

Natural Resource Improvements at Lebanon Hills

Envision Dakota County as it once was—a *mosaic of prairie, savanna, woodland and forest habitats*. This patchy and varied landscape was home to thousands of plant and animal species. Today, much of that diversity is lost, and direct management is necessary to prevent further decline.

Dakota County is working to restore these habitats in Lebanon Hills.

Approximately 116 acres of prairie has already been restored, and in some areas where woodlands and savannas have been diminished, restoration is underway. You will notice the difference when you visit the park. Restoration is messy, and may even look destructive sometimes. But here's what's happening:

Before



- Fire suppression, buckthorn invasion and other factors have diminished the park's woodland and savanna habitats.
- Oak forests are choked with buckthorn; there are only a few plants growing in the understory, and there are no young oak trees.
- Native wildflowers are diminished.

Now...Restoration has started! Throughout the park's *preserve zone*, between Pilot Knob Road and the park's east boundary, buckthorn and invasive shrubs have been cut down—you may notice what looks like mulch on the ground after a forestry mower has come through—along with additional forms of restoration management.

After



- There is habitat to support 100+ plant species and many kinds of wildlife.
- Season-long blooms will provide food for pollinators, including endangered Rusty-patched Bumblebees (*see Critter Corner on page 4*).
- Rare plants like lily-leaved twayblade recolonize.

Monthly Volunteer Events at Lebanon Hills

In May, join us for one or more of the following Garlic Mustard Pulls:

Tues., 5/2, 6-8pm * Thurs., 5/4, 6-8pm * Sat., 5/13, 9-11am

Learn how to identify this invasive woodland plant, why threatens our native ecosystems, and how to pull it. Work alongside Dakota County staff and other volunteers in the field helping to rid the park of this invasive plant!

Registration details and a complete 2017 schedule can be found on the "Volunteer" page of our website, www.wildernessinthecity.org.

Restoration Project Areas

Jensen Lake & Buck Pond Restoration

Dakota County will remove buckthorn and other invasive species from 136 acres of woodland, plant 31 acres of new prairie, enhance 5 acres of rare remnant prairie and restore 2.5 acres of wetland around Jensen Lake and Buck Pond.

Star Pond Savanna Expansion

This project will expand the Star Pond Savannah by 75 acres. Low-quality trees and shrubs will be removed in order to allow more sunlight to the ground layer, then seeded and plugs of woodland species will be planted by volunteers. The goal is to transition the site from low-quality, weedy trees and shrubs to a high-quality oak-aspen system.

Tamarack Swamp Enhancement

This project will restore 24 acres of swamp, oak woodland and oak savanna on a site west of Holland Lake. This rare plant community is one of the southernmost tamarack swamps in Minnesota and the only one in Dakota County. The project will create conditions that are more favorable to tamarack regeneration. Volunteers will be invited to assist with planting, seed collections and removal of invasive species.

Learn more about these, and other projects on the Dakota County Parks website, www.co.dakota.mn.us/parks.

What's Inside...

- ✓ Action Pending -- Central Greenway Connectivity Study
- ✓ Dakota County Natural Resources Management Plan
- ✓ A Legacy of Nature
- ✓ Rusty Patched Bumblebee
- ✓ Wilderness in the City's Annual Meeting notice...and more!

Central Greenway Connectivity Study

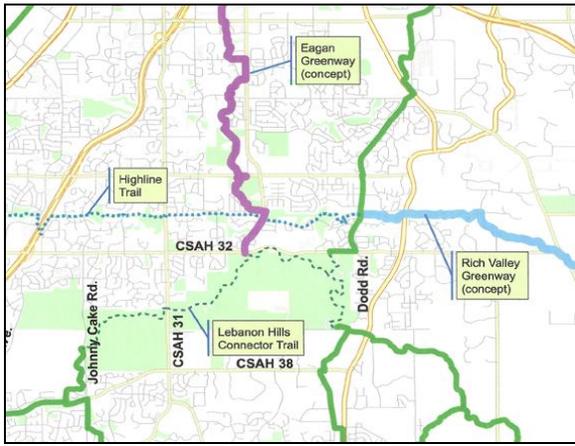
"The paved Connector Trail is not to serve as a segment of the Greenway network."

A Look Back...

In 2008, the County Board adopted the *Dakota County Parks System Plan*. This plan included a concept for a 200-mile Regional Greenway Bike Network, and envisioned a paved trail through Lebanon Hills that would serve as a main artery, or "hub", of the greenway network.

To achieve this vision, a new master plan would be required for Lebanon Hills. A draft plan was created by staff and consultants, including a paved "Connector Trail" trail end to end through the park, directly linked to several other regional bike trails.

Proposed Greenway Network with the Connector Trail through Lebanon Hills shown as a main segment. (July 2015)



Wilderness in the City acknowledges the County Board for their actions to realign the greenway network around, and not through, Lebanon Hills.

This was a significant change beneficial to Lebanon Hills because it meant:

- less negative impact to the natural resource base of the park;
- eliminate potential for Lebanon Hills to be used as a thoroughfare;
- less conflict of use among park visitors;
- *if the connector trail is built, it will be designed to promote in-park recreational use, instead of a bike route through the park.*

Since Then...

In July 2015, the County Board approved a contract with a consultant to evaluate and designate trails around Lebanon Hills for bicycle transportation connectivity.

On April 11, 2017, staff presented the draft plan to the County Board at their Physical Development Committee meeting. Staff noted that *"We have a pretty complete system of bike trails around the park."*

The study:

- suggests that signage and enhancements to the existing trails, combined with a more recreational design for the Connector Trail, will entice some higher speed bicyclists to ride around, instead of through, the park;
- estimates that the route through the park will take bicyclists longer than the route around the park;
- currently does not eliminate the potential for Lebanon Hills to become a thoroughfare for bicyclists *if* the Connector Trail is built.

If the study is approved without change by the County Board, then the greenway regional bike network should be completed and established around the Lebanon Hills prior to any action on the proposed Connector Trail. This would help assure compliance with the Lebanon Hills Master Plan which states "the Connector Trail is not to serve as a segment of the Greenway system".

Greenway Trail Networks are like highway systems for bicyclists by providing non-motorized transportation corridors with design criteria to accommodate 20-mph bike speeds. When built through natural areas, these projects can lead to extensive construction detrimental to the surrounding landscape, as evidenced at Spring Lake Park Reserve.

To assure preservation of our valuable urban natural areas, it is crucial that natural resources are prioritized when planning greenway regional bike trails.

Public Reaction / Board's Response...

The public was asked for their input to the draft Plan. During a contentious two-year process, public input received was significantly opposed to this new vision. The most controversial element was the Connector Trail.

In response, the County Board approved changes to the status of the Connector Trail, and the adopted 2015 Master Plan now states:

- "The paved Connector Trail is not to serve as a segment of the Greenway system." (p. 184)
- "Dakota County greenways that will connect to Lebanon Hills are planned to include paved trails, and will bring people to, but not through the park." (p. 147).

Action Pending

The draft study is now available for public review and comment through July 1. Your input is encouraged.

A link to the draft study can be found on our website (www.wildernessinthecity.org) under *Public Notices*. Check website for timely updates; information about public meetings will be posted as soon as available.

Natural Resources Management System Plan

Since 2000, Dakota County residents have consistently recognized the importance of preserving natural resources based on survey findings and additional public input, including the Lebanon Hills master plan process.

In response, for the past two years Dakota County has been developing a Systems Plan to guide natural resource management of County Parks, Regional Greenways, and Conservation Easements. This draft **Natural Resource Management System Plan (NRMSP)** is currently in a public comment period, and will be considered for adoption by the Board later this spring.

Next Steps: If the Systems Plan is adopted by the Board of Commissioners, then detailed natural resource management plans will be developed for each Dakota County "Forever Wild" Park (including Lebanon Hills) and open spaces. These subsequent plans will follow the guidelines established by the comprehensive systems plan.

- ❖ **Goal:** The amount of parkland being actively managed after five years will be 74%, and after 20 years will be 98%. That is a significant step up from what has historically been actively managed, averaging less than 15% prior to 2015.
- ❖ Left unmanaged, natural resources in our parklands will continue to degrade, resulting in diminished opportunities for nature-based recreation and education, and wildlife habitat.
- ❖ Sources of funding for initial restoration include the 2008 Legacy Amendment and Dakota County's Environmental Legacy Fund.

For additional information, go to "Planning" at www.co.dakota.mn.us/parks

Public Comment Period Ends April 20

Thanks to all who attended the Open House and have provided input. It's not too late to have your voice heard! Submit comments to:

joseph.walton@co.dakota.mn.us
al.singer@co.dakota.mn.us

The Board of Commissioners is expected to consider adoption of the Plan at their May 9 Physical Development Committee meeting.



Goats were on display at the April 13 Open House showing how they like to chew buckthorn and other invasive plants.

A Legacy of Nature

Did you know...most Minnesotans who supported the 2008 Legacy Amendment stated reasons such as clean water and preserving nature for voting "yes".

In conflict with this vision is the reality that since inception, Parks and Trails Legacy spending has prioritized costly built infrastructure, diminished natural resources and wildlife habitat, and increased ongoing maintenance expenses within the metropolitan regional parks system.

These valuable urban parks, including Lebanon Hills, represent some of the last remaining refuges in the metropolitan region for habitats including prairies, savannas, woodlands, forests and wetlands. Where natural resources throughout the parks and trails system are degraded, they should be restored...or we risk losing them.



Wilderness in the City is advocating for balanced spending of Legacy Funds to ensure that natural resources in our unique and valuable metro regional parks system are preserved for future generations of people and wildlife.

Contact your elected Legislators. Let them know that you support nature, not development, with Parks and Trails Legacy dollars. Ask them to oppose Parks and Trails Legacy Funding for the metropolitan region unless changes are made to better reflect funding priorities and the original intent of the Law.

ONE SMALL CHANGE CAN HAVE AN ENORMOUS IMPACT

Restoration at Lebanon Hills has started...an exciting legacy to leave for the next generation of people and wildlife.

But let's not stop there!

Wilderness in the City is building a coalition of groups and individuals to advocate for preservation of urban natural areas. Join us, and tell others!



IT ONLY TAKES ONE
ACTION TO START A
RIPPLE EFFECT

Critter Corner - Rusty Patched Bumblebee



Rusty Patched Bumblebee

Native to Minnesota, Rusty-patched Bumble Bees (*Bombus affinis*) are identifiable by a rust colored patch on their back, on the second segment of their abdomen.

Once abundant, they have declined over 87% and is the first Bee to be placed on the Endangered Species list.

Bumblebees are important pollinators for all kinds of plants including food; one bite out of three is pollinated by a bee. Bumble bees

are especially good pollinators using "buzz pollination," in which the bee grabs the flower in her jaws and vibrates her wing muscles to dislodge pollen from the flower. Yet, bees are in decline due to loss of flowering plants that provide their food source, pollen, pesticides especially neo-nicotinoids and climate change.

Bumblebees and other pollinators need our help. Here's what you can do:

- Grow flowers that provide nectar and pollen-important food sources. Some flower cultivars do not provide pollinator food, check with your greenhouse. Also, ask whether the plants have been treated with pesticides; avoid those.
- Plant native grasses and wildflowers; eliminate herbicides and pesticides.
- Urge your city and county park departments to prioritize plantings that are pollinator-friendly. Our valuable parklands represent some of the last remaining refuges for the Rusty patched bumble bee, and other species.
- Become a citizen scientist; see www.BumbleBeeWatch.org . Bzzzzzt!

"Critter Corner" is provided by the nonprofit organization Women Observing Wildlife-MN.

Wilderness in the City's Annual Meeting

Tuesday, May 9, 6:30-7:30pm

Wescott Library, Lower Level
1340 Wescott Rd., Eagan

Following the meeting, all are welcome for a social gathering at Granite City, 3330 Pilot Knob Rd., Eagan

Check out our new website!
www.wildernessinthecity.org

Do you have a favorite photo from Lebanon Hills we can share on our photo gallery? Submit photos to: wildernessinthecity@gmail.com.
Thank you!

Visit our booth at these Events

Outdoor Adventure Expo

Fri-Sun, Apr 28-30
Midwest Mountaineering
309 Cedar Ave., So., Minneapolis

Dakota County Water Forum

Sat., May 6, 8:30-Noon
Eagan Community Center

Become a Supporting Member!



Wilderness in the City

Yes! I want to help preserve the wilderness character of Lebanon Hills for future generations of people and wildlife.

\$25 Wildflower \$50 Oak Savannah Other Amount
 \$75 Lakes and Wetlands \$100 A Legacy of Nature

Name: _____

Address: _____

City/State: _____ Zip: _____

Email: _____

Phone (optional): _____

**Donate online at www.wildernessinthecity.org or submit checks to
Wilderness in the City at P.O. Box 211453, Eagan, MN 55121.**

*Wilderness in the City is a 501(c)3 nonprofit. All donations are 100% tax-deductible.
Thank you for your support!*

Our Mission

Wilderness in the City is dedicated to preserving and enhancing natural urban areas for future generations of people and wildlife.

What We Do

Advocate for preservation of urban natural spaces for the benefit of future generations of people and wildlife.

Support natural resource stewardship projects and build a community of stewards.

Inform you when decisions are pending and how you can take action.