

Heckrodt Wetland Reserve Prairie Meadow and Arboretum Project

In January 2005, Heckrodt Wetland Reserve acquired the last remaining parcel of property that is contiguous with the Reserve. From the beginning, our goal was to create a special place ... to enjoy now...and to be preserved for future generations to enjoy as well. The acquired property was an eleven-acre, capped landfill that had grown wild for about thirty years. The open portion of the site was rubble-strewn; the wooded portion of the site was being over-run by invasive plants. Because it is a closed landfill, the property came with stringent DNR requirements. We saw it as a “diamond in the rough.”

Good things continued to happen for us. Permit approvals went smoothly. Generous donors stepped forward. Two examples are cited here: we were given 3,500 cubic yards of excess dirt from a construction project, and we were provided with a source for digging nearly 800 evergreen transplants that were needed. The bridge was manufactured and installed within a short period of time. Many groups of volunteers pitched-in to help – over 10,000 hours of volunteer time has been invested in the project to date.

Bill Heckrodt provided the financial support that made the project possible. His gift to the Reserve to cover property acquisition and basic construction was \$225,000. The value of the Project is double that at \$450,000 when considering material donations, grants received, contributions and volunteer labor valued at fair hourly rates.

Basic Project Components:

A Bridge over the Lopas Channel and a half-mile of new trail. To connect the new property to the main portion of the Reserve a foot bridge was installed over Lopas Channel. This new connection provides a lovely spot to view the channel over the water – a new feature at HWR. A plaque honoring our Project Sponsor, William F. Heckrodt, who provided the financial support that made the Project possible, can be found on the east approach of the bridge. Interpretive signs around the perimeter of the project were developed to help visitors understand more about the site and habitat management practices required to maintain it. The interpretive sign aspect of the project was funded by a Project grant from the Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region.

A four-acre Prairie Meadow was planted in October 2006, incorporating about fifty varieties of prairie plants native to Wisconsin. The site was prepared by spraying the existing field grasses with herbicide over one growing season to remove the vegetation that might compete with the seeds. The seed mix was planned to provide a wide variety of plants over three seasons, with special emphasis on nectar and host plants preferred by the Monarch butterfly. Seeds were planted using a Brillion seeder. During the summer of 2007, the prairie was mowed several times using a flail shredder to eliminate weeds, giving the prairie seeds a chance to germinate. This mowing will continue for in through the summer of 2008. Our vision for the prairie is for tall grass waving in the wind, with a myriad of colorful prairie flowers blooming from late spring to late fall. We anticipate nearly full growth of the prairie by 2012– prairies take a lot of patience. In the meantime a Prairie Identification Garden has been developed to help visitors to our future prairie identify the plants they will see there. This portion of the project was funded by a grant from the Fox Valley Area Chapter of Wild Ones Natural Landscapers.

An Arboretum has been planted on the earthen berms that were constructed on two sides of the triangular shaped site. More than a thousand small trees and shrubs native to Wisconsin are planted on the berms. The intended purpose of the planted berms is to provide a “living fence” that separates our natural, tranquil area from the urban surroundings and from the noise of a busy highway.

About a third of the site is being preserved for its natural beauty and wildlife habitat. Hundreds of truckloads of invasive plants have been removed, and that will be an ongoing task. The area has been enhanced with hundreds of new trees and shrubs that were selected to provide food and cover for wild animals and birds. Structures were added to attract wildlife and provide a demonstration area for landowners to learn more about this type of management. These structures include brush piles, rock piles, owl nesting boxes, and a bluebird nest box trail. This portion of the project was funded by a C.D. Besadny Conservation Grant (managed by the Natural Resources Foundation).

Future Project Support and Maintenance:

The Prairie Meadow and Arboretum project will require continued maintenance and management into the future. Invasive plants will require removal. The prairie will require mowing or burning maintenance to ensure its diversity. The wildlife management area will require upkeep and monitoring to evaluate the success of methods installed. A Prairie Meadow and Arboretum Sponsorship program has been developed to help the public support our efforts in habitat development and management. Sponsors can choose varying levels of support, with gifts of \$100 or more acknowledged on a permanent plaque in the Nature Center.

Links of interest:

Fox Valley Area Chapter of Wild Ones

<http://www.for-wild.org/chapters/foxvalley/>

C.D. Besadny Conservation Grants

[http://www.wisconservation.org/index.php?page=About the Program](http://www.wisconservation.org/index.php?page=About_the_Program)

Community Foundation for the Fox Valley Region

<http://community.cffoxvalley.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?pid=183&srcid=183>

Planting Prairies – Prairie Nursery

http://www.prairienursery.com/howTo/guide/prairie_estab_guide.htm

Managing Your Land for Wildlife – Wisconsin DNR

<http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/publ/wildland.htm>

Blue Birds – North American Bluebird Society

<http://www.nabluebirdsociety.org/>

Monarch Butterflies – Monarch Watch

<http://monarchwatch.org/>

Invasive Species – Invasive Plants Association of Wisconsin

<http://www.ipaw.org/>