

May 20, 1990

Aldeen Prairie Project Final Report

This project combined the efforts of many organizations and individuals working together to achieve planting and maintaining a small prairie plot to be used for educational purposes.

At the Outdoor Education Center located at Aldeen Park, Rockford, Illinois the main focus of the center is to provide an educational environment where the local school children can learn and participate in an ongoing learning program. The Rockford Park District maintains the park facilities to meet their needs and the instructors at the center involve the students in doing additional improvements and betterment of the area. Recently a large area near the creek bed was disturbed to accommodate a larger sewer improvement project. When this project was completed it left an area devoid of trees and natural vegetation. Left unattended this would result in an area of mustard garlic and burdock until trees reseeded in the area. This disturbance also resulted in creek disturbances and the stream flowed underground through this area for better than a year and a half. The creek now is flowing due to snow melt and rainfall, it will need more time to conclude if this is a permanent or temporary situation.

was damaged from stress but was still able to inhibit growth in one area of the prairie. This March we put up 6 Bluebird houses that were donated by a teacher that had brought her class to the park and was so impressed she wanted to help us out. Her husband built the houses. We put 4 around the prairie and the other two near by. We have seen the bluebirds in the area this spring but they have not yet nested. On April 9, the park personal in charge of prairie burns, proceeded to burn the prairie without our knowledge and because it was a small area they spot burned it. So we are not sure what effect this type of burn will have on this summer's growth.

Not only has this project been beneficial in establishing habitat, it has been a learning experience for the staff here at Aldeen Park. We attended a Prairie Workshop in Chicago and have been in contact with many organizations interested in preserving our prairie heritage. The students and teachers have been very involved and seem to view this as their project. They bring us cans for recycling to help finance the prairie and return to the park with their parents to show off their prairie.

In summary I believe this project has accomplished much in the way of community awareness and educational benefits. The project has received attention in the news media, Natural Land Institute, IOF publication and school releases. The articles and other material are included with this final report. After the initial grant funds made this project a

reality, the students, staff, and volunteers will continue to maintain and improve the natural habitat available in a small city park.

Jan Lindemue
Alder Environmental Center
Director

The staff, consisting of Jan Lindenmier and Kay Hill, decided that the open area was well situated to supporting a small prairie and it would add to the educational program. After deciding what we wanted to do we proceeded on finding the help and the financing for the project. Jeff Hill, a student at Stillman Valley High School, was looking for a project to do for his Eagle Scout award and he agreed to look into the possibility of constructing the fence and helping establish the prairie. We felt a fence was necessary to discourage hikers from walking through the middle which paralleled the trail but would be slightly shorter route. The construction had left a definite path through the area. Jeff submitted the proposal to the Park District Representative and Scout Leaders and received the necessary approvals. He proceeded to measure the area and get estimates on the material while the staff received the application forms and submitted these papers.

During the fall of 1988 some children from Keith Country Day School helped us collect seeds from a small prairie belonging to Robert Anderson in Rockford, Il. These seeds we kept over the winter. This included switchgrass, purple coneflower, rattlesnake master, canadian rye, big blue stem, and pale beardting, big bluestem, indian grass, little bluestem, and blazing star. These seeds were collected by the staff and their families over many weekends. In April the area was rototilled about 4 times by the maintenance personal and school groups came out and raked and picked

stones. The parents and teachers helped with this part of the project. On April 23, the Scouts and adult supervisors put in a split rail cedar fence on 3 sides of the area. The fourth side has a natural slope and begins the forested area of the park. The Scouts also tilled the area again and raked the seeds into the area. At this time we planted compass plant, pale beardtongue, yellow coneflower, snowy goldenrod, smooth blue aster, culver root, alum root and New England aster. These were plants and seeds we purchased. We are not on site during the summer months so we made arrangements to keep an eye on the area. In July we spent time weeding out the encroaching mustard garlic and planted some more forbs. During this time we visited many railroad areas and established areas where we could get more local species that needed to be increased. During the summer the growth was good although it was an extremely dry time and the creek was dry.

By the time we were ready to begin our fall program the prairie had enough flowers and grasses to be used as a teaching area. We also noted an increase in butterflies, insects, and small mammals in the area. We planted the last of the grasses and late flowers and noticed many birds feasting on our efforts. During the winter a red fox moved into a near by bush pile and the children frequently saw his prints.

We have removed some box elder trees that were shading the one side and one black walnut tree. The black walnut tree

M E M O

TO: Dave Larson
FROM: Bill Goodson
DATE: March 5, 1990
RE: Prairie Burn Plans - Aldeen and Atwood Parks

Dave, we need your assistance in scheduling fire permits and helping us to conduct prairie burns at Aldeen prairie plot and at Atwood Park. Hopefully we could schedule these during the week prior to March 30. In order to complete a Department of Conservation grant, we definitely need to do the prairie burn at Aldeen Park this year. You and your staff's assistance in helping to complete these prairie burns will be greatly appreciated. Please keep me posted on the availability and times of your staff. Thank you.

pc Jan Lindenmier
Clarence Hicks

ALDEEN PRAIRIE PROJECT

The Rockford Park District has composed a natural prairie land at Reuben Aldeen Park in an effort to raise awareness of historical Illinois as a prairie state. Local school children and Boy Scout Jeff Hill, 17, of Stillman Valley have been instrumental in the development of the prairie.

As part of an Eagle Scout project, Hill assisted with rototilling and fencing the prairie. Visiting school children, grades K-4, parents and teachers helped to remove sticks and stones, to scatter seeds, and rake the prairie. The project was under the direction of Jan Lindenmier and Kay Hill, coordinators of the Aldeen nature trail program.

Funding for the project was largely based on aluminum cans saved and recycled by visiting Rockford-area school children. Additional funding was provided through a grant from the Illinois Department of Conservation's Nongame Wildlife Conservation Fund. Donations also came from the local Lions Club and the Independent Order of Foresters.

The prairie is scheduled for completion by June 1990. Prairie flowers and grasses have been blooming since the fall. The Lindenmier and Hill families spent weekends collecting prairie seeds like New England aster, evening primrose, Canada rye grass, and Indian grass from prairies throughout Illinois.

The prairie will be burned in March to get rid of alien plants like dandelions and mustard plants. The prairie burning, similar to that

NO RELEASE

created by lightning, will simulate nature as it will warm the earth and provide the prairie plants with a better chance to grow naturally thereafter.

The quarter-acre prairie replaces a section of the nature trail destroyed by sewer construction.

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For further information contact
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Natural Land Institute

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Dedicated to the protection of natural areas in the Rock River Valley

December 1989

Number 1

Aldeen Park Prairie Restoration Project:

Environmental Center Helps Students Appreciate Illinois Prairie

Students participating in the environmental classes at Aldeen Park Environmental Center in Rockford took advantage of the physical disturbances caused by the extension of a city sewer line through the park and began their own prairie restoration project.

First through fourth grade classes worked on the project from fundraising to planning the plot, collecting prairie seeds from along railroad tracks and area prairies, leveling and raking the dirt smooth, and planting seeds last April. Boy Scout Jeff Hill, a senior at Stillman Valley High School, roto-tilled the plot, installed a split-rail fence, and raised \$330 to help offset costs of the materials for the fence as his Eagle Scout project. Hill convinced both the Lions Club and the Independent Order of Foresters to donate toward the prairie restoration.

Children at the center raised money by collecting aluminum cans, and the Center will receive a \$200 grant from the Illinois Department of Conservation's Nongame Wildlife Conservation Fund.

The triangular shaped prairie plot, located in a small clearing along the nature trail, will eventually be a valuable outdoor laboratory for the students, providing a place for the children to study insects and plants that are native to Illinois. But the project has also been a valuable learning experience for the children, and their enthusiasm clearly shows.

"You should have seen the kids when we found the first Indian grass and big bluestem," said Jan Lindenmier, Program Coordinator for the Environmental Center. "They were so excited they shouted to the other kids, 'We've got big bluestem!'"

This fall, the students collected more seeds and planned for next spring. Early in the spring, Lindenmier said, the park will

burn the plot to get rid of the foxtail and other unwanted weeds.

The restoration project was part of the Outdoor Education Program run by the Center and the Rockford Park District and headed by Director/Naturalist Jan Lindenmier and Teacher/Naturalist Kay Hill. Lindenmier estimates that 8,000 students participate in their programs each year.



Last April, third and fourth graders from Miss Jensen and Mrs. McCullough's classes from Keith School brought their own tools and a few of their parents to help rake and seed the new prairie area at Aldeen Park. The ongoing prairie restoration project is part of the Outdoor Education Program for Kindergarten through fourth grade at the environmental center, located in Aldeen Park, just off N. Alpine between E. State St. and Guilford Rd.