

## Restoration in Progress at Lebanon Hills Regional Park

### WHY

Throughout Lebanon Hills and Dakota County, ecological processes developed over thousands of years have been significantly altered and degraded during the past century due to human impact. The result is:

- broken and altered ecosystems
- depleted and impaired native plant communities
- reduced and fragmented habitat

If we do nothing, the quality of resources will continue to degrade, resulting in non-functioning ecosystems and a rise in "monocultures", or growth of a single plant (ex: buckthorn) within Lebanon Hills.

As evidenced by the lack of young oak trees, invasive buckthorn has already disrupted regeneration of this valuable tree. Once the remaining mature trees die, there are few young trees replacing them. Wildlife diversity will continue to decline, water quality will be negatively impacted, and opportunities for nature-based recreation and education will be diminished.



#### What's Inside...

- ✓ Summary and map of restoration areas
- ✓ Special Findings
- ✓ How you can help
- ✓ Critter Corner: Spring Peepers
- ✓ Beyond Lebanon Hills
- ✓ Upcoming events...and more!

### EARLY STAGES

Nature is resilient, and by taking action now we can reverse this downward trend.

**Ecological Restoration:** The process of assisting the recovery of an ecosystem that has been degraded, damaged or destroyed.

Initial steps for restoration requires significant clearing of woody shrub, and this has started in certain areas within Lebanon Hills. These initial stages may look alarming, however this is only the foundation of a multi-year process which will result in healthy systems including oak savannas, woodlands, and native prairies.



### ULTIMATE GOAL

Lebanon Hills will be better than we found it. Healthy oak savannas, woodlands and prairies, lakes and wetlands, hundreds of native plants and a wide diversity of wildlife will provide high quality nature based recreation and educational opportunities for now and future generations.



### Let's bring back the Bobolink!



This beautiful bird has not been seen at Lebanon Hills in many years— however, with successful restoration efforts, there is a good chance this impressive song bird, and many others, will be back!

"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not."

~Dr. Seuss~

## Transitioning to a Healthy Ecosystem

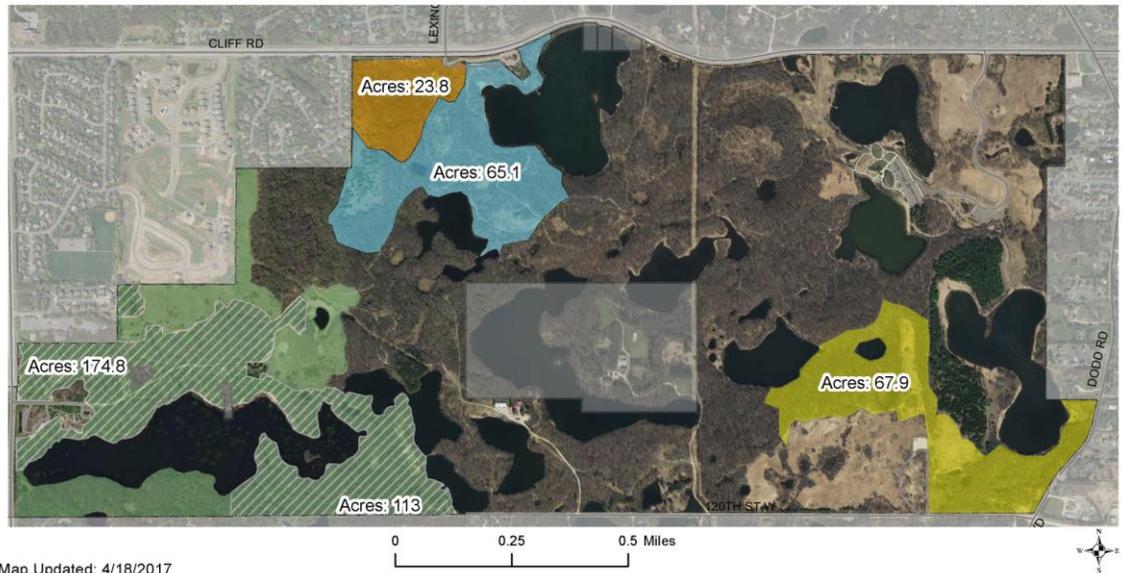
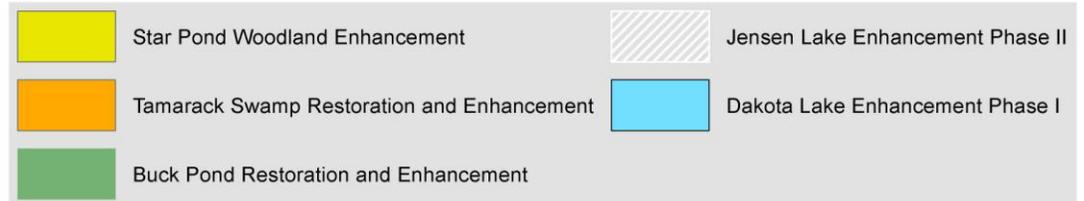
Natural Resource projects are multi-year restoration projects; initial work can look messy, and anticipation for the finished product takes patience. But once an area is restored, it will be worthy of large celebrations—ribbon cutting and all!

This map shows locations of grant funded restoration projects. An additional 130 acres of woodland and savanna restoration work will begin within the next year through two different grants.

This entire area has received an initial sweep for buckthorn removal, and areas are now being revisited through grants or crew work to address resprouts and new seedlings.

Additional information on each project area can be found at: [www.co.dakota.mn.us/parks](http://www.co.dakota.mn.us/parks) [click on *Improvement Projects* and then *Lebanon Hills*]

### Current Lebanon Hills Natural Resource Restoration Projects



Map Updated: 4/18/2017

### Funding for Restoration & Ongoing Management

- Initial restoration costs can be high, and grants have been acquired for various project areas within Lebanon Hills.
- Grant projects span a three-year period, and then restored land moves into an ongoing management phase.
- Annual costs for ongoing management, which are lower than initial restoration, will be Dakota County's obligation.
- As more land is restored, funding for ongoing management will increase within the County budget.
- Existing sources of funding for ongoing management also include Minnesota's Parks and Trails Legacy Funds.
- No additional fees or taxes to residents and park visitors for ongoing management of restored parklands is expected.

#### Ongoing Issue to Watch

- Acquiring grants for initial restoration has allowed for a great start toward restoration efforts.
- Successful restoration throughout the park, however, should not be solely dependent on acquiring grants.
- Areas where grant funding has not been acquired should not be neglected; otherwise, restored areas will be difficult to sustain and eventually will decline.
- Dakota County's Environmental Legacy Fund (ELF) is an existing source of funds for areas not covered by grants and for ongoing management of restored areas.

### What About the Rest of the Park?

- Restoration throughout the entire park is planned, moving from East to West.
- The projects shown above are located in the East section of the park. This section is referred to as the "Preserve Zone" because it encompasses the largest area of the park and offers the most extensive overall ecological diversity.
- This spring, early stages of buckthorn management started on 60 acres near Camp Sacajawea in the middle section of the park.
- Restoration activities have not yet started in the West section of the park.

### Why Stop Here?

Envision Lebanon Hills as the starting point, providing an example of what can be accomplished in other Dakota County Forever Wild parks and the entire Metropolitan Regional Park System.

The Regional Parks System was established in part to preserve the last remaining high quality natural areas within in the metropolitan region. We are borrowing this land from future generations and it's our responsibility to manage it for them. Let's leave it better than we found it.

# Lebanon Hills Natural Resources Management Plan

A **Natural Resources Management Plan** is currently being created to guide ongoing management in years ahead. This plan is expected to be completed and approved by the County Board in Fall 2018. For additional information or questions about the Plan, visit the County Park's website or contact Joe Walton, Senior Ecologist, at 952-891-7507 or joseph.walton@co.dakota.mn.us.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (answers provided by Natural Resources staff):**

*Q: What's being done to follow up on Buckthorn control; it seems like nothing has been done in several years after cutting of large-diameter shrubs.*

A: We plan on following up on all areas that were previously cut. We have a Vegetation Management contract now that includes all of these areas and they will be addressed by either brush cutting, forestry mowing, or herbicide applications.

*Q: How will you prevent Buckthorn from growing back? It's been removed before but then it just grows back even worse.*

A: Ultimately, we would like to restore the community and establish a good amount of fuel-bearing plants in the ground layer that can carry a running ground fire, which will allow us to use fire as a management tool to control Buckthorn resprouts, seedlings and whips. Native grasses, sedges, and forbs will compete with Buckthorn and help "turn the tide" of Buckthorn dominance of the site, thus enabling us to escape the seemingly perpetual cycle of cutting, regrowth, and cutting again.

*Q: What is being done to prevent new invasive species from entering the parks? Shouldn't signage or boot cleaners or something of the like be installed?*

A: Yes signage should be and is called for in the Parks Aquatic Invasive Species Plan. We recommend that signage should be installed at various entrance points to the park and along trails. Boot cleaners, however, cannot stop invasive species from entering the park, but they do provide good reminders to people that they should be cleaning invasive species off of their boots and equipment before entering the park, so we recommend that they be installed at a few major entry points.

*Q: How do you propose to manage the middle and western sections of the park? Right now, they are covered with Buckthorn, and it will only get worse and do more damage to the native plant community. Shouldn't something be done sooner than later, to prevent even more degradation?*

A: Yes it should, but we need a solid plan to guide us on how and what to tackle when. That is what we are hoping to get from this plan: a set of priority areas and actions, and a work plan with action steps and estimated costs outlined.

## **Help make Lebanon Hills the best it can be!**

Additional staff has made a huge difference in recent years, however, they can't do it alone! Here are ways you can help to assure successful restoration within Lebanon Hills.

### **1. Participate in Natural Resource Volunteer opportunities**

Wilderness in the City supports monthly events in partnership with Dakota County Parks. Learn more and register for these events on the Volunteer page of our website, [www.wildernessinthecity.org](http://www.wildernessinthecity.org).

### **2. Continue to communicate with your elected County Commissioner**

Let them know your priorities for Lebanon Hills and other Forever Wild parks, and share your appreciation for their commitment to natural resource improvements. Contact info can be found at: [www.co.dakota.mn.us/Government/Board](http://www.co.dakota.mn.us/Government/Board)

### **3. Do you own, or know someone who owns property adjacent to the park?**

Ask them to contact Dakota County Parks to learn how managing adjacent property can help (or hurt) restoration efforts at Lebanon Hills.

**NO ONE CAN DO EVERYTHING, BUT EVERYONE CAN DO SOMETHING.**

## **Special Findings**

During early stages of restoration, some exciting findings, including species of special conservation need, have already been found in Lebanon Hills.

**Wildlife:** Fisher, Northern Long-Eared Bat, Blanding's Turtle, Cerulean warbler

**Rare Plants:** Rattlebox, Lily-leaved twayblade, Grape ferns, Scepter ferns and orchids.

Eventually, a healthy ecosystem will greatly increase the diversity of native plants and wildlife in Lebanon Hills.



## **The Silver Lining**

In 2013, Dakota County Parks Natural Resources staff consisted of one part-time employee. Since then, the department has grown and now includes six full-time staff plus five seasonal staff —the "silver lining" some might say of a contentious 2015 Master Plan update process.

With staff increase, more grants are being acquired, more land is being restored, and ongoing management is much more likely.

**We acknowledge the Dakota County Boards recognition of the importance of this department , and encourage their continued support in years ahead.**

## Critter Corner - Spring Peepers



Spring Peepers are small chorus frogs, well-camouflaged and nocturnal. You are much more likely to hear than see them. If you are lucky enough to see one it will be 3/4 to 1.5 inches long, tan or brown in color, with a distinct darker X marking on its back. Males usually have dark throats, and are darker and slightly smaller than females.

Spring Peepers are amphibious, living part of their lives in water and part on land. Marshes, ponds, or swamp areas are required to support the eggs and tadpoles. For successful springtime breeding, fishless temporary wetlands (also called vernal pools or ephemeral wetlands) associated with forest habitat (and sometimes grassy lowlands) are ideal.

A permeable skin- and a dual life existence in both water and on land make Spring Peepers and other amphibians highly sensitive and vulnerable to pollution from run-off. Because of this sensitivity, Spring Peepers and other amphibians are good **indicators of the health of their surrounding environment**. Currently we are experiencing a loss of toad and frog populations in various areas of the world and it could be a red flag that their ecosystems may be imperiled.

*For more information visit [www.dnr.state.mn.us](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us) and search Spring Peeper*

## Beyond Lebanon Hills - The Regional Park Policy Plan

The Metropolitan Council's Regional Park Policy Plan (RPPP) serves as a guide for regional park acquisition, development and management. Regional Parks are required to meet criteria established in the RPPP to be eligible for State and Met Council funding.

Language within the RPPP can influence accountability toward natural resource stewardship and capital development within our nature-based Regional Parks System, including Lebanon Hills.

**The RPPP is currently being updated with a public comment period expected later this summer. We are following this closely and will provide you with details and how you can provide input during this important process.**

### Upcoming Volunteer Events

Join other volunteers and Dakota County Staff for these upcoming events:

- Thurs., 6/7, 6-8pm: Native Plug Planting
- Thurs., 7/12, 6-8pm: Japanese Hedge Parsley Training/Pulling
- Thurs., 9/13, 6-7:30pm: Native Seed Collection

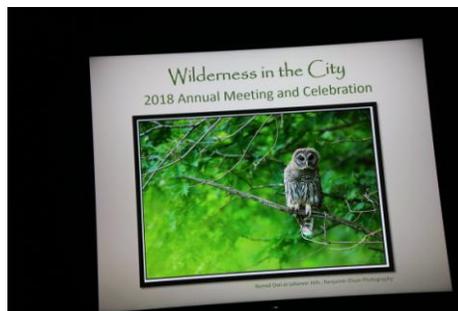
Visit [www.wildernessinthecity.org](http://www.wildernessinthecity.org) and click "Volunteer" for additional information and to register for these events.

**Thank you Volunteers!**

## Wilderness in the City – Annual Meeting Highlights

**Thank you to those who attended our Annual Meeting and Celebration this past February, and for your ongoing support.**

It was an honor to present the inaugural "A Legacy of Nature" award to Vance and Darlene Grannis. Our thanks to Benjamin Olson for participating and sharing his photography, and to The Hacklewrappers for their entertaining music. We acknowledge special guests Sen. Jim Carlson, Rep. Rick Hansen, Dakota County Commissioners Joe Atkins, Tom Egan and Mike Slavick, and former Commissioner Nancy Schouweiler.



## Our Mission

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

We are a grassroots, 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, fully supported by donations from our members. All donations are 100% tax-deductible. Thank you for your support!

Become a member today at  
[www.wildernessinthecity.org](http://www.wildernessinthecity.org).

**"The idea of wilderness needs no defense. It only needs more defenders." ~ Edward Abbey**