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## Bloomington's Crestmont Park: Thoroughly Heart Warming

**By Gillian Field**

The excitement and hope that more than one thousand hours of loving care has brought to Crestmont Park is thoroughly heartwarming. After tackling invasive species, and a year

after sowing acorns, we are thrilled to share the joy and exhilaration of restoring an urban greenspace.

Nestled in a corner of Bloomington, Crestmont Park comes under the care of the city's Parks and Recreation Department. It has well cared-for basketball courts and a new playground that might distract your attention from the neglected landscape.

The landscape contained 14 acres of mown grass, an open ephemeral creek, storm water "explosions" directed from the adjacent Housing Authority hardscape, and remnant trees that were broken, forlorn, and torn. However, its land formations and nooks of forest

remnants stirred our restorer's imagination like no other greenspace in the city system.

Lured by the call of native species, staff and volunteers calmly tackled the woody invasive species bordering the large mown areas for over four years. The community was invited to hours of cutting

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bicep-width climbing purple wintercreeper vines (*Euonymus fortunei*) and mature and emerging Asian bush honeysuckle (*Lonicera* spp.) and multiflora rose (*Rosa multiflora*). We were fortified by our collective knowledge and sensitivity to the desired outcome, namely allowing native species to flourish where they have evolved.

To accomplish this, we had to think creatively when resources weren't available to move the invasive plant debris from our work area. Instead, we chose to reimagine the mowed areas as newly forested urban sanctuaries by bordering selected space with these undesirable and awkwardly shaped branches.

The sowing of acorns and tree seeds provided one of the most notable outcomes of our effort. More than 20 intentionally planted native tree seedlings have emerged

*Crestmont* — continued on page 2

Courtesy of G. Field



Above: Volunteers Zil Then, Paul Murphy, and Robert Harman work on controlling invasive shrubs at Crestmont Park, Bloomington, Indiana.

Right: Ray Major and Eve Cusack inspect which white oak (*Quercus alba*) seedling to keep.





## Crestmont — continued from front page

under the watchful care of volunteers. Careful volunteer training has included weeding around plants, selective caging to protect from deer-browse, mulching with cut grass



Local youngsters demonstrate why this vantage point is called Binocular Hill.

and leaves, and the hard task of choosing which oak seeding can stay in preference to the other baby oaks nestled in a tight spot.

In addition to these intentional plantings and the grooming that takes place in these restoration areas, surprises have revealed the remarkable emergence of native remnants that have survived more than 50 years of seasonal mowing. One hill now showcases a flourish of asters (*Symphyotrichum* spp.), oldfield cinquefoil (*Potentilla simplex*), broom sedge (*Andropogon virginicus*), violets (*Viola* sp.), and native plantain (*Plantago* sp.).

This portion of Bloomington, locally named Pigeon Hill, was once purported to be the home of the Passenger Pigeon. This specter of loss now regains new hope as we call our highest outpost Binocular Hill. The new name highlights the experience we offer children when we invite them to try using mini-binoculars to examine the tops of existing trees for leaf buds and fruits as well as bird nests and small animals.

When you consider the feeling of peace that native plants and landscapes can offer and the

benefits of restored urban greenspace as enclaves for wildlife, then the opportunity for collective effort is thrilling. Crestmont Park has warmly responded to our love and attention. We hope we have captured your imagination to uncover your next urban greenspace project.

*We recognize that the city of Bloomington, Indiana sits on Native land which is the traditional homelands of the Miami, Delaware, Potawatomi, and Shawnee people and we acknowledge they are past, present, and future caretakers of this land.*

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Spotting a newly emerged tree seedling in the formerly mowed area.



Several species of acorns ready for sowing.