



SALT CREEK CHRONICLES

WOLF ROAD PRAIRIE SPECIAL EDITION

A Newsletter of the Salt Creek Greenway Association (SCGA)
www.saltcreekgreenwayassociation.org

Fall 2015

Summer at Wolf Road Prairie





GOOD NEWS for Hickory Lane Buffer Restoration

The Salt Creek Greenway Association renewed our Agreement with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) to continue restoration on the 9 Hickory Lane stream corridor and uplands property we have been working on for several years and extends restoration to additional acreage on 9 Hickory Lane for prairie recovery. The agreement also adds two more buffer properties to the restoration Agreement. These additional properties are 8 Hickory Lane and 1 Hickory Lane and include prairie uplands and savanna recovery ecosystems.

Many dozens of vintage oaks and hickories populate portions of the savanna buffer ecosystem property. Some of these oaks are likely pre-settlement trees whose origins date back to the time when Native Potawatomi lived and hunted in the Salt Creek Watershed and the Wolf Road Prairie area.

Our arrangement with IDNR also covers continuing our work in the Wolf Road Prairie wetland to monitor and treat *Phragmites*, purple loosestrife and other non-native species in partnership with the Forest Preserve District of Cook County (FPDCC).

This phase of Hickory Lane wetland and buffer restoration is conducted by approved contractor, Mary Zaander, Witness Tree Native Landscapes, and funded by SCGA.

Hickory Lane buffer restoration is critical to restore native ecosystems and wildlife habitat and prevent invasive species from migrating eastward into Wolf Road Prairie from upstream properties to the west of Hickory Lane and from 15 acres of land on Hickory Lane still owned by a developer.

Our goals are:

1. Restore as much land as possible to its native origins and wildlife habitat
2. Protect the watershed and hydrology of the bufferlands and Wolf Road Prairie
3. Encourage the return of grassland birds previously known to the area such as the Bobolink and Meadowlark, last seen in 2012
4. Continue our partnership with the IDNR, FPDCC and the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission
5. Recruit volunteers for Hickory Lane work days
Schedule more nature programs, classes and tours led by distinguished conservation educators and leaders

With severe cuts in the budget facing IDNR and conservation in Illinois, it has never been more important for the private sector to step up and fill some of this gap. SCGA sees our role at Wolf Road Prairie and Hickory Lane as a support organization funding selected work projects and involving volunteers and donors to protect and restore one of the finest prairie areas in Cook County and Illinois.





ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION AT WOLF ROAD PRAIRIE AND HICKORY LANE BUFFER

The first "Meet and Greet" volunteer Hickory Lane Restoration recruitment gathering was held on August 8, 2015 coordinated by the Salt Creek Greenway Association (SCGA), Forest Preserve District of Cook County (FPDCC) and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR).

Maggie Cole, IDNR, Doug Chien, Friends of the Forest Preserves, John Kolar, Salt Creek region steward, Dr. Darrel Murray, Lynora Jensen, Ken and Valerie Spale, Carol Brouk and others kicked off the event led by Craig Billington and Raquel Garcia-Alvarez, FPDCC, on 7 HL buffer. A walk around 7 and 9 HL buffer restoration zones followed.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR HICKORY LANE?

1. SCGA will continue working with FPDCC, IDNR, INPC, special volunteer and corporate groups and Mary Zaander, Witness Tree Native Landscapes, to restore HL Bufferland properties and recruit volunteers.
2. Several volunteer workdays will be scheduled for the coming year.
3. Special group workdays will be held, including volunteers from the U.S. Coast Guard in Chicago.
4. Contractor work will resume on 9 HL and the Wolf Road Prairie wetland and 1 HL and 8 HL conducted by Mary Zaander, Witness Tree Native Landscapes, funded by SCGA.
5. Jeff Swano, Digrightin Landscaping, will donate corporate service workdays on HL
6. The FPDCC will continue restoration along the 1 Aloha Lane pond and uplands and on 7 HL by staff and contractors.
7. The FPDCC will continue restoration by staff and contractors and prescribed burns at the 80 acre Wolf Road Prairie

WHY RESTORE HICKORY LANE BUFFERLANDS?

The HL bufferlands enlarge the size of the preserve, protect the hydrology of the site and encourage the return of native plants, insects, birds and animals. Hickory Lane would have been developed into high density residential or commercial use – a horrible alternative – if IDNR and the FPDCC had not stepped in to acquire the land.

Restoration work includes removal and monitoring of buckthorn, teasel, purple loosestrife and other invasive species, the introduction of prescribed burns and scattering of seed collected on HL and possibly Wolf Road Prairie for introduction to HL restoration areas.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP!

Donate a little time and energy and reap the satisfaction of being part of this incredible opportunity to bring back the historic savanna, native prairie, stream corridor, pond and wetland ecosystems of HL. The microcosm of pre-settlement Illinois is right here on HL. Experience the challenge and the reward. Just go to stpsspale@aol.com for more information on how to become a HL volunteer and sign up.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FPDCC

Thanks to President Preckwinkle and Supt. Randall with congratulations to the District on its 100th Anniversary and for allocating staff time and funding for ecological contractors to oversee the care and recovery of the entire 80 acre Wolf Road Prairie Nature Preserve.





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Restoring Wolf Road Prairie Buffer

WOLF ROAD PRAIRIE

2015 Nature Series Programs at 1 Aloha Lane Hickory Lane Buffer

1 Aloha Lane, Hickory Lane buffer, owned by the FPDCC, is where SCGA Nature Series programs have been held. The property is located north of 31st Street, west of Wolf Road, Westchester. The site adjoins Wolf Road Prairie to the east along the scenic 31st Street Salt Creek Greenway Corridor in Cook County. Programs are held in the meeting room at 1 Aloha Lane (headquarters for the District Police Department). The meeting room overlooks a scenic pond providing habitat for herons, waterfowl, dragonflies, turtles, frogs and other wildlife. Thanks to District Chief Roberts for hosting the programs at this buffer property. Thanks also to our distinguished program presenters.



2015 PROGRAM SCHEDULE



Saturday, March 28, 2015 - 1:30 PM
Presenter: Leslie DeCoursey, Naturalist Aid, Sagawaw Environmental Center, FPDCC
Bird banding is one of the most important ways to study bird populations, migration routes and life spans of monitored species. Bird banding statistics alert conservationists to species in crisis or threatened with extinction.



Saturday, July 25, 2015 - 1:30 PM
Aquatic Adventures at Wolf Road Prairie: Be a Wetland Scientist
Presenter: Joni Marzalik, Ecologist and Environmental Educator
The pond at 1 Aloha Lane is brimming with life through all seasons of the year. Fascinating plants and animals can be seen by the naked eye or through a microscope.



Saturday, April 25, 2015 - 1:30 PM
Restoring Wolf Road Prairie and Hickory Lane Bufferlands
Presenter: Craig Billington, Ecologist I, FPDCC
The District is reclaiming and restoring the 80 acre Wolf Road Prairie but volunteers are needed to take on the task of restoring Hickory Lane bufferlands to wildlife habitat.



Saturday, August 15, 2015 - 1:30 PM
Prehistoric Elephants of the Chicago Region
Presenter: Jack MacRae, Interpreter, Natural and Cultural History of the Chicago Region. Mammoths and Mastodons roamed the Chicago area during the Ice Age. They were here when the first humans arrived about 10,000 years ago. Their bones have been found in numerous nearby locations.



Sunday, May 17, 2015 - 1:30 PM
Savanna Spring at Wolf Road Prairie
Presenter: Greg Jerzyk, Natural Areas Volunteer and Birder
The Wolf Road Prairie savanna is a profusion of wild hyacinth and other spring ephemerals in bloom mid-May. This spectacle is a rare sight in Cook County and Illinois.



Saturday, September 26, 2015 - 9 AM to Noon
Celebrating National Public Lands Day and the 100th Anniversary of the FPDCC at Wolf Road Prairie.
Sponsors: FPDCC and SCGA Volunteers and students collect seed for relocation to the northwest restoration corner of Wolf Road Prairie at this traditional annual event.



Saturday, June 27, 2015 - 1:30 PM
The Decline of Grassland Birds in the Chicago Region: Can They Be Saved?
Presenter: Daniel Suarez, Stewardship Program Associate, Audubon Chicago Region. Grassland bird populations have dropped by over 40% in the last 40 years. Habitat loss, urban sprawl and invasive species are the main cause. Restoring large grassland preserves may help grassland birds recover from the brink of extinction.

For more information about SCGA Nature Programs, go to: www.saltcreekgreenwayassociation.org. Scroll down the front page to Nature Trek Vignettes at Wolf Road Prairie and select the program that interests you. Click the link. You will be connected to a narrative and photos of your selected program.

CREDITS:

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