

2015 ERAC Annual Report

2015 Initiatives

At the beginning of the year, ERAC members decided on focus areas and topics they would like to keep abreast of throughout 2015. These topics included:

- Deer management at Griffy Lake Nature Preserve
- Griffy Lake Plant and Water Quality Data
- Adopt-an-Acre Program
- Wapehani Mountain Bike Park
- Winslow Woods Management Plan

2015 ERAC officers: Melissa Clark – Chair
 Angie Shelton – Vice-Chair

Deer management at Griffy Lake Nature Preserve

Deer management continued to be an area of interest for ERAC members. While the cull at Griffy Lake Nature Preserve was called off in early 2015, members worked to keep their concern for the health of the preserve in the public view and in the mayoral race. A letter was written by ERAC in support of deer management at Griffy and members brought the issue to the attention of mayoral candidates in interactions with them. ERAC continues to support a plan for deer management at Griffy Lake Nature Preserve.

Griffy Lake Plant and Water Quality Data

Monitoring of the water quality and plant life in Griffy Lake continued this year after the 2013 drawdown. Member Melissa Clark organized efforts to collect samples twice each month with her Indiana University students and BPR staff. Results continue to point toward a plant versus algal dominated lake. Other research performed by Clark's staff focused on specific plants growing in the lake. Vegetation surveys since the drawdown indicate that the population of the invasive plant, Eurasian watermilfoil has increased in size. The lake is being mapped in an effort to identify specific locations of the plant, so the spread can be tracked. The presence of Eurasian watermilfoil is expected to increase without control measures, impacting the diversity of the native plant populations in the lake. ERAC members will continue to aid in the discussion of possible action to control the spread of this invasive plant. Melissa Clark's research on the water quality and plant growth will continue into 2016.

Adopt-an-Acre Program

The Adopt-an-Acre program began in 2015 is modeled off of the successful Adopt-a-Trail program. There were five areas in Griffy Lake Nature Preserve opened for adoption by individuals or groups. An Indiana University human biology class helped create recruitment tools, press releases, and volunteer information. All areas were assigned to adoptees in the first recruitment. These volunteers, with the help of BPR staff, worked to remove invasive plants from their adopted areas and then monitored the area for new invasive plant growth. The program had great success this year and will continue with new sections opened for adoption. Current adoptees will have the option to expand their adopted areas, and new sections will be added to the program until all 1,200 acres of the preserve are adopted. With continued success and interest, the program will be expanded to other parks with natural areas to help prevent the spread of invasive plants and help protect native plant communities.

Wapehani Mountain Bike Park

Interest in the Weimer Lake dam, located in the park, grew this year after the Indiana Division of Water inspections determined it is a significant hazard dam. With the development of I-69 and the potential for increased development downstream, the dam could become a high hazard in the future. While funding was sought by BPR for a feasibility study, it was not obtained. The Utilities department may be able to fund a study on their own to determine the best course of action for the site. While the dam is managed by the Utilities department, the surrounding land is managed by BPR. ERAC members expressed interest in maintaining the water resource for recreation and wildlife. ERAC members will continue to stay updated on any developments and provide feedback on the impacts of the management options for this park.

Winslow Woods Management Plan Development

Throughout the year progress on the Winslow Woods Management Plan was shared with members. Natural Resources Vegetation Laborer, Jon Behrman worked on inventories in the park and Education Specialist, Josh Nickleson compiled tree mapping data from aerial photographs. A volunteer work day aided the removal of invasive plants. Regular monitoring for invasive plant detection and removal is included in the management plan. The plan includes goals for the property with collaboration from the gardens and the orchard. It will outline obstacles and threats to management goals, determine a course of action, and outline preferred management techniques. Implementation of the management plan will be followed by monitoring the impacts and successes of actions and this information will be used to direct future action. The focus will be on creating a resilient and healthy native plant community that supports wildlife as well as education and recreation opportunities for the public. A draft of the plan will be presented to ERAC by the end of winter.

Environmental Education Efforts

Members continue involvement in environmental education efforts. Member Cathy Meyer participated as an instructor in the Griffy Lake Nature Day program and the Leonard Springs Nature Day program. In addition, she continued worked on the Adopt-a-Stream program partnership. This program recruited seven volunteers to monitor stream sections on BPR and MCPR properties. The volunteers worked to keep streams clear of litter and updated staff on erosion and other issues. They were trained in Hoosier Riverwatch protocol and with provided equipment, they monitored their stream section for water quality and submitted data to a statewide database. The program will continue into 2016 with the same stream sections and may expand in 2017 to new streams.

2016 Priorities

Priorities for 2016 include deer management, Griffy Lake plant and water quality monitoring, trail development, and natural resource management plan development. Members will continue to be involved in gathering data and setting priorities in park management plan development. They will maintain their commitment to collecting and analyzing samples from Griffy Lake and will continue to provide input as BPR creates an integrated pest management plan. The expertise and advice this group provides to BPR is a valuable part of the staff's decision making process.