

2022 Environmental Resources Advisory Council Annual Report

2022 Initiatives and Topics of Interest

- Long-term Restoration Projects
- Bicentennial Bond Tree Planting Project
- Goat Farm Redevelopment
- Griffy Master Plan Updates
- Griffy Lake Nature Preserve Deer Management
- Griffy Lake Loop Trail/ Griffy Accessible Fishing Pier Development
- Trail Improvements
- Education & Outreach

Long-term Restoration Projects

Throughout the year, ERAC members were given updates on several long-term restoration projects that take place on BPRD property. These projects include updates from the Urban Forester on various tree plantings and removals, updates from the Urban Greenspace Manager on invasive plant management and native plant installations, as well as updates from the Nature Resources Manager on various trail and lake management projects. Specific project updates included: Bicentennial Bond Tree Planting Project, Switchyard Park Wetland and Stream Mitigation Annual Monitoring, Griffy Lake Aquatic Vegetation Management, Lower Cascades Stream Stabilization Project, Griffy Lake Nature Preserve Prescribed Burn Project, and the Griffy Lake Nature Preserve Deer Browse Study. These projects support a variety of the City's current Sustainability Action Plan (SAP) and Climate Action Plan (CAP) goals

BPRD staff also invited private contractors to present project results and allow ERAC members to ask questions regarding the process and outcomes. ERAC members continue to provide feedback and make suggestions for additional restoration projects.

Bicentennial Bond Tree Planting Project

In 2018, Mayor Hamilton announced a series of Bicentennial bond projects to invest in the future of the City of Bloomington. Included in the Bicentennial bond was \$800,000 to plant trees along streets and in public rights-of-way across the city. Potential planting sites were identified by Davey Resource Group in 2019 as part of a city-wide inventory of street trees. The initial identification of potential planting sites was based on above-ground conditions such as overhead power lines, width of the public right-of-way, existing trees, and other considerations. To address gaps in Bloomington's canopy, the first phase of tree planting is focused in areas identified by both their environmental and socio-economic characteristics. In February 2022, BPRD contracted Davey Resource Group to oversee the planting and maintenance of new street trees. Spring tree plantings began in April 2022 and fall plantings began in

October 2022. The new Urban Forester attended meetings to give ERAC members updates on tree installations and discuss Callery pear removals.

In 2023, BPRD will continue to inspect city trees, assess risks, investigate planting sites, and replace more invasive trees.

Goat Farm Redevelopment Project

The 31.5-acre Goat Farm property was donated to the Bloomington Parks Foundation by the Sherman Rogers family in 2007 with the provision that it be used for publicly accessible recreation and greenspace. The property contains a prairie habitat and is located in the Jackson Creek floodplain. In 2021, the Rogers Family donated an additional \$1 million dollars to fund improvements to the park that align with the original purpose of providing publicly accessible recreation and greenspace. BPRD contracted Mader Design to create preliminary design concepts for the park. After several public meetings, ERAC members were asked to provide feedback on the project design.

In August 2022, the construction contract was awarded to Scenic Construction Services and work began. The first phase included repairing the barn and silo, adding parking and seating, creating a new loop paved trail, constructing two boardwalks, and expanding the native prairie to the south. ERAC members reviewed design plans and native seed mixes. Members will also be asked to review interpretive sign content prior to production.

Goat Farm property construction will continue into spring 2023 and will conclude with a ribbon cutting ceremony that will involve officially renaming the site to Rogers Family Park.

Griffy Master Plan

The original 1984 Griffy Master Plan was updated in 2008. Since then, the plan has been updated annually by sections. In 2020, BPRD hired Western EcoSystems Technology, Inc. (WEST) to complete a bird, reptile, and amphibian inventory of Griffy Lake Nature Preserve. The information gathered from this study was used to update the Griffy Master Plan and ensure the appropriate management of this property. In December 2021, WEST shared the Reptile, Amphibian, and Avian Inventory Surveys at Griffy Lake Nature Preserve with BPRD staff. ERAC members were able to review the report and provide feedback at the April 2022 meeting.

Aquatic vegetation management in Griffy Lake was not supported by the Lake and River Enhancement (LARE) grant in 2022 due to reduced Indiana Department of Nature Resources (IDNR) program funding and the potential impacts from lowering the lake for the Griffy Loop Trail Project. However, BPRD staff hired Aquatic Control Inc. to conduct two vegetation surveys and update the Griffy Lake Aquatic Vegetation Management Plan. The results from the two surveys were shared with ERAC members and future management methods were discussed, including improving fish habitat along the newly constructed walkway.

Terrestrial vegetation continues to be monitored annually by contracted field botanists from Eco Logic, LLC. Researchers are specifically tracking understory plant growth to indicate deer browse pressure. This

data is used to inform decisions regarding deer management on the property as well as provide recommendations for sites that would benefit from future prescribed burns.

A contract with Spectrum exists to update the trail portion of the Griffy Lake Master Plan to provide recommendations for existing and future trails – this includes a pilot ravine crossing along the western corner of the lake at the south corner of the dam. ERAC members will be able to review this report at the April 2023 meeting.

Griffy Lake Nature Preserve Deer Management

Deer management, once again was a regular discussion topic at meetings. BPRD did not receive funding from IDNR for deer management in 2022, however, with the support of the Park Board and ERAC members, BPRD was able to hire a contractor to plan and facilitate a hunt over two weekends in November during deer season. This year, it was decided not to host a hunt the weekend after thanksgiving because participation was low in past years and there was a demand from the public to keep the park open for hiking. BPRD hired White Buffalo, who was previously hired to do the sharpshooting in 2017 that removed 62 deer. White Buffalo has coordinated 4 hunts since then including the 2019 CHAP hunt that removed 26 deer from the park, the 2020 CHAP hunt that removed 40 deer from the park, the 2021 CHAP program that removed 47 deer from the property. The 2022 hunt removed 46 deer over two weekends.

Under the supervision of White Buffalo, all 29 participants were required to pass a proficiently test and be properly licensed to hunt deer with firearms on the property. Deer Reduction Zone status was requested from the IDNR and approved, however the announcement of this coincided with news regarding the start of the archery season. This has created some confusion among hunters who are under the impression that they may go to Griffy to hunt using archery equipment – the only hunting allowed at Griffy is during the supervised deer hunt. For safety reasons, hunters were only permitted to fire downward from tree stands that are at least 12 feet off the ground. A private security firm was hired by the BPRD to patrol the access points to Griffy Lake Nature Preserve, and to advise members of the public of the temporary closure of the property during the hunt. Signs were placed conspicuously at parking areas and trail heads to inform the public of the closure of the property during the weekends of the hunt.

Research and plant inventories conducted by Eco Logic, LLC continue to show that deer management is required to allow native plants to recover. Specifically, BPRD staff aim to reduce browse pressure on young oak and hickory saplings so that they can mature enough to support wildlife in the park. These native tree species are also desirable because they are more resilient to the pressures of climate change, such as droughts and high winds.

ERAC members support long-term deer management at Griffy Lake Nature Preserve and will continue to annually review the vegetation monitoring results.

Griffy Lake Loop Trail / Griffy Accessible Fishing Pier

Trees & Trails Bicentennial Bond funding has been obtained for the design and development of this project. In 2020, BPRD staff presented the proposed Griffy Lake Loop Trail route to ERAC members as well as the plans for several trail connections and an accessible fishing pier. The first phase included constructing an accessible pedestrian walkway along the west side of N. Headley Road to connect users to the south and north trail segments as well as adding five fishing access points along the western shoreline. BPRD staff provided project updates and invited ERAC to provide design recommendations.

BPRD hired E&B Paving after soliciting bids for this project. Construction began in December 2021 and continued until June 2022. The project was celebrated at the Griffy Lake: A Golden Celebration on July 29th, 2022. Mayor Hamilton joined past and present BPRD staff to celebrate 50 years of managing the property and perform a ribbon cutting ceremony for the new accessible walkway and fishing piers. The new walkway connects users to the north and south shore hiking trails. Phase one of the Griffy Loop Project also includes a .5 mile section of dirt trail located on the south side of the lake. This section of trail was installed by Spectrum. Spectrum also updated the trail section of the Griffy Lake Master Plan to provide management and trail route recommendations.

BPRD staff will continue to update ERAC members on the design plans, permit requirements, and construction progress for this project. Phase two includes adding a trail crossing along the top of the dam and constructing a staircase from the parking lot to the new trail.

Trail Improvements

Throughout the year, ERAC members were updated by BPRD staff on trail development and improvement projects. While the Griffy Lake Loop Trail and the proposed Clear Creek Trail extension received the most attention, other trail updates were discussed such as taking over the Polly Grimshaw Trail, The Mill property donation, and ongoing invasive plant management along other City trails.

BPRD has agreed to take over the management responsibilities for the Polly Grimshaw Trail from Public Works. The paved trail is located near Park Ridge Park along a railroad corridor. The trail will be trimmed back, snow removed, and maintained to BPRD standards for paved trails.

The Mill property donation includes the trail section east of Weimer road, close to the proposed east-west trail from Switchyard Park to Wapehani Mountain Bike Park. This section, approximately 900 feet long and paved, will be used as part of the Clear Creek Trail extension. There is potential for additional connections to the proposed Powerline Trail and RCA Community Park. These projects support goals outlined in both the City's SAP and CAP which aim to connect existing greenspaces and provide additional access to residents.

Trail connections and development will continue to be discussed bi-monthly with ERAC members.

Outreach

Every meeting, ERAC members were updated on BPRD's education and outreach activities such as Nature Days, Roving Naturalist Programs, Adopt-A-Stream/Greenspace/Trail Volunteers, and After-

School Nature Club programs. With no COVID-19 restrictions, BPRD was able to increase group sizes and the number of program offerings in 2022. Large community events, such as Bug Fest, Bird Fest, and Get Outdoors day were able to welcome hundreds of people and provide free opportunities to learn more about local outdoor recreational opportunities and our environment.

Additionally, BPRD renewed its partnership with Monroe County-Identify and Reduce Invasive Species (MC-IRIS) to host weekly Weed Wrangle programs and to develop education opportunities about invasive plant management. In 2022, this program was expanded to allow for additional weekly Weed Wrangle programs at specific parks based on community engagement.

BPRD staff continue to add boot brush stations around parks with natural surface trails to reduce the spread of invasive species and to educate park users. ERAC members provided feedback on the boot brush sign design as well as provided feedback on interpretive sign designs for RCA Community Park. The current park signs have been vandalized or are damaged from exposure. Final art will be review by ERAC members in June 2023.

BPRD has improved the GIS data and descriptions for all parks presented on OuterSpatial's mobile application. BPRD staff will continue to develop interpretive hikes that will be made available to park users on the free mobile app. ERAC members were asked to download the app and provide feedback on ease of usage and content.

Moving forward in 2023, ERAC members will continue to provide feedback and recommendations on matters pertaining to the operations of natural areas, programs, and facilities.