



SALT CREEK CHRONICLES

WOLF ROAD PRAIRIE SPECIAL EDITION

A Newsletter of the Salt Creek Greenway Association

Winter 2011

Salt Creek Greenway - Gateway to Discovery

Natural areas, historic sites, cultural attractions, land and water recreational trails, shopping centers, theatre and gourmet dining beckon visitors to experience one of the richest and most scenic and diverse open space corridors in Illinois.

Located within the densely populated suburbs of western Cook and eastern DuPage Counties, the Salt Creek Greenway trail is designated a priority Greenway in the Northeastern Illinois Regional Greenways Plan and extends through 9 communities with a combined population exceeding 300,000 residents and includes:

- 15 forest preserves in two counties
- 8 local parks and recreational facilities in 5 communities
- 5 National Historic Register sites and other historic attractions
- 3 dedicated Illinois Nature Preserves
- The Brookfield Zoo
- The historic Fullersburg area
- Graue Mill and Dam
- Mayslake/Peabody Estate
- Shopping malls, theaters restaurants, employment and economic centers, mass transit services, historic homes, vintage communities and spacious subdivisions.

SCGA is tax exempt (501)(c)(3) organization and all contributions are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.

SCGA is a member of Chicago Wilderness, Partners for Parks and Wildlife and the Lower DesPlaines Ecosystem Partnership.



Photo: IDNR Director Marc Miller, Valerie Spale and Jack Pizzo from SCGA, Don McFall of IDNR and Randy Heidorn, Illinois Nature Preserves Commission.

WOLF ROAD PRAIRIE – A SALT CREEK GREENWAY TREASURE

Protecting and restoring the 80 acre Wolf Road Prairie and Hickory Lane bufferlands is a priority project in the Greenway for SCGA.

Our purpose is to partner with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), the Forest Preserve District of Cook County (FPDCC), owners of the preserve, and the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC), who oversees management and protection of the site, by recruiting volunteers, scheduling workdays and sponsoring special educational programs and nature tours.

We are proud and honored to announce that SCGA received an Outstanding Volunteer of the Year Award from IDNR for our work at Wolf Road Prairie. The award was presented at the Illinois State Fair in Springfield on August 20, 2011 by IDNR Director, Marc Miller.

“The Salt Creek Greenway Association of Westchester is a watershed-focused organization that has taken an active role in restoring Wolf Road Prairie Nature Preserve which is located within the Greenway. The group completed 375 hours in 2010 by sponsoring a Restoration Blitz, two Pump Up the Prairie workdays, an Exelon Employee Workday and a National Public Lands Day event. They have already completed two Pump Up the Prairie days in 2011 and have made preparations to chip and haul away invasive brush during a winter workday. The outlook for Wolf Road Prairie has become very positive from this active and passionate volunteer group. The Salt Creek Greenway Association stands out for its accomplishments and is deserving of the IDNR Volunteer of the Year Award.”

SCGA WOLF ROAD PRAIRIE

In 1833, when the Illinois territory opened to European settlement, 70% of the state's original landscape was prairie. Today, only 1/100th of 1% high quality black soil prairie remains. This includes Wolf Road Prairie recognized as the finest and largest example of black soil prairie east of the Mississippi River. Natural areas like Wolf Road Prairie are often isolated and vulnerable to invasion by non-native species. As degradation occurs, biodiversity is diminished and the site loses its ability to sustain rare native plant, insect, bird and animal populations indigenous to its origins. To reverse this decline and to ensure that the last of our priceless natural areas like Wolf Road Prairie survive, ecosystem restoration and aggressive removal of invasive species is critical.



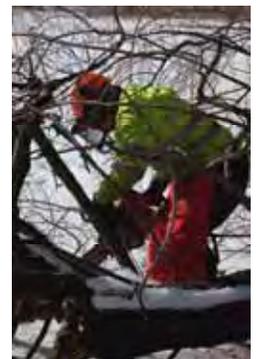
For more details or to volunteer please visit our website
www.saltcreekgreenwayassociation.org

WORKDAY HIGHLIGHTS



SCGA volunteers are proud to play a restoration role at Wolf Road Prairie working hand in hand with Steve Byers and INPC staff, FPDCC staff and IDNR staff. As invasive species are removed and scenic vistas open, an array of prairie plants extend their range into newly restored ground. This results in more native plant seed production and expands favorable habitat for migrating and nesting birds and other wildlife.

One of the long term goals is to encourage the return of rare grassland birds such as Dickcissels, Meadowlarks, Field Sparrows, Brown Thrashers and Bobolinks who require tall grasses for perching and larger nesting territories. They were recorded in the vicinity of the preserve not too long ago before changes in land use to the west altered the open space character of the area. Converting those parcels of Hickory Lane bufferland still maintained as mowed turfgrass to original ecosystem function and thriving native plant communities might be all that is needed to bring them back.



PHRAGMITES CAMPAIGN AT WOLF ROAD PRAIRIE



This summer, SCGA launched the “Eliminate *Phragmites* Campaign” to begin the battle to rid this aggressive invasive species from the Wolf Road Prairie wetland.

Phragmites australis (Common reed) is a tall perennial grass that grows to heights of 15 feet or more and is found in or near shallow water. *Phragmites* thickets displace native wetland plants, alter hydrology and block sunlight to the aquatic community.

Phragmites, the scourge of Illinois wetlands, rapidly reproduces through the spread of seed and by root system cloning. It can quickly take over a high quality wetland in a matter of a few years if left unchecked.

This is the case at the Wolf Road Prairie wetland. Where there were some isolated clumps of *Phragmites* only a few years ago, today they have expanded their range exponentially and are posing a grave environmental threat to the integrity of the wetland as shown in red in the map above.

The goal of SCGA is to raise funds to help eliminate this threat. Nearly \$2,500 has been raised to date for phase one of the \$5,000 “Eliminate *Phragmites* Campaign.” SCGA has retained Witness Tree Native Landscapes, Inc. to conduct herbicide treatment of *Phragmites* under the supervision of Steve Byers, Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, with approval by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. Now the insidious *Phragmites* is being stopped in its tracks. But the battle is far from won. Another \$2,500 is needed for additional phase one herbicide treatments and follow-up treatments as necessary.

Our thanks to everyone who has contributed to the “Eliminate *Phragmites* Campaign”. We invite those natural area advocates who believe it is crucial to maintain a high quality wetland ecosystem at Wolf Road Prairie to join us as we move ahead to eradicate *Phragmites*. 100% of all contributions go directly to the “Eliminate *Phragmites* Campaign”.



Herbicide Application



Herbicide Application



Before Treatment



After Treatment

TREKKING WOLF ROAD PRAIRIE

A Nature Trek at Wolf Road Prairie is like going back in time to the origins of Wild America. Here the savanna, prairie and wetland respond to the rhythms of nature and the cycles of the seasons much as they have done for thousands of years. Just moments away from shopping centers and housing developments, Wolf Road Prairie invites visitors to experience the connection between humans and the natural world at one of the rarest places on Earth.



PRAIRIE

Enjoy these photos taken at Wolf Road Prairie and shared with SCGA by internationally published nature photographer, Mike MacDonald. Mike is renowned for capturing the beauty and majesty of Chicago Wilderness natural areas and beyond. He constantly explores, photographs, writes and teaches about the prairie. You can see more of his photography and find out about his photo workshops by visiting his web site at www.chicagonature.com. Mike was recently featured in *Outdoor Photographer – Land and Sky*. His photo seen below of Culver's root glowing in the morning sun at Wolf Road Prairie was selected as the banner image for the magazine article.

Photo opportunities at Wolf Road Prairie change almost daily. A new flower blooms, the textures and colors of grasses and leaves turn with the seasons and winter brings its own beautiful scenes of snow cover over the dormant prairie.

Experience the prairie through the lens or just by wandering around this ancient place miraculously saved.



Culver's Flame - An endless display of Culver's root burns white in the morning light of the prairie.



Bathe in the Light - Wild hyacinth bathe in fresh morning light as it streams into the open oak savanna.



Glorious Entanglement - Sawtooth sunflower and obedient plant grow in a gloriously chaotic and entangled embrace.

GALLERY



Diversity - The summer prairie blooms in a rich display of biodiversity.



Fireworks - July prairie wildflowers combine to resemble a fireworks display.



Late Bloomer - Sawtooth sunflowers bloom in fields of towering endless yellow in one of the last dramatic displays of the summer season.

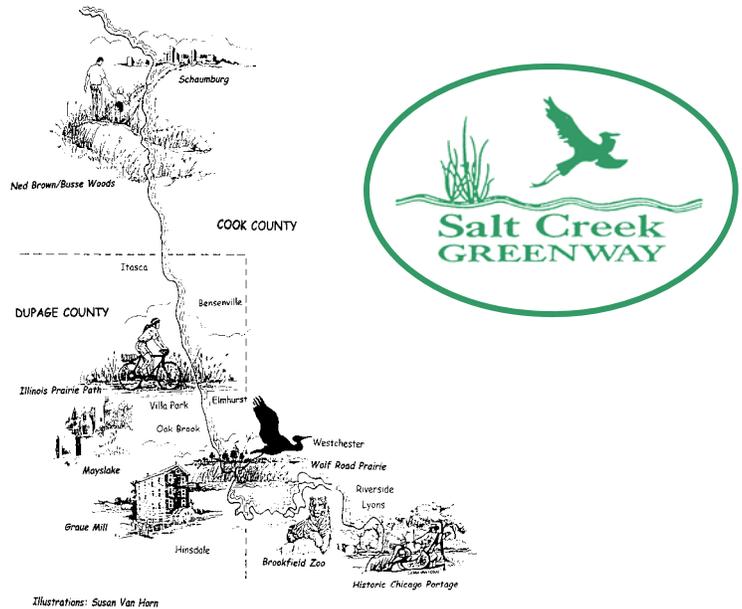
SALT CREEK GREENWAY TRAIL

Trail System	Miles
Salt Creek Greenway Trail	30
Illinois Prairie Path	66
Fox River Trail	50
Great Western Trail	12
Centennial Trail	20
DesPlaines River Trail beginning at the Wisconsin State Line	

THE SALT CREEK GREENWAY

and its spheres of influence contain remnants of the original landscapes of pre-settlement northeastern Illinois and the history and traditions of its people

- Ancient oak groves, savannas and prairie vistas...
- Archaeological sites dating back to 8,000 B.C....
- More recent Native American influences...
- Early settlement communities...
- Pioneer cemeteries...
- Impressive architectural structures listed in The National Register of Historic Places...
- Historic Homes and Museums...
- Recreational land and water trails...
- Vital reminders of our region's fascinating past which co-exist with modern-day communities and economic corridors



Illustrations: Susan Van Horn

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Mike MacDonald, Nature Photographer and Teacher – Wolf Road Prairie Gallery Photos
- Cynthia Gehrie, Ph.D, Volunteer SCGA web site designer
- Dave Waycie, Volunteer SCGA Wolf Road Prairie photographer
- Jack Pizzo, Pump Up the Prairie photos and *Phragmites* map
- Irene Hogstrom, *Phragmites* campaign photos
- Greg Jerzyk, Special SCGA restoration volunteer at Wolf Road Prairie
- The Nature Conservancy/Illinois Nature Preserves Commission – grant for 2 backpack sprayers
- Whole Foods Market – Hinsdale – Donation of snack bars for National Public Lands Day – September 24, 2011
- Andy Slovick, Edmark Press, Chronicles Design

THANKS TO SCGA WOLF ROAD PRAIRIE NATURE TREK LEADERS

- April 20, 2011 – John Elliott, FPDCC – Birding on the Wolf Road Prairie Trail
- May 21, 2011 – Jack Pizzo, SCGA Board Member, Pizzo & Associates – Savanna Spring
- June 5, 2011 – Rich Hyerczyk, Chicago Lichenological Society – The Colorful World of Lichens
- July 26, 2011 – John Elliott, FPDCC – Roosevelt University Students Field Trip
- July 30, 2011 – Dr. John Wagner, The Field Museum - Discovering the World of Insects
- Aug. 27, 2011 – Dr. Gerould Wilhelm, Conservation Research Institute - A Late Summer Walk at Wolf Road Prairie
- Oct. 8, 2011 – Phyllis Mertz, The Morton Arboretum - Oaks of the Prairie
- Nov. 12, 2011 – Rich Hyerczyk, Chicago Lichenological Society – Natural History Lichen Class
- Dec. 3, 2011 – Yvonne Woulfe, Little Red Schoolhouse, FPDCC, Winter Survival

We're on the Web!

www.saltcreekgreenwayassociation.org
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