

INPC Volunteers

Story By Kelly Neal

The Illinois Nature Preserves Commission assists private and public landowners in protecting high-quality natural areas and habitats of endangered and threatened species in perpetuity through voluntary enrollment of these areas into the Illinois Nature Preserves System. The commission promotes preservation of these significant lands and provides leadership in their stewardship, management and protection.

In 1983 INPC partnered with The Nature Conservancy to form the Volunteer Steward Network as a resource for volunteers interested in stewardship of

prairies, woodlands, wetlands and other high-quality natural communities. The network is comprised of volunteer groups across the state, with INPC and TNC lending support by supplying tools, training and conservation expertise. The network has been so successful it's now a model for other volunteer organizations throughout the country.

Volunteers invest their time in training to learn more about the plants and animals that inhabit these sites and the management required to maintain them. They then implement this knowledge on the ground by conducting surveys of flora and fauna. In an effort to control exotic, invasive plants that threaten to overtake the habitat of native plants, they cut brush, pull and herbicide



(Photo by Shell Eisele.)

Volunteer contributing to the outdoor education of community members and young people at Coral Woods, McHenry County.

“weeds,” and assist with prescribed burns. Without the efforts of volunteers, many unique natural communities would have been lost—to present and future generations.



Natural Heritage Volunteers

Story By Maggie Cole

Volunteers working on Division of Natural Heritage projects are focused on the preservation and enhancement of the state's highest-quality natural areas.

Dedicated individuals and organizations have cared for some of the rarest natural communities remaining in Illinois, including coastal dunes and swales, savannas, bogs, forests and prairies. Their long history of participat-

Plants of Concern volunteers monitor populations of rare bog arrow grass and little green sedge at Illinois Beach State Park.

ing in regularly scheduled work days has resulted in an integrated approach to restoration ecology. In addition to gathering and planting native seed, hand-pulling exotics, mowing, brush-cutting and monitoring the site for new populations of invasive species, many volunteers are licensed herbicide applicators, so their work may even include follow-up herbicide application.

Surveying, monitoring and compiling animal and plant species data also is an important component of restoration management. One specialized group of volunteers, called Plants of Concern Monitors, have been trained to use a scientific

method developed by the Chicago Botanic Gardens for monitoring endangered and threatened plants. These highly trained volunteers develop reports that are used by District Heritage biologists to monitor various threats that could destroy these rare species.

Volunteers have been strong partners and advocates in promoting our natural heritage. By providing tours, teacher workshops and top-notch educational programs that have attracted even international interests, their commitment has resulted in a dramatic rejuvenation of the state's most precious resources from southern Illinois to the most highly urbanized areas around Chicago.



(Photo by Deb Neilson.)

