

EMBARRAS VOLUNTEER STEWARDS

CONSERVATION DAYS FOR SPRING 2018

Our conservation days are on Saturdays from 9:00 to 11:00 a.m. Everyone is welcome and no prior experience is necessary. We do not have formal membership or dues. Just come as often as you like and help us do our small part to maintain the health of woodlands, prairie remnants and prairie restorations. Visit this page to get updates. To receive email notifications of updates and cancellations send your email address to Larry at thorsenhutton@gmail.com with a request to be added to the list.

We advise sturdy footwear and gloves at work days. Tools are provided but bring your own loppers and shovels if you have them.

SEE OUR SPRING SCHEDULE BELOW

BEVERLY FOOTE'S ADDRESS AT THE EMBARRAS RIDGES OPENING EVENT

(A slightly revised reprint from the Spring and Summer edition of *The Prairie Rendezvous* article by Jamie Ellis)

With plenty of sunshine, a gentle breeze, and pleasant temperatures, friends gathered to celebrate Grand Prairie Friends' acquisition of 141 acres of

forested land south of Charleston, IL. About 80 people came out on the morning of Saturday June 2, 2012 to enjoy the weather and experience the beauty of this property.

Jamie Ellis, GPF Board President, gave some brief remarks about the process of raising money to buy this property and too give proper thanks to the many people who gave time or money to make this acquisition a reality.

GPF sincerely thanks Dan Olson and Terry Rathgeber who along with Jamie Ellis helped plan the event. David Mott and Mary Kay Solecki gave their time to lead a few nature hikes into the forested ridges and ravines. Jeanna Annis came early to help set up tables and chairs, and Ansel Anderson directed traffic.

The ceremony that morning was brief, but we provide here a transcript of some meaningful and moving words written and delivered by Beverly Foote.

WHAT EMBARRAS RIDGES MEANS TO ME: Address delivered by Beverly Foote to crowd gathered at Embarras Ridges on June 2, 2012.

My husband, Dan, and I moved to Charleston in 1965 so he could teach chemistry at Eastern Illinois University. Looking for nearby natural places for family outings and picnics, we soon discovered three good places. They were: Walnut Point State Park, upstream of Charleston on the Embarras River, Lake Charleston, an impoundment on the Embarras River near Charleston, and Fox Ridge state Park, downstream of Charleston on the Embarras River. Clearly, the places of natural interest were on the Embarras River.

The Embarras River is a welcome contrast in a county (Coles) that is mostly flat, squared off in mile-sized parcels, and cultivated with corn and soybeans. Its curvy course cuts a valley through the terminal moraine formed by the last advance of the Wisconsin Glacier. Only in Coles County, where the moraine exists, does the Embarras River Valley exist.

The valley consists of the river itself, its floodplain, and the adjacent forested ridges and ravines. In the late 1960's the US Corps of Engineers thought this would be a good place to build a reservoir. They proposed to dam the Embarras River near the Coles-Cumberland county line. The river would have become Lincoln Lake – a reservoir extending to the Coles-Douglas county line. There would no longer be an Embarras River in Coles County. There would be a body of

water with widely fluctuating water levels and steep eroding banks. Think Lake Shelbyville.

There are still folks around, myself included, who opposed the Lincoln Lake project. When I gave presentations describing the undesirable outcomes of the project, sometimes someone would ask me what my vision was for the Embarras River. The answer was a naturally free flowing river and its accompanying wooded ridge and ravine valley. The project was deauthorized by Congress in 1971. Since then, Woodyard Conservation Area adjacent to Lakeview Park, Warbler Woods, adjacent to Embarras Ridges and at least two private properties on the river are being protected.

It is forty years later and now we have the wonderful prospect of having a naturally free flowing Embarras River and another protected piece of its adjacent wooded ridges and ravines in place thanks to Grand Prairie Friends. We are well on our way to protect the Embarras River valley for migrating birds, frogs, ferns, sedges, orchids, threatened and endangered species – all the bits and pieces throughout its course through Coles County. I never thought I would live long enough to see all this happen. But here it is. It means a lot to me and, I think to you too.

Editor's note: Beverly Foote made a significant donation to protect Embarras Ridges in loving memory of her sister Brenda Dreisow.

POST SCRIPT by Beverly Foote January 25, 2018. Who among those attending the dedication could have imagined that six years later 141 acres of protected Embarras River Valley hillside would grow to 870 acres of not only hillside forest but also floodplain right down to the river's edge? The first added parcel was Warbler Woods Nature Preserve, 202 acres just north of Embarras Ridges, donated by Shirley Hunt in memory of her late husband, ornithologist Dr. Barrie Hunt. Six additional parcels were purchased from four adjacent landowners with funds from individual donors and grants from foundations. Grand Prairie Friends functions as a land trust. The complex is to be known as Warbler Ridge.

The formerly cultivated fields in the floodplain require habitat restoration to wetlands and floodplain forest, hopefully similar to pre-settlement times, by removing nonnative invasive plants and replanting with native plants. Volunteer

stewards including the Embarras Volunteer Stewards are so lucky for the opportunity to help and to enjoy the return of this protected natural area.

E.C. Pielou, *After the Ice Age: The Return of Life in Glaciated North America*.
University of Chicago Press, 1991

The great ice sheets in North America began melting about 20,000 years ago, causing changes in landforms as well as in tree, plant, insect, and animal populations that continue today. Geographical change and the arrival of different species at the edges of the ice was continuous, although not steady, as the climate kept changing. Fossil evidence shows the variety of life and where species lived and migrated.

Pielou's description of the relationship between the ice and the evolution of life under a great variety of conditions is both science-based and written for the non-scientist, with numerous maps and drawings, to give the reader a picture of causes and effects, and the progression of changes. Her guide to what has been happening helps us understand that there is no "correct" or "optimum" ecological balance. The interactions of land, water, plants, animals and climate constantly change the picture, however slowly from the human point of view.

Different forms of tundra, meadows and forests developed and quickly attracted species, including humans, that could live in them. Huge lakes formed, attracting aquatic plants, fish and animals, then vanished as the ground rose. A sudden warming about 10,000 years ago caused rapid habitat alteration and the extinction of over 50 species of mammals. The reasons for it are not clear.

Surprisingly, there is also evidence that North America has become cooler and wetter than it was as the ice was retreating, and that we are again in a period of slow glaciation.

This kind of evidence about continuous natural fluctuations over millennia and epochs makes us appreciate that, although human destruction of native ecosystems and consequent very fast warming are now disrupting natural processes, the next period of glaciation might mercifully erase our work.

Larry Thorsen

To Burn or Not to Burn?

An article in the December 2017 issue of Nature reports a study that found frequent burning of grasslands and woodlands over decades may gradually reduce the vitality of plants and trees. Burning reduces the carbon and nitrogen in the soil, reducing plant growth. This in turn reduces the amount of carbon the plants draw from the atmosphere and stored in plants, the process of carbon sequestration. The study looked at soil fertility over a 65 year period, so fertility reduction is slow, and there is no suggestion that we should suppress fire altogether.

Grassland Restoration is Working in the Soil, Too

Nachusa Grasslands is a 4,000 acre preserve near Dixon, Illinois that has been managed for 30 years by The Nature Conservancy, with the goal of enhancing plant and animal biodiversity. The introduction of American bison in 2014 was part of the management plan. Recent research has found that the soils at Nachusa are starting to resemble soils in remnants of the original prairie in Illinois, of which less than one percent remains. The increased diversity of bacteria recolonizing the soil is particularly important in the face of the global trend of loss of biodiversity.

Cool Green Science

Cool Green Science is the conservation science blog of The Nature Conservancy. Its articles and photos about wildlife and nature are presented for the non-scientist. Recent articles are about snowy owls, turkeys, climate change, prairie plants and the effects of insecticides on birds and insects.

www.blog.nature.org/science

Entomology Today

The Entomology Society of America presents documentaries on insects for popular viewing. Recent ones are about deer ticks, mosquito repellents, bed bugs, and the emerald ash borer. www.entomologytoday.org

SPRING CONSERVATION DAYS

March 24 - Lakeview Park for removing various invasives. The Lakeview parking area is at the end of McKinley Avenue in Charleston.

March 31 - Douglas-Hart Nature Center for removing bush honeysuckle. Douglas-Hart is at the corner of Lerna Road and DeWitt Avenue in Mattoon.

April 7 - Lafferty Nature Center for removing bush honeysuckle. Park behind Carl Sandberg School on Reynolds Drive in Charleston.

April 14 - Woodyard Conservation Area for removing various invasives. Woodyard is 1.8 miles south of Route 16 on Route 130.

April 21 - Embarras Ridges for a garlic mustard hunt. Take Route 130 south from Charleston to Daileyville Road (CR 1470 North). Follow the road about one mile to the parking area on the right.

April 28 - Douglas-Hart Nature Center. This is Douglas-Hart's annual Earth Day event for volunteers to plant, clean up and remove bush honeysuckle.

May 5 - Warbler Bottoms for another garlic mustard hunt (for those EVS volunteers not participating in the annual statewide spring bird count). Take Route 130 to Bypass Road opposite the entrance to Lake Charleston. Cross the old bridge and turn right on CR 550 North, follow the road to the parking area.

May 12 - Burgner Acres for another garlic mustard pull. Take Coles County Road 1000 North to County Road 1150 East, turn south and go about 0.2 mile to the end of the road.

May 19 - Rocky Branch Nature Preserve for our annual wild flower and warbler walk. Meet at the café at the top of the hill in Clarksville for car pooling.

June 2 - Coneflower Hill Prairie for sweet clover removal. Take the Bruce-Findlay Road about 5 miles west from Coles Station, turn right at the electric substation, so 2 miles to the "T," then turn left and go one mile to the parking area.

June 9 - Walnut Point State Park for bush honeysuckle removal. Meet at the Pleasant Grove picnic area.

June 16 - Lafferty Nature Center for bush honeysuckle removal. Park behind Carl Sandberg School on Reynolds Drive in Charleston.

June 23 - Woodyard Conservation area for removal of invasives.

June 30 - Lakeview Park for removal of invasives.