



Natural Areas 2012 Annual Report



Groschmidt Park

Department of Parks, Recreation, and Culture

James Keegan, Interim Director

Milwaukee County University of Wisconsin Extension

Eloisa Gomez, Director

Natural Areas Program Major Accomplishments 2012

1. Presentations at community events, workshops, schools, conferences reached over **1,297 citizens this past year.**
2. Published in **The Natural Areas Journal**, an international peer-reviewed scientific publication, and in quarterly newsletters for the Park People, the Southeastern Wisconsin Invasive Species Consortium Inc (SEWISC), and the UW-Madison Arboretum.
3. Through staff efforts and the substantial efforts of our partner organizations, we engaged **1,155 volunteers** who donated **21,504 hours** assisting in natural resource management projects throughout 2012.
4. The financial impact of our volunteers can never be overstated, because the value of their donated labor alone in 2012 amounted to a **\$468,572 dollar community investment** within the Park System's natural areas.
5. The Natural Areas Internship Program (**13 Interns in 2012**) had another great year with our interns gaining important natural resource career skills and at the same time they donated **1067 hours** to the Natural Areas Program.
6. Partnerships are essential to our success, and in 2012 staff worked with **55 partner organizations** on a variety of important projects within the Park System's natural areas.
7. Continuation of the Natural Areas Program/Institute for Service Learning partnership with the **University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee** for a total of 5 classes and **44 students.**

8. Continuation of natural resource inventories for ephemeral wetlands, invasive species, and wildlife populations. All of which allows the DPRC to more effectively and efficiently manage the County's natural resource base.
9. Installation and stabilization of **9.6 miles** of the Park Department's Forked Aster Hiking Trail System.
10. Developed **Restoration & Management Plans** for the natural areas within the Park System. These plans will guide our management efforts over the next 10 years. Parks completed in 2012 were **Doctor's, Esch-Honadel, Grant, Greenfield, Jacobus, Kletzsch, McGovern, Noyes, Warnimont, and a section of the Root River Parkway near Kulwicki Park.**
11. Update of the Invasive Species Quick Reference Guide, creation of a **Natural Areas Internship Syllabus**, and expansion of management databases for the plants and wildlife of the Milwaukee County Park System.
12. **Awards & Recognition:** The Natural Areas Program was humbled this year to receive the Virginia M. Kline Award for Community –based Ecological Restoration. This award was presented to the program by two of Wisconsin's most notable conservation organizations, the **Friends of the UW-Madison Arboretum and the Aldo Leopold Foundation.**
13. **Natural Areas Expansion**– In a unique partnership with **Northwestern Mutual Insurance** and the **Village of Oak Creek** the DPRC was able to acquire the Esch-Honadel Woods on the south side of Drexel Avenue. In a second area of expansion **Steven and Mayda Peckham** donated 2.6 acres of wetlands along the Menomonee River Pkwy to the DPRC. Both locations will be managed by the Natural Areas Program.

2012 Natural Areas Management Locations

Parks Administration

- ◆ Pollinator Garden

Anderson Lake-Root River Pkwy

- ◆ Hiking Trail Installation-AmeriCorps
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Back Bay

- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Baran Park

- ◆ Groundwork Milwaukee– Rain Garden Installation and Invasive Species Control

Bender Park

- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Wildlife Habitat Management
- ◆ AmeriCorps & SCA Projects

Brown Deer

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Cambridge Woods

- ◆ Groundwork Milwaukee, AmeriCorps, & MRGC-Hiking Trail Installation, Invasive Species Control, and Native Plant Installation

Copernicus

- ◆ Eagle Scout –Pollinator Garden

County Grounds Park

- ◆ Eagle Scout-Native Plant Installation

Cudahy SNA

- ◆ Ken Solis-Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Trail Maintenance

Dale Creek Park

- ◆ Invasive species Control

Dineen Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Doctor's Park

- ◆ Eagle Scout– Kiosk
- ◆ Friends of Doctor's Park– Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Restoration & Management Plan

Doyne Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Dretzka Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Esch-Honadel Woods

- ◆ Natural Resources Inventories
- ◆ Restoration & Management Plan

Estabrook Park

- ◆ Friends of Estabrook Park– Invasive species Control
- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance

2012 Natural Areas Management Locations

Falk Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Hiking Trail Construction & Maintenance-SCA
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Eagle Scout Project-Boardwalks, Benches, and Kiosk

Fitzsimmons Woods

- ◆ Invasive Species control
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Franklin Savanna SNA

- ◆ Hiking Trail Installation-AmeriCorps
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Savanna Restoration- MALC

Grant Park

- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance
- ◆ Friends of Grant Park-Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Restoration & Management Plan

Grantosa Creek

- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Greenfield Park

- ◆ Hiking Trail Construction & Maintenance-SCA
- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Grobschmidt Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Hiking Trail Construction - SCA
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Grassland Habitat Enhancements
- ◆ Eagle Scout-Kiosk & Benches

Holler Park

- ◆ David Ciepluch-Invasive Species Control and Native Plant Installation

Holt Park

- ◆ Hiking Trail Installation -SCA

Humboldt Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Jackson Park

- ◆ Hiking Trail Construction & Maintenance-SCA
- ◆ Invasive Species Control-SCA
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Jacobus Park

- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Restoration & Management plan

2012 Natural Areas Management Locations

Juneau Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ USFS Pollinator Project
- ◆ SCA & Service Learning Workdays

Kinnickinnic River Pkwy

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Invasive Species Control-AmeriCorps
- ◆ Hiking Trail Installation –SCA
- ◆ Eagle Scout– Kiosk

Kletzsch Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control-Friends of Kletzsch Park
- ◆ Hiking Trail Construction & Maintenance –SCA & AmeriCorps
- ◆ Restoration & Management Plan
- ◆ Eagle Scout Projects-Foot Bridges
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Kohl Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance
- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Kosciuszko Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Kulwicki Park—Root River Pkwy

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Lake Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control & Native Plant Installation-Lake Park Friends
- ◆ SCA & Service Learning Park
- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance

Little Menomonee River Pkwy

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Service Learning Site
- ◆ Hiking Trail Installation-SCA
- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Restoration & Management Plan
- ◆ Grassland Habitat Enhancement

Mangan Woods—Root River Pkwy

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance

McCarty Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

McGovern Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Restoration & Management Plan

Menomonee River Pkwy

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Invasive Species Control

2012 Natural Areas Management Locations

Mitchell Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Mitchell Blvd Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control-Eagle Scout & Story Hill Neighborhood Association
- ◆ Native Seed Collection –Service Learners

Noyes Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance
- ◆ Restoration & Management Plan

Oak Creek PKWY

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Rainbow Airport Prairie

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Native Seed Collection-AmeriCorps & Service Learners
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Grassland Habitat Enhancement

Rawson Woods—Oak Creek Pkwy

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Hiking Trail Maintenance
- ◆ Eagle Scout Kiosk

Root River Pkwy North of I-43

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Restoration & Management Plan

Root River Pkwy South of I-43

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Scout Lake Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Servite Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control

Sheridan Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control-Sheridan Park Friends

South Shore Park

- ◆ South Shore Park Watch-Invasive Species Control & Native Plant Installation

Uihlein Park

- ◆ Natural Resources Inventories

Underwood Creek Pkwy

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

Veteran's Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories

2012 Natural Areas Management Locations

Warnimont Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Hiking Trail Construction & Maintenance-SCA
- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Eagle Scout Projects-Kiosk & Snake Monitoring Boards
- ◆ Restoration & Management Plan

Washington Park

- ◆ Wildlife Surveys
- ◆ Invasive Species Control-SCA

Whitnall Park

- ◆ Natural Resource Inventories
- ◆ Invasive Species Control
- ◆ Wildlife Surveys

Wilson Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control-Molly McCarty

Wyrick Park

- ◆ Hiking Trail Installation-SCA

Zablocki Park

- ◆ Invasive Species Control

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

62 Parks & Parkways in 2012!

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, designs for future project development, hiking trail installation, and the creation of educational materials. Natural Areas staff worked with **44 students this year at 5 parks**. Students participated through the **University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Institute for Service Learning**.

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 **20 presentations to 1,297 citizens**. Program accomplishments were also covered in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and the various media outlets within UW-Extension.

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 Natural Areas Program efforts were published in **The Natural Areas Journal**, an international peer-reviewed scientific publication, and in quarterly newsletters for the Park People, Southeastern WI Invasive Species Consortium (SEWISC), and the UW-Madison Arboretum.

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 **13** university students and recent graduates this past year. Students participated from UW-Milwaukee, 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 learning experience, our interns (**who volunteer their time**) donated **1,067 hours** towards helping us achieve our natural areas goals. Their efforts and personal sacrifices to further their careers 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: **Karl Pehkonen, Brittany Voeks, Rachel Cornils, Evan Banach, Sophie Steck, Jessica Quinlan, Rebecca Dreyer, Cassie Rincon, Claire Kennedy, Roberto Ayala, Kevin Leon, Tim Shomberg, and Alex Kasprzak**.

Our staff has been continuously impressed with the success of our interns. Of the **33 interns** that have completed the 3-month internship program with us over the last 4 years, **90%** have taken positions within their career fields working for government agencies, not-for-profits, and the private sector across the United States.

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. One of the ways the Parks Department and its partners provide this experience is through the **Forked Aster Hiking Trail System**.

Staff, working with the Student Conservation Association (SCA), AmeriCorps, Service Learners, and Eagle Scouts we were able to stabilize and enhance **9.6 miles** of existing degraded hiking trails spread over **22 parks** in 2012. Building on the trail improvement success of the past few years, there are now more than **32 miles** of sustainable hiking trails within the Park System's natural areas for residents to enjoy.

Trail maintenance and restoration is an ongoing project and great strides were made this past year. Upon completion of our current enhancement of historic trails, the **Forked Aster Trail System** will provide **50 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.

To find out which natural areas contain hiking trails near you please contact Brian Russart, Natural Areas Coordinator, at Brian.Russart@milwcnty.com.

Natural Areas Land Management & Resource Planning Activities

Thanks to our partners, volunteers, donors, and additional staff resources from the Parks Department we had a banner year for restoration projects. Accomplishments included:

- ◆ Removal and control of **22** different invasive plant species at **47 parks and parkways**.
- ◆ Many natural areas within the Park System have historic plant lists due to inventories conducted by the Southeastern WI Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC), however many natural areas do not. Therefore, staff has begun the process of "filling in the gaps" by **conducting detailed plant surveys** of the natural areas without plant inventories.
- ◆ Monitoring wildlife populations is one of the best measures of ecological health and restoration project success. With that in mind staff expanded our snake monitoring surveys to **4 parks**, began breeding bird surveys at **4 parks**, began turtle surveys at **25 parks**, and we assisted the Milwaukee Biome Project monitoring migratory birds at **2 parks**.
- ◆ The initial phase of our **ephemeral pond inventory project** is nearly complete with only sections of the Menomonee River and Little Menomonee River Parkways remaining to survey. The four year study has added **336 ephemeral wetland** locations within the Park System. Ephemeral wetlands are the main breeding and nursery areas for the majority of our native amphibians species.
- ◆ Staff and partners trained **1,155 volunteers** that donated **21,504 hours** to improving our natural areas.
- ◆ Staff and partners conducted ecological restoration activities that benefited **1,744 acres** of natural areas.
- ◆ Staff completed Restoration & Management plans for **Doctor's, Esch-Honadel, Grant, Greenfield, Jacobus, Kletzsch, McGovern, Noyes, Warnimont**, and a section of the **Root River Parkway near Kulwicki Park**.

The Financial Value of the Natural Areas Program

Costs & Returns

Ecological restoration can require 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 2012 the Natural Areas Program received:

\$15,488 in grants (WI DNR & SEWISC)

\$14,000 in donations of materials or cash (Lake Park Friends, Eagle Scouts, Friends of the Arboretum)

\$468,572 in donated labor from volunteers (based on standardized rates published by the Independent Sector)

\$89,730 from the Agricultural Lease Program and CRP program that is managed by the Natural Areas staff

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

The Natural Areas Program brought in \$5.43 for every dollar the Parks Department spent on the salaries of Natural Areas staff 2012. A total measurable value of \$632,190!

Special Projects for 2012

- ◆ The Natural Areas Program continued its long standing partnership with **AmeriCorps** by hosting three very passionate and talented crews this past year. We also continued diversifying our AmeriCorps project partners by hosting a crew with **The Nature Conservancy** for the first time. The other two crews working within the Park System's natural areas (especially along our river ways) were shared with the **River Revitalization Foundation** (RRF) and **Groundwork Milwaukee**, both of which have been excellent stewards of the County's natural resources.
- ◆ The **Alliance for the Great Lakes'** dedication to preserving the ecological integrity of the Great Lakes has once again positively impacted the coastal natural areas within Milwaukee County. This past year the Alliance approached the Parks Department about jointly applying for a restoration grant from Sustain Our Great Lakes (federally funded grant program). The grant was successful and **the Alliance will be providing \$75,000 in 2013 to conduct restoration and wildlife habitat projects on over 200 acres at Bender, Grant, and Warnimont Parks.**
- ◆ Our partnership with the **Student Conservation Association** is a "special project" for our staff each and every year. The tireless efforts of these young men and women continues to make significant contributions to public accessibility within our natural areas (hiking trail construction) as well as improving the ecological health (invasive species removal). The opportunity to work directly with an organization so completely dedicated to the advancement and sustainability of urban youth is truly an inspiration for the Natural Areas staff.

Natural Areas Notable Partnerships for 2012

The Park People Weed-outs

Hands down, one of our most important and sustained partnerships. Weed-outs to remove invasive species were conducted in spring and/or in fall at **Doctors, Estabrook, Grant, Holler, Honey Creek Pkwy, 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 to guide and nurture volunteers **(712 in 2012)** in a sense of community enrichment.

Southeastern Wisconsin Invasive Species Consortium Inc (SEWISC)

Natural resource management efforts may be site specific but they rarely exist in a vacuum. With that in mind it has been very important for the Natural Areas Program to participate in regional projects and with regional partners such as SEWISC. We are certainly honored to be a partner in SEWISC's efforts to expand the public's awareness of the negative impacts of invasives species on the natural resources of southeastern Wisconsin. Our participation has led to new and/or expanded partnerships with other conservation organizations as well as direct funding to continue the restoration efforts at Franklin Savanna SNA.

Lake Park Friends

The Lake Parks Friends once again stepped up and showed their conservation leadership by funding a Natural Areas internship position in 2012. This has been an excellent partnership that has allowed us to jointly achieve our natural areas goals for Lake Park. Staff worked on invasive species removal, hiking trail maintenance, native plantings, and design assistance for the new native trees and shrubs planted at Lake Park this past fall. A special thank you to **Steve Morse** for his efforts to build and nurture this partnership.

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

The Natural Areas Program has developed a strong partnership with UW-Milwaukee's Conservation & Environmental Science (CES) program. This relationship has presented numerous opportunities for CES students to gain hands-on natural resource management and planning skills that will significantly benefit students as they enter their career fields. We'd specifically like to thank **Dr. Glen Fredlund and Dr. Mai Morshidi Phillips** from the university for promoting this opportunity to their students.

Eagle Scouts Projects

Experiencing conservation at a young age often solidifies an individual's natural resource perspectives for life. This year scouts built hiking trail boardwalks, trailhead kiosks, Leopold benches, snake-monitoring boards, removed invasive species, and seeded native plants. Our sincerest thank you to the following young men and their families: **Hubert Law, Dan Fuller, Brian Kratz, Andy Searles, Michael Drakopoulos, Mitchell Butschle, Cal Hart, Dustin Boyer, CJ Reynolds, David Mantes, Tony Pucel, Bryce Lein, Thomas Kiesling, Sam Eliot, William Placek, Joe Gebhart, and Curt Homan**.

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 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

- ◆ **John Lunz**- We can't say thank you enough. John is arguably our most dedicated volunteer and has always been willing to travel around the county to participate in a worthy natural areas cause.
- ◆ **David Ciepluch**- David has tirelessly led the charge to enhance the biodiversity of Holler Park by overseeing the installation of thousands of native plants, educating and supervising volunteers, and writing water quality grants to improve one of the head waters of the KK River.
- ◆ **Molly McCarty**-For many years now, Molly has made significant improvements to the Cudahy SNA and Wilson Park natural areas with her invasive species removal efforts.
- ◆ **Betsy Abert & Don Lawson**- Betsy & Don have been the conservation leaders for the Grant Park Friends for many years and have developed a program that serves as a natural areas role model for many other friends groups in the Park System.

The Value of Urban Natural Areas

Whenever I give a presentation at a conference, represent the Natural Areas Program on regional committees, or talk to others in my profession outside of Milwaukee County I have heard far too often that urban natural areas don't matter. The historic and current mindset for many land managers, researchers, and natural resource planners is that urban natural areas are not biologically diverse, too small, too linear, invasive species hotspots, or that they are just loved to death by large urban populations. To be honest, prior to becoming the Natural Areas Coordinator almost 5 years ago, I would have agreed with many of these thoughts out of my own ignorance.

Well, what a difference five years makes. I've had the opportunity to walk the 10,000 acres within our Natural Areas Program and to interact with thousands of volunteers across the county, and the obviousness of how important urban natural areas are to the communities (natural and man-made) they sustain leaves no doubt in my mind of their true value. It is immense. The Park System's natural areas exist within Wisconsin's largest gathering of humanity, yet we have nearly 700 species of plants (mostly native species), lay within one of the upper Midwest's major migration corridors, fall within Wisconsin's ecological tension zone (major biodiversity area), and at a minimum we have well over 100 species of breeding (native) wildlife within the Park System.

I do realize that there is a subset of biodiversity and ecological interaction that we have lost and are unlikely to ever regain, however we have one more aspect of our county that provides significant value and that's the good fortune of practicing conservation amongst a population base of over 900,000 people. A historic event has occurred in the last few years. For the first time in recorded history, more people live in urban areas around the world than in rural areas. The campaign to bring conservation into the lives of the average person must follow if we are ever to find a sustainable way to live upon this earth. Many more hearts and minds will be won or lost in urban natural areas than all those inspired by the wildernesses of the world. With this change comes opportunity and with opportunity comes responsibility. As more and more purely urban natural resource programs add their collective voices to the conservation conversation we gain more influence in the direction of our professions. Influence that will be necessary to obtain the resources and knowledge needed to preserve, protect, and restore urban natural areas and our vital connections to them.

The recent successes of our Natural Areas Program, success that is the direct result of many creative and dedicated individuals, has begun to get noticed and has generated numerous new opportunities that will allow us to continue to build on all the good work that has already been undertaken. My sincerest thank you, for all that you have allowed us to accomplish. Our program is and hopefully will always be a strong partnership between the County and its citizens.

Brian Russart
Natural Areas Coordinator
Milwaukee County Department of Parks, Recreation & Culture
University of Wisconsin Extension



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 2012

<i>Natural Areas Coordinator</i>	<i>Brian Russart</i>
<i>Assistant Natural Areas Coordinator</i>	<i>Julia Robson</i>
<i>Natural Areas Stewardship Coordinator</i>	<i>Staycie Greefkes</i>
<i>Natural Areas Land Management Technician</i>	<i>Sophia Steck</i>
<i>Natural Resource Technician</i>	<i>Scott Kunz</i>