CHILD SIZED MASK

Museum of the Grand Prairie, Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve, 1-3 p.m. or while supplies last

Limit 2 bags per family. Fun for ages 3-103! FREE.

Tuesday, February 9

ABRAHAM LINCOLN CRAFT BAG

Museum of the Grand Prairie, Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve, 1-3 p.m. or while supplies last

Limit 2 bags per family. Fun for ages 3-103! FREE.

Wednesday, February 10

MORNINGS WITH THE MUSEUM: LOVE STORIES

Online Event, Streaming on the Museum of the Grand Prairie Facebook and YouTube pages, 10 a.m. FREE.

Thursday, February 11

ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S FAREWELL ADDRESS WITH MS. SANDY OSBORNE

Online Event, Streaming on Museum of the Grand Prairie's Facebook Page and YouTube pages, 1 p.m. FREE.

Thursday, February 11

MAPLE SUGAR DAYS: THE VIRTUAL EDITION

Online Event, Streaming on the Museum of the Grand Prairie Facebook and YouTube pages, 7 p.m. FREE.

Friday, February 12

STORIES WITH MARY: A VIRTUAL VISIT WITH MARY LINCOLN

Online Event, Streaming on the Museum of the Grand Prairie Facebook and YouTube pages, 10 a.m. FREE.

Tuesday, February 16

BLACK HISTORY MONTH READ ALOUD: "THE UNDEFEATED"

Online Event, Streaming on Museum of the Grand Prairie Facebook and YouTube pages, 1 p.m. FREE.

Wednesday, February 17

OWLS OF ILLINOIS

Online Event via Zoom, 7-8:15 p.m.

Recommended for ages 15 and up. FREE. Register at ccfpd.org.

Thursday, February 18

GARDEN SPEAKER SERIES

HOW-TO USE THE DIVERSITY OF NATIVE PLANTS IN YOUR GARDEN

Online Event, Streaming on the Museum of the Grand Prairie Facebook and YouTube pages, 7 p.m. FREE.

Wednesday, February 24

ALL ABOUT OWLS

Online Event via Zoom, 6:30-7:30 p.m.

FREE. Register at ccfpd.org.



MARCH

Saturday, March 6

FROG CALL SURVEY TRAINING

Online Event via Zoom, 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Ages 18 & up. FREE. Register by March 5 at ccfpd.org.

Wednesday, March 10

MORNINGS WITH THE MUSEUM: SPRINGTIME TALES

Online Event, Streaming on the Museum of the Grand Prairie Facebook and YouTube pages, 10 a.m. FREE.

Tuesday, March 16

SPRING BREAK CRAFT BAG WITH CHILD SIZED MASK

Museum of the Grand Prairie, Lake of the Woods Forest Preserve, 1-3 p.m. or while supplies last.

Limit 2 bags per family. Fun for ages 3-103! FREE.

Tuesday, March 16

FROG CALL SURVEY TRAINING

Online Event via Zoom, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Ages 18 & up. FREE. Register by March 15 at ccfpd.org.

Thursday, March 18

GARDEN SPEAKER SERIES

HOW-TO PLANT A GARDEN FOR POLLINATORS

Online Event, Streaming on the Museum of the Grand Prairie Facebook and YouTube pages, 7 p.m. FREE.

Friday, March 19

SPRING CLEANUP

Homer Lake Interpretive Center, 2-3:30 p.m.

All ages. FREE. Register by March 18 at ccfpd.org.

Tuesday, March 23

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH READ ALOUD: GLORIA STEINEM

Online Event, Streaming on Museum of the Grand Prairie Facebook and YouTube pages, 1 p.m. FREE.

Monday, March 22 to Monday, May 3

SPRING EXPLORATION ACTIVITY GUIDE

Spring is here! Head outside to look for signs of spring; from wildflowers to migrating birds and the return of the butterflies! Download the activity guide or pick one up at one of our facilities to help you explore nature at the preserves or even your own backyard this spring. Grab your gear and start exploring! FREE.