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Jelke Creek Sanctuary gets back to nature

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July 10, 2010

By GLORIA CARR gcarr@stmedianetwork.com

DUNDEE TOWNSHIP — The enormous cottonwood tree has stood tall as the land around it has undergone a transformation from a gravel pit to

Dundee Township Supervisor Sue Harney has walked the path many times, passing the cottonwood tree, but finds something new every time.

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The 232-acre Jelke Creek Bird Sanctuary is unrecognizable from just a year ago when the entire parcel was regraded and reconstructed. It is a project that Harney has worked on for seven years, from securing grants to reviewing architectural plans to overseeing construction.

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Photos: Bird sanctuary

"This view is really pretty," she said, looking out from a vista built near the

The 232-acre Jelke Creek Bird Sanctuary is unrecognizable from just a year ago when the entire parcel was regraded and reconstructed. It is a project that Harney has worked on for seven years, from securing grants to reviewing architectural plans to overseeing construction.

"I am in love with this site," said Harney during a recent tour of the property located off Boncosky Road and bounded by Sleepy Hollow Road on the west. "It's coming along, but we have a long way to go.

Dundee Township purchased the former Chicago Elmhurst Stone gravel site in 2000 and the adjoining land, owned by the Schuetz family, in 2001 with grants from Illinois

Department of Natural Resources's Open Land Trust program. Amajority of the \$2.3 million renovation was completed through grant money.

The idea behind Jelke Creek Bird Sanctuary is threefold: restore an area to enhance a disappearing bird habitat, develop a water management design and provide residents with an interactive recreation area, Harney said. The township continues working on the final touches as it prepares to unveil the sanctuary at a grand opening next weekend.

Character traits

The land stood vacant for years, looking more like a set out of one of those 1980s "Mad Max" movies

Harney recently drove her truck through the walking paths still closed off to the public. No vehicles will be allowed on the property once it opens, except those used for maintenance.

As she drove on the gravel path, she explained the work that's been

Construction crews had to fix the damage done to the property as a result of the mining and moved 260,000 cubic yards of dirt on the site, creating



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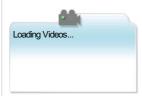
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4.5 miles of trails and sixponds including one for fishing pond that has been stocked with bluegill and largemouth bass.

There was a vertical drop of 20 to 30 feet along the back of the property that was popular with neighborhood dare devils. "If you stepped off it, you'd be in a free fall," Hamey said. The drop was filled in with dirt and plants.

Wherever possible, the township left trees and boulders original to the site, she said.

As she drove, the path suddenly ended at a field that has not been touched. This portion cannot be developed because it is the site of a prehistoric Indian village uncovered in the 1970s. The discovery caused work on the gravel pit to stop. An archeologist on that dig, Cathy Bird, will be at the grand opening discussing the property's rich history.

When doves fly

Harney backed up and continued on, heading north on the property. As she drove, two doves flew overhead. Volunteers from the Chicago Audubon Society have been taking stock of the variety of birds seen on the property and have developed three reference pages, she said. Arare barred owl and a sandhill crane, whose numbers were down a few years ago, have been spotted in the sanctuary.

Harney said she is sure the sanctuary will attract bird watchers from all over the region and the township is working on listing all the varieties found on www.ebird.org.

Asignature feature of the sanctuary is the terraced ponds. What makes Jelke Creek Bird Sanctuary even more unique is that it's designed to catch rainfall and let it infiltrate the ground and end up in the Jelke Creek watershed. The six ponds are part of the design, Harney said.

She has been interested in developing a water management plan area for years. The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning's (CMAP) 2030 study predicts Kane County will face a water supply shortage if sustainable watersheds and management plans are not created. The sanctuary's design achieves the goals laid out both in CMAP's 2030 water plan and the Kane County Water Resource Report, according to Harney.

Jelke Creek's design is working just as planned, Harney said. Heavy rains this spring and summer were filtered throughout the property and did not cause any flooding, she said.

Healing properties

Alocked fence keeps cars out for now but other entrances along Boncosky and Sleepy Hollow roads, allow people to walk onto the grounds. Jelke Creek Sanctuary is already becoming a popular place for people using the walking paths, bird watchers and environmentalists, Harney said.

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June Keebler has worked on open space iniatives for 25 years and played a key role in a mid-1990s referendum that created an open space district within Dundee Township. She lives nearby and has watched the progress at the sanctuary.

"It's just been really exciting," said Keebler.

The sanctuary is the most transformed of all the township's open space properties and is a good example of natural restoration, she said.

"We are putting back everything we can possibly put back," Keebler said. "It's a re-establishment of a natural system that we hope over time will have all the places of high quality natural system. It will take years, but the matrix will be there. It couldn't be more exciting."

Back at the sanctuary, Harney pulled alongside a pond where contractors were doing more planting. Atotal of 50,000 seedlings and plants were established, Harney said. The site had been overgrown with weeds and other non-native plants and trees, many of which were cut down. Some Sleepy Hollow neighbors complained when the trees were cut down, but Harney said it was necessary to remove them to get the land back to its natural state.

The property has come a long way, but it has a long way to go, Harney said.

"It will finally heal itself over a long time," she said.

Sanctuary opening events

Dundee Township is inviting residents to experience the Jelke Creek Bird Sanctuary during its grand opening next weekend.

Here's a list of events

n Friday, July 16

6:30 p.m. — Opening ceremony

n Saturday, July 17

7–9 a.m. — Kane DuPage Soil and Water District Information table; bird walk accompanied by John James Audubon impersonator.

9-11 a.m. — "Wild Ones" nature Hike led by township Supervisor Sue Harney.

10 a.m.–2 p.m. — Hay rides; tour of newly restored site.

Noon — Lion's Club selling lunches.

1-2 p.m. — Beginners birding for adults; attracting birds to your yard; learn about the birds at the sanctuary.

10:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. — Children's activities, including bird art tables, nature bingo hike and interactive bird identification game.

2-7:30 p.m. — James Audubon presentation at 2 p.m.; archeological talk by Cathy Bird at 3 p.m.; grand opening at 4 p.m.

n Sunday, July 18

8 a.m.-noon — Fishing derby (contact the township for more details to pre-registration for the derby).

11:30 a.m.-2 p.m. — Frontenac Farms Open House, art display, tours of the stable, history, demos and kid stuff.

Noon-3 p.m. — Lunch at Frontenac Ice Cream Social Farms.

For more information, call the township office at 847-428-8092.

Source: www.dundeetownship.org

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