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Natural Areas 2011 Annual Report



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Major Accomplishments 2011

1. Natural Areas Program presentations at community events, workshops, schools, conferences, as well as appearances on TV (Outdoor WI) and local radio (88.9 Radio Milwaukee) educated over **53,337 people**.
2. Natural Areas Program efforts were published in the **Rivers Report**, which is a quarterly publication by the Southeastern Wisconsin Watersheds Trust, Inc and UW-Extension, **Restoration News Midwest**, a regional publication of the Society for Ecological Restoration, and we will be published in **The Natural Areas Journal**, an international peer-reviewed scientific publication, in January 2012.
3. Adding up the financial impact of 2009-2011 the Natural Areas Program has brought in **\$1,035,791 (yes, over a million dollars)** in cash, materials, grants, and volunteer labor all in an effort enhance the quality of the Park System's natural areas.
4. Expansion of the Natural Areas Internship Program (**18 Interns in 2011**) and the creation of UW-Extension Internship positions funded by **Preserve Our Parks** and the **Lake Park Friends**.
6. Partner acquisition and development - staff worked with **46 partner organizations** in 2011.
7. The Natural Areas Program had **1,104 volunteers** that donated **13,392 hours** assisting staff in natural resource management projects in 2011.

8. Continuation of the Natural Areas Program/Institute for Service Learning partnership with the **University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee** for a total of 3 classes and **41 students**.
9. Continuation of natural resource inventories for ephemeral wetlands and invasive species, the **completion of the Park System-wide vegetation survey (8,509 acres in 2011)**, and the beginning of wildlife population surveys. All of which will allow the DPRC to more effectively and efficiently manage the County's natural resource base.
10. Installation and stabilization of **23 miles** of the Park Department's new Forked Aster Hiking Trail System.
11. For the first time ever, Natural Areas staff has begun the process of developing **Restoration & Management Plans** for all the natural areas management units within the Park System. These plans will guide our management efforts over the next 10 years. Parks with completed plans are listed within this report.
12. Update of the Invasive Species Quick Reference Guide, creation of a **Natural Areas Internship Handbook**, and development of species databases for the plants and wildlife of the Milwaukee County Park System.
13. **Awards & Recognition:** The Natural Areas Program was honored this year to receive three important awards. We were part of a national **Butterfly Conservation Award** from the **USFS** recognizing our pollinator project at Juneau Park in partnership with the USFS Eastern Region office in downtown Milwaukee. We received the **Invader Crusader Award** from the **Governor's Council on Invasive Species & IPAW**, and our final award was the **University Colleges & University of Wisconsin Extension Chancellor's Award for Excellence in Community Engagement**.

2011 Natural Areas Management Locations

A.C. Hanson Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Algonquin Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Armour Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Back Bay

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Baron Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Barnard Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Bay View Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Bender Park

- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Wildlife Habitat Management
- ◆ Eagle Scout Projects (2)
- ◆ AmeriCorps & Service Learning Projects
- ◆ Restoration & Management Plan

Big Bay Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Caesar's Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Cannon Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Chippewa Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Cudahy Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Cudahy SNA

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance

Currie Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Dale Creek Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Dineen Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ SCA Park

Doyne Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance
- ◆ Eagle Scout Project-Restoration
- ◆ AmeriCorps Project

2011 Natural Areas Management Locations

Dretzka Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Falk Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Eagle Scout Project-Boardwalk
- ◆ Service Learning Park
- ◆ Restoration & Management Plan

Franklin Savanna SNA

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ SCA, AmeriCorps, & Service Learning Park
- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Gordon Park

- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Grant Park

- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Service Learning Park

Greenfield Park

- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ SCA, AmeriCorps, & Service Learning Park
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Grobschmidt Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Restoration & Management Plan
- ◆ SCA & AmeriCorps Park

Hales Corners Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Holler Park

- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance

Holt Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Jackson Park

- ◆ Eagle Scout Project-Kiosk
- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Restoration & Management Plan
- ◆ AmeriCorps & Service Learning Park
- ◆ Briggs & Stratton Workday

2011 Natural Areas Management Locations

Jacobus Park

- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Service Learning Park

Joseph Lichter Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Juneau Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Service Learning Park
- ◆ USFS Pollinator Project
- ◆ Grant Thornton Workday

Kern Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Service Learning Park
- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance

Kinnickinnic River Pkwy

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Kletzsch Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Service Learning Park
- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance

Kohl Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Service Learning Park
- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance
- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Kulwicki Park—Root River Pkwy

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Lake Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Service Learning Park
- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance

Lincoln Park & Lincoln Creek

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Little Menomonee River Pkwy

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Service Learning Park
- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance
- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ DNR/EPA restoration projects

Maitland Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Mangan Woods—Root River Pkwy

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Service Learning Park
- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance

2011 Natural Areas Management Locations

McCarty Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

McGovern Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance
- ◆ SCA & AmeriCorps Park

Meaux Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Melody View Preserve

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Menomonee River Pkwy

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Milwaukee River Pkwy

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Mitchell Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Boy Scout Project- Clean-up

Mitchell Blvd Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Native Seed Collection Park
- ◆ Service Learning Park

Noyes Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance

Oak Creek PKWY

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Oakwood-Fitzsimmons Woods

- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Pleasant Valley Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance
- ◆ Service Learning Park

Pulaski Park –Milwaukee

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Rainbow Airport Prairie –Root River Pkwy

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Native Seed Collection Park
- ◆ Service Learning Park

Rawson Woods—Oak Creek Pkwy

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance

Root River Pkwy

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Scout Lake Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance
- ◆ Service Learning Park

2011 Natural Areas Management Locations

Servite Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control

South Shore Park

- ◆ Guidance on Restoration Project

St. Martin's Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Underwood Creek Pkwy

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Veteran's Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Wahl Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Warnimont Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ SCA & Service Learning Park
- ◆ Trails Construction & Maintenance
- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Washington Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ SCA Park

Whitnall Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Wilson Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Lowell Elementary Restoration Day

Wyrick Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Zablocki Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Invasive Species Control

"Natural Resource Inventories" Include but are not limited to: vegetative surveys of plant communities within a park, invasive species surveys, wildlife surveys, or ephemeral wetland surveys.

Natural Areas Education & Outreach Efforts

Higher Education

University Service Learning projects require students to undertake a variety of community service activities. Natural areas projects revolve around ecological restoration, natural resource data collection, hiking trail installation, and the development of educational materials. Natural Areas staff worked with **41 students this year at 16 parks**. Students participated from UW-Milwaukee, Alverno College, and MSOE.

Community Education & Outreach

Urban natural resource management requires an engaged and educated community. It is always a priority for us to take the Natural Areas Program to the people. During 2011 staff gave **18 presentations to 472 citizens**.

The Natural Areas Program had a number of unique opportunities to connect with the public this year. One of our invasive species workdays (in cooperation The Park People & REI) at Greenfield Park appeared on 3 broadcasts of **Outdoor Wisconsin** and reached over **44,000 Wisconsinites**. We were also on the radio with one of Milwaukee's most popular radio stations (**88.9 Radio Milwaukee**) where we had the fortunate opportunity to discuss native pollinators and our project with the US Forest Service at Juneau Park. While it's difficult to quantify the number of radio listeners reached by the program we know that it was broadcast to the greater Milwaukee area. Radio Milwaukee interview: <http://www.radiomilwaukee.org/initiatives/make-difference/forest-service-and-milwaukee-county-parks-team-upmake-difference-week-7> Outdoor Wisconsin episode (2713) http://www.mptv.org/localshows/outdoor_wisconsin/latest_episode/?v=Ca_LoVI2m71

Finally, to complete our outreach activities, we always strive to promote the efforts of our volunteers, partners, and staff in regional, national, or international publications. This year we were honored to have articles published in the **Rivers Report**, which is a quarterly publication by the Southeastern Wisconsin Watersheds Trust, Inc. and UW-Extension, and **Restoration News Midwest**, a regional publication of the Society for Ecological Restoration. We will also be published in **The Natural Areas Journal**, an international peer-reviewed scientific journal, in January 2012.

Natural Areas Internship Program

Training the next generation of natural resource managers should be one of the most important components of any natural areas program. The Natural Areas Program extended its internship opportunity to **18** university students and recent graduates this past year. Students participated from UW-Milwaukee, UW-Whitewater, Alverno College, and Carroll University.

Interns were provided training in ecological restoration techniques/equipment, natural resource data collection, development of restoration & management plans, creation of educational materials, GPS/GIS technology, and plant/wildlife identification skills.

In return for the training experience, our interns (**who volunteer their time**) donated **2,873 hours** towards helping us achieve our natural area program goals. Their efforts and personal sacrifices to further their career skills and give back to the Milwaukee County community have been a daily inspiration for the rest of the staff and myself. It has been a privilege to work with each of our dedicated interns. Our interns this past year were: **Julia Robson, Jillian Meyers, Buddy Ebert, Mark Penington, Staycie Greefkes, Karl Pehkonen, Tina Kroening, Katie Ciardo, Brittany Voeks, Rachel Cornils, Erin Andrew, Aaron Harter, Evan Banach, Sophie Steck, Jessica Quinlan, Rebecca Dreyer, Chris Brown, and Alex Kasprzak.**

Natural Areas Hiking Trail System

While the staff greatly encourages the interaction between citizens and our diverse natural areas, it is important that it is done in a sustainable manner. Last year staff focused on GPS mapping of all the publicly generated “social” hiking trails within the Park System, determined which were ecologically appropriate, and developed a plan to implement a sustainable hiking trail system.

Through important partnerships with the Student Conservation Association (SCA), AmeriCorps, Service Learners, and Eagle Scouts we were able to stabilize, re-route, and install **23 miles** of hiking trails spread over **23 parks** in 2011. The **Parks Dept.’s Forestry staff** also played a critical role by using their specialized skills and expertise to remove numerous deadfalls from the trail system. We’ve also given our new and improved hiking trail system a name. It will be called the **Forked Aster Trail System** and act as a compliment to the Oak Leaf Trail system while highlighting a state-threatened species of plant that grows within our Park System’s natural areas.

This is an ongoing project and great strides were made this past year. Upon completion, the **Forked Aster Trail System** will add approximately **40 miles** of designated hiking trails to the Park System for park users to enjoy while protecting the natural resources that add to the quality of our citizens’ lives.

Natural Areas Land Management & Resource Planning Activities

With 9,100 acres of natural areas and only one full-time and two seasonal staff positions, what can realistically be accomplished? Turns out a great deal thanks to our natural areas partners and volunteers. In 2011 staff and partners:

- ◆ Continued to remove and control **20** different invasive plant species at **31 parks and parkways**.
- ◆ Completed mapping all of the vegetative plant communities and the majority of the invasive species populations (**8,509 acres surveyed in 2011**) within the Park System. This is the first time this data has been collected by staff on this scale. All of our field observations are currently being transferred into a software program called ArcGIS and will become an extremely important tool that will greatly enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of our land management efforts.
- ◆ Expansion of our wildlife-monitoring program to include snakes and aquatic organisms.
- ◆ Continuation of our ephemeral wetlands program. Staff inventoried and monitored **75 ephemeral wetlands** within the Park System in 2011 and we were very excited to find blue-spotted and tiger salamander populations at 10 different locations. Ephemeral wetlands are the main breeding and nursery areas for the majority of our native amphibians which in turn are a vital component of the food chain for mammals, birds, and reptiles.
- ◆ Trained **1,104 volunteers** that donated **13,392 hours** assisting staff in the management of natural areas.
- ◆ Conducted ecological restoration activities on **772 acres** of natural areas.
- ◆ Developed a comprehensive plant database to assist with future restoration projects. To date nearly **700 species** of plants have been documented within the Park System’s natural areas. Staff also developed a potential breeding wildlife database to act as a guide for future wildlife surveys and habitat management.
- ◆ Completed Restoration & Management plans for **Falk, Bender, Grobschmidt, and Jackson Parks**.

The Financial Value of the Natural Areas Program

Costs & Returns

Ecological restoration requires specialized equipment, herbicides, planting materials, educational resources, and trained staff, all of which can financially add up and prevent worthy projects from being undertaken. Fortunately, the Natural Areas staff has been able to leverage outside resources through donations from partner organizations and volunteers. In 2011 the Natural Areas Program received:

\$28,341 in grants (**WI DNR & US EPA** for restoration work along the Little Menomonee River & the **USFS** for the Juneau Park pollinator garden)

\$7,500 in donations of materials or cash (Preserve Our Parks and Lake Park Friends to fund intern activities)

\$239,047 in donated labor from volunteers (\$17.85/hr based on WI standardized rates published by Independent Sector)

\$87,963 from the Agricultural Lease Program that is managed by the Natural Areas Program

\$44,400 in value to the County for assisting another County Department achieve their natural resource goals

The Natural Areas Program brought in \$5.09 for every dollar the Parks Dept spent on the salaries of Natural Areas staff 2011.

When combined with the 2009 & 2010 figures, the Natural Areas Program has added over a million dollars (\$1,035,791) worth of value to the Park System and Milwaukee County's natural areas.

Special Projects for 2011

- ◆ The Natural Areas Program started a new partnership with the **River Revitalization Foundation** (RRF) as a host organization for an AmeriCorps crew. RRF and the Parks Dept share similar goals of improving the ecological quality of the Menomonee and Little Menomonee River Corridors which made this partnership a natural fit. This project builds on a long-standing partnership with **Groundwork Milwaukee** who has been hosting AmeriCorps with the Parks Dept for over five years.
- ◆ The **Alliance for the Great Lakes** approached the Natural Areas Program this year to assist them with developing and field testing a new pilot program that trains volunteers to conduct habitat/ecosystem assessments along the shorelines of the Great Lakes. Bender Park was the site of one of only three pilot projects in the Midwest. Volunteers conducted transects to inventory native and invasive plants, and afterwards spent several hours on a very hot day working on habitat improvement projects.
- ◆ The Natural Areas staff participated in the **Southeastern Wisconsin Invasive Species Consortium's (SEWISC)** first ever invasive species roadside survey. Staff and volunteers surveyed major roadways and parkways throughout Milwaukee County as part of an 8-county effort to map populations of phragmites, teasel, and Japanese Knotweed in SE Wisconsin. Survey results can be found at SEWISC's website: <http://sewisc.org/>

Natural Areas Notable Partnerships for 2011

The Park People Weed-outs

Weed-outs to remove invasive species were conducted in spring and/or in fall at **Doctors, Estabrook, Grant, Holler, Honey Creek Pkwy, Hoyt, Juneau, Kletzsch, Lake, Menomonee River Pkwy, Oak Creek Pkwy, Sheridan, and South Shore Parks**. These Weed-outs significantly improved the quality of our natural areas and we are greatly appreciative of the Park People's consistent and tireless efforts.

Student Conservation Association (SCA) & AmeriCorps

SCA & AmeriCorps crews once again did an outstanding job this year stabilizing hiking trails, removing invasive species, building natural fencing, improving wildlife habitat, and educating the community. This year crews worked in **Bender, Dineen, Doyne, Greenfield, Grobschmidt, Jackson, McGovern Warnimont, Washington, and Whitnall Parks**.

UW-Extension—Preserve Our Parks—Lake Park Friends

Two paid internship positions were made possible through the leadership and financial donations of **Preserve Our Parks and the Lake Park Friends**. Julia Robson and Jillian Meyers (UWEX interns) made a significant difference in the quality and quantity of work that we were able to accomplish this year.

United States Forest Service

The USFS provided additional funding to expand and manage the native pollinator garden in Juneau Park. They also donated their time maintaining the garden and educating volunteers on the benefits of pollinators. Thank you **Jan Schultz and Terry Gallagher** for providing USFS leadership on this outstanding project.

Eagle Scouts Projects

Experiencing conservation at a young age often solidifies an individual's natural resource perspectives for life. While environmental education is extremely important, so are hands-on projects. This year scouts built hiking trail boardwalks, trailhead kiosks, stabilized trails, built snake-monitoring boards, removed invasive species, planted native trees, and conducted a park clean up. Thank you to the follow young men and their families: **Jake Beaulieu, Nick Gutowski, Brian Kratz, Zach Winchester, George Drakopoulos, and Davis Marklin**.

Neighborhood Associations & Friends Groups

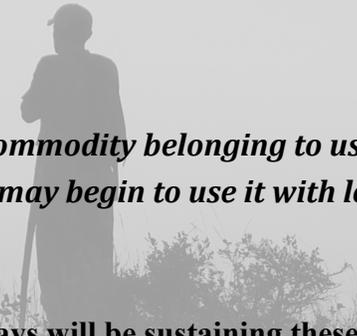
Too many outstanding partners to list in such a small space. Once again they donated their time, expertise, knowledge, and funding in order to enhance not just their local parks but also the larger Milwaukee County Park System. At the end of the day, these parks belong to county residents and they have shown an overwhelming desire to preserve the natural places that make our County unique.

Volunteers of Significance for 2011

- ◆ **John and Martha Lunz**, for the hundreds of hours spent planting and managing a prairie at Kletzsch Park.
- ◆ **Kathy Hadfield** for single handedly filling over 60 bags of cut teasel heads (aggressive invasive species) in the Root River Pkwy near Kulwicki Park.
- ◆ **Ken Solis** for his tireless efforts to remove garlic mustard from the Root River Pkwy and Cudahy SNA.
- ◆ **Dale & Sharon DeWitt** for maintaining hiking trails and helping staff remove invasive species at Bender Park.

Where is the Natural Areas Program Headed?

With only limited resources available for the foreseeable future, the Natural Areas Program must continue working to engage the greater Milwaukee County community and strive to develop the broadest partnership base possible in order to be truly successful in maintaining our natural places for future generations. Aldo Leopold, one of humanity's greatest conservation minds and famous Wisconsinite, once wrote:



"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect."

The main challenge for the program is and always will be sustaining these natural places within a very urban environment. Our goal is not to turn back the clock two hundred years and attempt to recreate "pristine" natural ecosystems. No matter how romantic the idea, there is no going back. We can only move forward and do our best to maintain ecological functions, nurture the greatest biodiversity, and provide places for our citizens to find peace when life sends them looking.

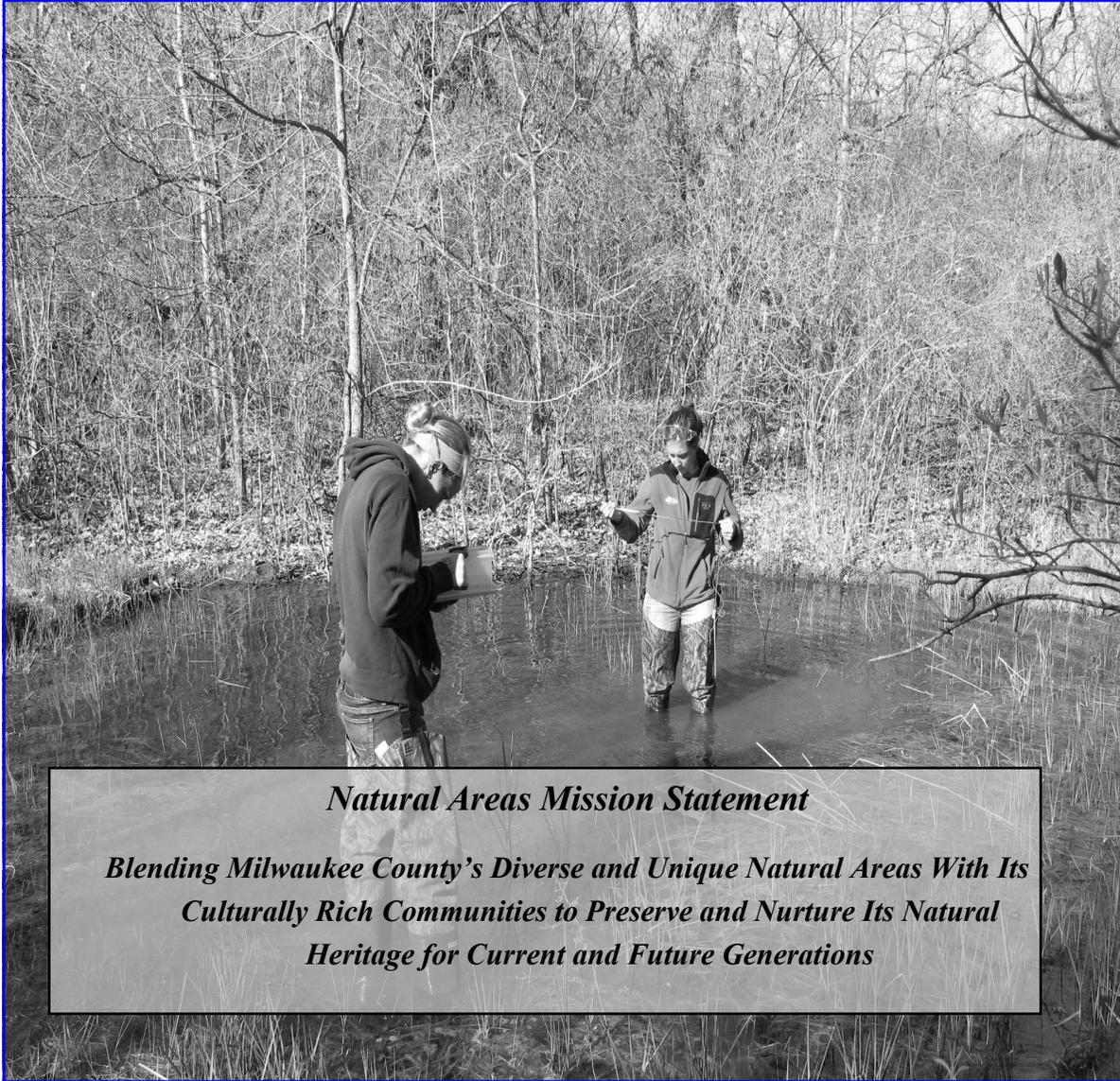
We will continue building a program that revolves not only around ecology but also sociology. These natural places are as much a part of Milwaukee County's culture as music, skylines, or ethnic traditions. On behalf of the Natural Areas Team, it is truly our privilege to be the stewards of one of Milwaukee County's most treasured resources. We look forward to introducing or reacquainting you to your natural areas whether it is on one of our hiking trails or during a stewardship workday. If you haven't done either recently maybe its time to give one a try.

Brian Russart

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Milwaukee County Department of Parks, Recreation & Culture

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Natural Areas Mission Statement

Blending Milwaukee County's Diverse and Unique Natural Areas With Its Culturally Rich Communities to Preserve and Nurture Its Natural Heritage for Current and Future Generations

Natural Areas Staff 2011

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