

Champaign County Forest Preserve District

Program Area:

Natural Areas Program

County:

Champaign

Grantee:

Champaign County Forest Preserve District

Grant Date:

May 1, 2010 & November 1, 2012

Grant Amount:

130,200

Location:

Penfield, IL 61862



In July of 2010 the Champaign County Forest Preserve District acquired a 41-acre parcel directly connected to the Middle Fork Forest Preserve. Currently at 1,700 acres and protecting 4.6 miles of the Middle Fork of the Vermillion River, the Middle Fork Forest Preserve is the largest preserve in Champaign County. A portion of the Vermillion River, just downstream from the parcel acquired in 2010, is the only designated National Wild and Scenic River in Illinois. Rivers are designated by Congress and, in some cases, the Secretary of the Interior and administered by a Council composed of the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and U.S. Forest Service. The northwestern five acres of the parcel contain the last unprotected portion of the adjacent Point Pleasant Wetland complex, a peat-filled bog rare to central Illinois. Although, a portion of the property had been farmed it was historically wet-mesic to dry-mesic prairie. The District illustrated its ability to restore the area back to this natural quality by demonstrating that it had a plan as well as the necessary funds to complete the work. The initial restoration of the parcel was completed quicker than expected with hundreds of hours of seed collection by volunteers and large donations of native seed. The restoration of the prairie resulted in less erosion and sediment deposits to the wetland as was initially a problem when the land was farmed.

In 2012 the District was successful in acquiring an additional five acres connected to the Middle Fork Forest Preserve that will be the link to any future acquisitions downstream. The 5-acre site will be maintained as an oak savanna, which is feasible with the use of a regular burn schedule and will allow for the wild hyacinth population at the site to thrive. Prescribed burning will also be used to fight against invasive species. Spring herbicide treatment of non-native, cool-season grasses will follow. Oak and hickory seedlings were able to establish and grow because the site was not mowed. In many cases seeds lie dormant for many years until the appropriate conditions arise.

What's next for this project? The District depends on the dedicated volunteers within the Master Naturalist and Trail Steward programs. Some of these individuals are trained in herbicide application and may assist with the spring herbicide treatment at the five acres. The District will continue to monitor and assess the number of remnant native plants that may appear due to improved management of the site and an increase in favorable conditions.

Although the prairie restoration of the 41-acre parcel is only in the second growing year, the District has observed high plant diversity as well as an immense decrease in invasive species such as sweet clover and Canada thistle. The District is preparing to begin burning the site in spring 2014 and is currently planning trail development and signage for the site.

