

Gorge Stewards Quarterly

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Maintaining Genetic Diversity in Oak Savanna Restoration

by Carolyn Carr

Today, when only fragments of natural communities like oak savannas or prairies remain on the landscape, protecting the plants and other living things that occur on those sites is essential, or they'll vanish. When restoring remaining sites or planting new ones, it is important to use seeds of native plants from local or regional sites to preserve biological diversity.

Plants are genetically adapted to local conditions and form ecotypes - plants of the same species that are adapted to slightly different environmental conditions of their location. Plants support other organisms that have co-evolved with them, including pollinators, insects, birds, mammals and other wildlife that use the plants for food, shelter or a place to raise their young. Restoring native plants to areas where they are well-suited accomplishes three purposes: it increases the chances of planting success, it helps preserve organisms that are dependent on them, and it helps protect the genetic diversity of the plants. Remaining natural plant communities are dwindling, so conducting restoration projects in a way that protects genetic diversity is important.

Here in Longfellow, we're working to protect the diversity of our stretch of the River Gorge landscape. Without diverse species of diverse ecotypes, our natural area will be more homogenous and less diverse -- like so much of the landscape. Longfellow's seed collection project contributes to the goal of using local ecotypes in the restoration of the River Gorge.

This fall, volunteers hand-collected seed from the River Gorge's Oak Savanna and another nearby remnant, following guidelines of ethical collecting (gaining landowner permission in advance, collecting limited amounts). Collected seed of four grass species and nearly a dozen wildflower species will be propagated by Prairie Restorations, Inc., for planting into the Oak Savanna site on June 5th. We hope for good germination! The June planting will include seedlings from Landscape Alternatives, Inc., a local nursery propagating native species from seeds collected within the 7-county metropolitan region, a seedling source that has been used at this site in the past.

To find out more about the planting or to sign up in advance to volunteer, contact Katie Galloway at 651/222-2193 x14 or kgallowa@fmr.org.

Volunteers collected the seeds of native grasses and wildflowers from the prairie bowl and oak savanna during a fall 2003 Gorge Stewards event.



Appreciation for Gorge Stewards' Efforts

As we wind down from the holiday season and look ahead to what the coming year will bring, Friends of the Mississippi River would like to thank everyone who participated in the Gorge Stewards program in 2003. We are truly grateful for your involvement in the program and your commitment to gorge-protection efforts.

A lot happened along the gorge in 2003 and a remarkable amount of work was done to improve habitat, clean up the trails, and strengthen people's sense of place. In the past year, FMR has organized 28 events and activities around the gorge, ranging from exotic species removals to river clean-ups, birding hikes to Meeker Island tours. Over 800 people have participated in these various events with stewards spending almost 900 volunteer hours working to restore the gorge.

Thank you to gorge stewards for your continued support and dedication to the program. Your role in river stewardship is truly commendable and we can't thank you enough for all your hard work. We look forward to seeing you out on the river in 2004!

Gorge Stewards Funding Update

In 2002, Friends of the Mississippi River received an Environmental Partnership grant from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to fund the expansion of the Gorge Stewards program to include the Prospect Park, Merriam Park and Macalester-Groveland neighborhoods on the east side of the gorge as well as Seward and Longfellow. Over the past year, FMR has successfully organized several stewardship and interpretive programs in the east-side neighborhoods, including an Open House to introduce the program, exotic species removals and tours of the Meeker Island lock and dam ruins. We have enjoyed meeting residents of these neighborhoods and working with new volunteers on efforts to protect and enhance the river gorge.

FMR is excited to announce that the Department of Natural Resources has awarded us an Environmental Partnership grant for the Gorge Stewards program in 2004. The grant will allow us to build and expand on the successes of the program by continuing to engage citizens in local gorge protection efforts in the Longfellow, Seward and Prospect Park neighborhoods of Minneapolis as well as Merriam Park, Mac-Groveland and Highland Park in St. Paul. We look forward to advancing our work with current gorge stewards and involving new people in the program in 2004.

Buckthorn Bust Recap

This past fall the Longfellow and Seward neighborhoods completed a buckthorn bust as the first of three neighborhood private property improvement programs that will enhance the Mississippi River watershed. Beginning in September, volunteers surveyed 148 blocks and identified 241 properties in Longfellow and Seward with buckthorn. A total of 36 residents removed the buckthorn from their property - 23 signed up for the free curbside pick-up while another 13 residents participated in the matching grant program and received money to apply toward professional removal costs. Many other residents removed buckthorn on their own, outside of the curbside pick-up and matching grant programs. Volunteers also worked with residents from the Becketwood Senior Living Cooperative to remove buckthorn from their property. The successful completion of the buckthorn bust was made possible thanks to the help of 60 dedicated volunteers who spent over 200 hours to plan, survey and remove buckthorn in Seward and Longfellow.

“We are quite happy with the results—though we would have loved to see higher participation in the removal programs, we also realize this is a long term effort”, says Hillary Oppman, Project Coordinator with the Longfellow Community Council. “We covered an enormous area in our surveys, and got the word out to a lot of residents. So the awareness of buckthorn is substantially higher than it was before LCC and SNG began our removal campaigns.”

The next phases of the private property improvement programs include a Native Plant Matching Grant and a Stormwater Management project. Planning is now underway and LCC will be seeking out additional volunteers to help with these projects. For more information contact Hillary at 612-722-4529 or go to <http://www.longfellow.org>.

Gorge Stewards Calendar

All activities are free and open to the public.

This calendar is subject to change.

January 15th - Seed Cleaning and Processing

Hiawatha School Park, E. 42nd St. & 44th Ave. S.

7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Help sort and clean seed that was collected from the Longfellow Oak Savanna during three stewardship events this fall. After processed, the seed will be sent to a local greenhouse to be grown into plugs that will be planted at a June volunteer event.

February 2nd - Gorge Stewards Neighborhood Planning Meeting

Brackett Park, 38th Ave. S. & 28th St.

7:00-9:00 p.m.

Active Gorge Stewards and neighborhood leaders are encouraged to attend this meeting to discuss goals, ideas and concerns related to gorge protection efforts in 2004.

March - “Rapids to Reservoirs: A Brief History of the Mississippi River Gorge”

Presentation by Dr. John Anfinson, Historian for the National Park Service

Prospect Park, Date and Location TBD

The Mississippi River Gorge Stewards is a neighborhood approach to protecting, restoring and interpreting a natural sanctuary in the heart of the Twin Cities sponsored by Friends of the Mississippi River. Funding is provided by the Longfellow Community Council, the Seward Neighborhood Group, Recreational Equipment Incorporated, Gannett Foundation (as recommended by KARE 11) and the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund.

*For more information about the Gorge Stewards Project or to get involved,
please contact Katie Galloway at Friends of the Mississippi River
651/222-2193 or kgallowa@fmr.org.*



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Friends of the Mississippi River is a leading citizen organization working to protect and enhance the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities area.