

Natural Area Preservation News

Protecting and restoring Ann Arbor's natural areas and fostering an environmental ethic among its citizens

Volume 18, Number 2

Summer 2013

Bird Hills Nature Area

by Yousef Rabhi

Far off in Atlanta, the crowds were just beginning to gather at the Georgia Dome in anticipation of Super Bowl XXVIII. The encounter between the Dallas Cowboys and Buffalo Bills promised to be an epic showdown. Yet, back in Ann Arbor on that chilly afternoon in January 1994, a dozen fearless volunteers stood ready to roll up their sleeves and build a more accessible park for the whole community. Less than a year before, the citizens of Ann Arbor made history by voting for funding to begin a comprehensive city-wide ecological restoration program, and thus Natural Area Preservation was born. On this Super Bowl Sunday, 1994, the Ann Arbor community was engaging in the process of protecting and restoring one of our city's most interesting and valuable assets: Bird Hills Nature Area.



Trillium and Mayapple in bloom at Bird Hills Nature Area

It had been seventy years since the cattle-cropped pastures known today as Bird Hills were purchased by a successful local attorney, Henry Graves. During his time at the University of Michigan Law School, Henry roamed its undulating glacial topography overlooking the Huron river seeking solitude and clarity of mind. Affectionately, he called the area "bird hill."

Strangely enough, he had purchased the property for the development of a subdivision. In those days, however, the blank cattle pastures were not considered by many as a suitable place for fine living. In an effort to make the property more marketable to possible future tenants, Graves decided to reforest the hillside. As the trees developed and grew, Graves must have had a change of heart as plans for development fell away.

Just before his death in 1952, Graves offered to sell the land to the City to ensure future generations of Ann Arborites could enjoy its vast beauty. The city was not able to purchase the property at that time, and the specter of development continued to loom for many years. In 1968, the City finally acquired the property to be conserved for generations to come. It would take many years to bring the newly acquired land into better ecological health, and that hard work began on Sunday, January 30, 1994.

After many years of vacancy, Bird Hills had developed an excessively complex trail network. According to Dave Borneman, Manager of Natural Area

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Coordinator's Corner

An Invitation to New Trees

This spring I got the news from Jason Tallant, on staff for the past 10.5 years: He was leaving NAP to take another job. A couple weeks later, I got the same news from Lara Treemore Spears, after 8 years on staff. (Read about their new opportunities in the Staff Update section on page 8.) JT and Lara started as NAP Technicians at the same time and, fittingly, they left at the same time.

Big changes for us! Those two have been a solid part of NAP for a long time. "How will we carry on without them?" was the question from a few staff members. Fortunately, in the midst of these announcements, I stumbled upon some wisdom from my best source for inspiration lately: Facebook! Here are a few excerpts from an essay called *When the Ground Falls*, by Jeff Foster:

What happens when the ground beneath your feet gives way? A relationship ends unexpectedly, success turns to failure overnight ... The future, which once seemed so solid and 'real', is now exposed for the lie and the fairy story that it was, and your dreams of 'tomorrow' crumble to dust. 'Tomorrow' was never going to happen, not in the way you had unconsciously planned, anyway.

Wonderful! What an invitation this is! Life has not gone wrong, for life cannot go wrong, for all is life, and life is all. Only our dreams and plans 'about' life can crumble, but life itself cannot. This present experience, this confusion and cosmic doubt, this heartbreak, is not against life, this IS life. This is not the 'wrong' scene in the movie, this IS the movie, however hard that is to see right now.

NAP will continue, despite the changes we face. Our trajectory shifts with the personalities in our program, but it is neither better nor worse. It is just different. Big trees crash down in the forest, leaving a hole in the canopy. But new trees grow to fill the gap, and the forest community continues unbroken.

Foster's essay is also good advice for ecological restorationists. On page 3, you'll read JT's reflections on NAP's trajectory. And you'll see that Restoration philosophy is ever-changing. There is not always consensus on where we should "be going." Should we turn back the ecological clock to pre-European settlement days, or prepare for future global climate change? Even if we agreed on a goal, there's no guarantee we would be able to reach it. In fact, chances are, we wouldn't. There are too many unknowns, too many complicating factors, too many stochastic events. Does that mean that we will fail? NO, not at all! The value of our work is *not* the final, end state of our natural areas. It is that we are maintaining the natural processes that allow native ecosystems to be dynamic and responsive to the stresses they may face in the future.

Actually, what happens in nature is only part of NAP's work. What happens in YOU, and your fellow citizens is the true touchstone of our work. The sense of stewardship for our natural areas, what Aldo Leopold called a "land ethic," also ensures that our natural areas will thrive in perpetuity, no matter our staff, and no matter how many big trees come crashing down in the forest.

-Dave Borneman, NAP Manager

(If you'd like to read the entire Jeff Foster essay, send Dave an email at dborneman@a2gov.org)



A unit of the City of Ann Arbor
Community Services,
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*The mission of Natural Area
Preservation is to protect and restore
Ann Arbor's natural areas and to foster
an environmental ethic among its citizens.*

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Anniversary Gifts: Honoring the Past, Recognizing the Future

By Jason Tallant

We asked JT to give us some reflective thoughts about his tenure at NAP, and where he thinks we should be headed in the future, with new staff. Following are his thoughts.

This fall marks a significant anniversary of land management in the City of Ann Arbor parks and natural areas. Twenty years of fire and non-native, invasive species control. Twenty years of mapping and documenting plants and animals. Twenty years of Dave Borneman at the helm, black soot on his face and drip torch in hand.

While pondering the upcoming anniversary, my mind naturally set upon gifts of celebration. I soon discovered that, in the world of anniversary gift-giving there is a rift in what represents 20 years of love and care. Historically, porcelain was the gift of choice for those celebrating an anniversary. But recently, as values and interests change, the gift of platinum has come into use. I knew nothing of this, and like any good digital native, I 'googled' "Anniversary Gifts". Lo and behold, this historical/modern dichotomy was exposed to me for the first time. Insignificant, in the grand scheme of life I will agree, but what bubbled up in me were the reoccurring conflicts inherent in the acts of restoration and stewardship.

The dominant view in the restoration community has been that, as restoration practitioners, we can right the wrongs of previous generations. We can recreate the systems our ancestors altered, manipulated, or destroyed by practicing things like invasive species control or returning fire. This approach, however, is being challenged by other well-meaning people. A new perspective is developing, that we cannot control the final assembly of species. The position considers the function species are performing together, and in terms of the steward: what functions or services are needed for life to be sustained and flourish into the future.

These are not subtle differences. The first stance – at its core – honors the past, and in most cases values and recreates what existed before. The second acknowledges the past, but does not constrain the possibilities to what existed before. For the last decade I have operated from the first mindset, but with an ear to the ground. I've listened to what's predicted under potential new climate and disturbance regimes, and I

must say that I'm no longer married to that belief. NAP as an organization is coming to the same conclusion.

NAP has changed the landscape. NAP has significantly reduced the fitness and numbers of non-native, invasive plant species in some plant communities in some parks. Some parts of the parks system resemble the historic assemblages of plant species prior to European settlement. NAP has in some parks uncovered beautiful displays of wildflowers or documented the existence of a rare critter languishing in disturbed and unconnected habitats. NAP has even created native plant communities in areas that were so disturbed, no native plant species occurred prior to our intervention. These are all impressive feats that are born out of a desire to be respectful stewards of the land. However, are they the right actions to create truly *self-sustaining, resilient ecological communities*? Personally, I'm not sure. But it's a question I wanted to challenge NAP with answering as I transition out of the organization.

So then, whether to commemorate with porcelain or platinum? That is to say, will NAP stay the traditional course of ecological restoration and do its best to recreate historic disturbance? Answering this question will be the challenge of the next twenty years.



NAP is Turning 20!

Help us prepare for our celebration by sharing your favorite memories and stories:

- NAP workdays
- NAP staff and interns
- Stewardship success stories
- Experiences in Ann Arbor Natural Areas

Send an email to NAPnewsletter@a2gov.org, give us a call at 734.794.6627, or post on our Facebook page (facebook.com/ann.arbor.nap).

Volunteer Stewardship Calendar

Summer 2013

June

June 1, Saturday
Bird Walk
Wheeler Service Center
7:30 am to 9:30 am

Free and fun for all ages. Join City Ornithologist Dea Armstrong as she leads a walk to look for early summer birds at the old landfill site – a great birdwatching spot! Bring binoculars if you have them. Meet in the small parking lot on the right off the main entrance to the Material Recovery Facility off of Platt Road just south of Ellsworth.

June 1, Saturday
National Trails Day Workdays
America has over 200,000 miles of trails, and we hope you'll agree that we have some of the best right here in Ann Arbor! Join us as we celebrate National Trails Day, along with people all over the country (www.americanhiking.org/ntd). We will be trimming back the overgrowth, and spreading woodchips. Bring a plastic sled to help haul woodchips.

Scarlett Mitchell Nature Area
9:00 am to 12:00 pm
Meet in Scarlett Middle School parking lot off Lorraine Street.

Bandemer Nature Area
9:00 am to 12:00 pm
Meet at the main parking area off Barton Drive.

Argo Nature Area
1:00 pm to 4:00 pm
Meet in the parking lot north of the Argo Canoe Livery.

June 2, Sunday
Marshall Nature Area Workday
9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Join in the effort to improve Marshall Nature Area by hand-pulling bittercress, dame's rocket and other invasive plant species. Meet in the parking lot off Dixboro Road, north of Plymouth Road.

June 8, Saturday
Bird Walk
Gallup Park
7:30 am to 9:30 am

Free for all ages and family-friendly! Join City Ornithologist Dea Armstrong as she leads a walk to look for birds in the morning in Gallup Park and Furstenberg Nature Area. Bring binoculars if you have them. Meet at the paddleboat dock in Gallup near the canoe livery.

June 13, Thursday
AADL Nature Walk
Mary Beth Doyle Nature Area
7:00 pm to 8:30 pm

Part of a series of walks in partnership with Ann Arbor Public Library. Observe and discuss summer native plant species, and continuing restoration efforts at this site. Meet in the Mary Beth Doyle Nature Area parking lot on Packard Road.

Stewardship Network's Stewards' Circle

Bruegger's Bagels - 709 N. University Ave.
7:30 am to 8:30 am

Are you interested in learning more about how to care for natural areas - woods, creeks, prairies, wetlands? Then join the Stewardship Network's Huron Arbor cluster for an informal discussion on a monthly topic with volunteer and professional land stewards, plus others interested in nature. Free and open to anyone interested.

June 11, Tuesday
Trail Construction and Maintenance: Do these terms mean anything to you: reinforced drainage dip, social trail, backslope, McLeod, trail corridor, or tamper? Come chat with us about trail maintenance and construction.

July 9, Tuesday
Aquatic Invasives: Join a discussion about impacts on Michigan's lakes and streams, ongoing efforts to manage established invaders, and Early Detection and Rapid Response efforts for limiting future impacts.

August 13, Tuesday
Woodland Restoration: On summer days, it's nice to escape the heat and head into the woods. We will discuss the types of work to be done in woodlands, what's best to do in summer, and techniques for success.

June 22, Saturday
Furstenberg Native Garden Workday
9:00 am to 12:00 pm
Help us weed and preserve this native garden, featuring some of the

Volunteer Stewardship Calendar

Summer 2013

most diverse flora anywhere in Ann Arbor. Plus, you're certain to learn a lot about native plants from Park Steward and Master Gardener Aunita Erskine. Meet in the parking lot off Fuller Road, across from Huron High School.

June 29, Saturday Barton Nature Area Workday 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Help keep Barton beautiful by hand-pulling spotted knapweed, bittercress and other invasive plant species that threaten the native habitats of this natural area. Meet at the Barton Dam parking lot at the corner of Huron River Drive and Bird Road.

July

July 13, Saturday Molin Nature Area Workday 1:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Enjoy a beautiful afternoon helping remove invasive plants from Molin Nature Area. Don't forget to hike all the way in to view the spectacular bur oak. Meet at the end of Powell Road on Columbia.

July 14, Sunday Redbud Nature Area Workday 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Join in the effort to remove invasive plants such as bittercress and Canada thistle. Redbud Nature Area is home to a beautiful prairie. Meet at the park entrance at the intersection of Parkwood Avenue and Jeanne Street.

July 14, Sunday Huron River Day Celebration Gallup Park

12:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Come celebrate the Huron River and participate in FREE activities for all ages such as river exhibits, live music, animals, a guided canoe trip, fishing, and much more! Food will be available for purchase. Ride your bike to the event, use the free valet bike parking, and receive a coupon for a free boat rental during the festival! For more information, call 734-662-9319 or go to www.a2gov.org/hrd.

Please wear long pants and closed-toe shoes to all workdays. Minors must be accompanied by a guardian or contact NAP in advance to obtain a release form. Snacks, water, and tools are provided.

August

August 3, Saturday Furstenberg Native Garden Workday

9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Help us weed and preserve this native garden, featuring some of the most diverse flora anywhere in Ann Arbor. Plus, you're certain to learn a lot about native plants from Park Steward and Master Gardener Aunita Erskine. Meet in the parking lot off Fuller Road, across from Huron High School.

August 10, Saturday Black Pond Woods Nature Area Workday

9:00 am to 12:00 pm

Help improve the trails in Black Pond Woods Nature Area. We will be trimming back the overgrowth, and spreading woodchips to help keep the trails accessible. Bring a plastic sled to help haul woodchips. Meet us at the Leslie Science & Nature Center parking lot (1831 Traver Road).

August 15, Thursday AADL Nature Walk Dolph Nature Area 7:00 pm to 8:30 pm

Part of a series of walks in partnership with Ann Arbor Public Library. Observe and discuss summer native plant species, and continuing restoration efforts at this site. Meet in the Dolph Nature Area parking lot

August 17, Saturday Stapp Nature Area Workday 9:00 am to 12:00 pm

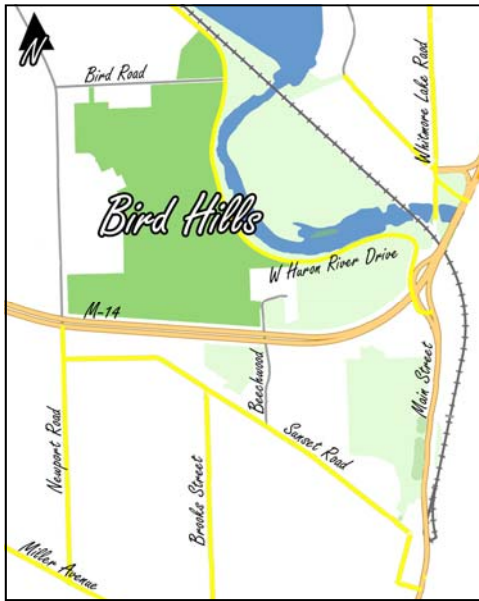
Help improve the trails in Stapp Nature Area. We will be trimming back the overgrowth, and spreading woodchips to help keep the trails accessible. Bring a plastic sled to help haul woodchips. Meet in the parking lot of the Traverwood library in the section nearest the park.

NAPpenings

Continued from page 1

Preservation, “It was confusing; there was even an area where five trails converged in the same spot!” With goals to maximize public access and minimize confusion, before NAP was created, the Parks Dept. had collaborated with local landscape architecture firm JJR to improve the trail system at Bird Hills. Recognizing the need to engage the public in the maintenance and upkeep of parks, NAP worked closely with the Sierra Club to reach out to the community for help in implementing the new trail system.

A cold breeze chilled the volunteer crew as they marched forward into the depths of the wooded hillside. The clanking of saws and loppers floated through the crisp air as the team cut down invasive shrubs and hauled brush to block off unwanted trails. This was NAP’s first ever workday, and the volunteers—having postponed their Super Bowl viewing plans—pressed onward not knowing the momentum they had created.



Two decades later, the restoration of Bird Hills Nature Area continues, along with over 100 other Park locations in Ann Arbor. To date NAP has logged nearly 100,000 hours of purely volunteer work.

To thank the volunteers from that very first workday, Dave Borneman wrote a letter to the editor on February 2nd, 1994. The letter states: “*The energy and enthusiasm of these volunteers attests to the fact that people in Ann Arbor are willing to work to preserve their natural areas*”. These words ring true today as NAP prepares to celebrate its 20th anniversary!

A Very Chilly Spring Workday for 2012 Volunteers of the Year, Community High

Over 340 students from Ann Arbor’s Community High School braved the April cold and rain to pull garlic mustard, dame’s rocket, and celandine-poppy at eight nature areas. They truly lived up to their Volunteer of the Year status!!



Miller Avenue Rain Gardens

As part of the planned improvements for Miller Avenue, the city will be installing rain gardens in the public right-of-way along Miller Avenue, as well as in Miller Nature Area, and a small section of Garden Homes



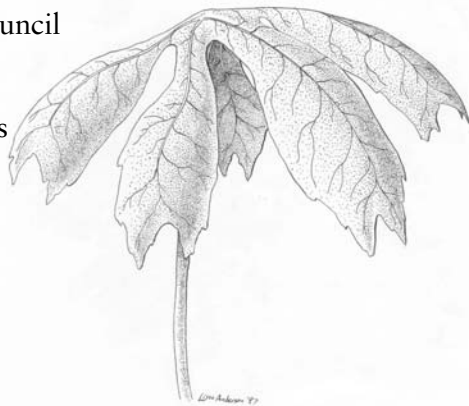
A rain garden in Ann Arbor

Park. The rain gardens are intended to handle storm water on Miller Avenue, improve water quality, and reduce dependence on the overburdened Allen Creek Drain. Information about the Miller Avenue improvements, and the planned rain gardens, can be found at www.a2gov.org, in the Capital Improvements area of the Project Management page.

Thank you...

Many thanks to the following groups who volunteered with NAP recently. We could not make such a difference without you!

Arbor Preparatory High School
APO
EMU Greek Life
EMU Small Group Communications
Foundation of International Medical Relief for Children
Rudolf Steiner School
Temple Beth Emeth
UM Alpha Phi Omega
UM Alpha Pi Mu
UM Econ 108
UM Engineering Council
UM Pi Tau Sigma
UM Sigma Chi
UM West Quad RAs



Staff Updates

Hello...



Molly Notarianni
My background is in ecology, and I have ten years' experience in environmental education, sustainable agriculture, and food system policy. Most recently, I spent four years managing one of Ann Arbor's oldest parks, the Ann Arbor

Farmers Market! I am excited to have an opportunity to get back to my "roots," exploring Ann Arbor's many natural areas and sharing them with others.



Penny Richardson-Bristol

I am excited to be part of the Field Crew this season. My education, research and previous work focused on the ecology of the Great Lakes Region; specifically invasive species, aquatic plants and wetland restoration. I look

forward to working with NAP to help improve our natural areas, while having fun and learning more about our local ecosystems.



Anat Belasen

My appreciation for reptiles and amphibians dates back to my childhood in rural upstate New York. I've worked with herps through my undergrad and grad school careers, and enjoyed opportunities to study a diversity of these

animals around the globe. My interests lie in both conservation science and public outreach, so I am thrilled to join NAP in working with volunteers to help protect Ann Arbor's native herp species.

Farewell...



Christine Chessler-Stull

After almost three years with NAP, I've moved on to start a new journey as the Outreach & Zero Waste Coordinator for Recycle Ann Arbor. As a Michigan transplant, I'll always feel fortunate to have

been welcomed into the NAP family. I'm grateful for all the exciting experiences and opportunities I had throughout these years. Mostly, I will miss the great co-workers, volunteers, and watching the seasons change from the Leslie House window.

More Staff Farewells...



Jason "JT" Tallant

After a decade of blood, sweat, and tears I'm happy to let someone new have a little fun. NAP has been more than work, but a place to call home. Thank you to everyone I've worked with over the years and thank you for the

innumerable experiences. I'm moving on to the University of Michigan Biological Station for summers on Douglas Lake in Pellston, MI. I'll remain involved with NAP and with the City's Natural Feature Committee and hope to become a fixture at workdays and after hours mop-up. Who knows maybe I'll even become a park steward at Ruthven... unless someone else steps up first. And remember, feel free to call if you have any comments, concerns, questions, or feedback!



Lara Treemore Spears

I never imagined all the amazing experiences I would have at NAP. We all have a unique path that brought us to Ann Arbor's parks and natural areas, and I appreciate everything I learned from all of you! I enjoyed the salamander and turtle monitoring programs, along with the challenge of changing the seemingly impossible into a fun, exciting experience (that applies to my work with NAP's databases too). I also owe my increased confidence burning my own woodlands to my burn boss experience at NAP. I'm going back to ASTI Environmental in their Resource Assessment and Management Group, where I hope to maintain my involvement in restoration, and work on urban redevelopment projects that establish green infrastructure in the City of Detroit and elsewhere.

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