# **Hadley Valley Preserve**

# **Forest Preserve District of Will County**

#### The problem

Over 200 years ago, the landscape in northeastern Illinois consisted of vast prairies, oak woodlands and expansive wetlands. As settlers moved into the region in the 1830s, prairies were plowed to grow corn, grains and soybeans, and to support livestock. Forests were cut down, streams were straightened, and miles of drainage tile were buried to dry the wet soil for farming. Loss of prairies and forests was accelerated with the suppression of fires and introduction of non-native species from the Old World. Within a century, native habitats and natural water processes in many parts of the region had disappeared, and with them, the many services they provide, such as water quality protection, flood control, and many others.

Spring Creek in Will County typified the results of the changes that brought about degraded landscapes in the region. The Creek had been turned into a drainage ditch and tiles had been laid, resulting in loss of wetlands, natural flow of water, habitat for native species, and destruction of a rare landscape in the region.

#### The solution

Public and private partnerships and mitigation<sup>ii</sup> funding allowed the Forest Preserve District of Will County to create the Hadley Valley Preserve, the result of a plan for protecting and connecting additional land around Spring Creek, restoring the prairie and oak savanna landscapes, and the creek's natural hydrology, and fulfilling the goals of The Spring Creek Greenway Master Plan. The Greenway Master Plan, adopted in 2004, called for connecting four preserves – Walnut Hollow, Hadley Valley, Messenger Woods Nature Preserve and Messenger Marsh - to provide habitat continuity and multi-use recreational trails.

In the process of creating the Preserve, the meanders of Spring Creek that existed prior to agricultural channelization were restored, 22,000 feet of drainage tiles were removed or disabled, 6,700 feet of stream bank was stabilized, more than 800 acres of wetland and 139 acres of upland were or are being restored, and 148,000 native wetland species were planted (overall, prairie and wetland seeds planted total seven tons). Restoring and managing the prairie and rare savanna landscape<sup>iii</sup> is a continuing process involving removal of non-native plants by cutting, applying herbicides, and using periodic controlled fires to mimic the wildfires that shaped the landscape before farming and urban development.<sup>iv</sup> In addition to these efforts, eight miles of greenway trails were created.

#### The process

The success of the Hadley Valley Preserve is due in no small part to the effectiveness of the partnerships convened by the District. Tim Good, Planning Section Supervisor for the District, notes that there was an extraordinarily high level interest by others to add funding to this highly visible, well-funded project.

Successful public bond referendums in 1999 and 2005 (totaling \$2.7 million) purchased much of the Preserve property. An additional ten million in grants and donations of cash or services was used to leverage those funds. Six hundred thousand was contributed by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, \$200,000 by the City of Joliet, with additional contributions from local developers for trail and access improvements.  $^{\rm vi}$ 



#### Overview

With contributions from an extensive list of public and private partners, the Forest Preserve District of Will County turned a degraded landscape devoid of its formerly meandering creek and prairie, oak savannah, and wetland habitats into the award-winning scenic Hadley Valley Preserve.

#### **CMAP Resources**

- <u>Ecosystem Restoration</u>
   <u>Strategy Report</u>
- Preservation of Parks and Open Space Strategy Paper
- <u>Public-Private Partnership</u>
   <u>Strategy Report</u>
- Stormwater Management
   BMPs Strategy Report

GO TO 2040
Recommendation:
Livable Communities Encourage the integration of
resource conservation in land
use planning.

#### For more information:

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The project also owes its success to partnerships resulting from the tree and wetland mitigation requirements for the expansion of the I-355 Tollway (\$5.5 million) and wetland mitigation by the City of Chicago for the O'Hare International Airport modernization project through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, (\$5.3 million) administered in a grant through the non-profit Openlands. Vii The funds helped compile adjacent parcels, restore wetlands and native landscapes, and design and construct access and trail facilities. Several partners are now working to develop a program to educate visitors on the importance of restoring landscapes that have been lost. Viii

### **Community considerations**

The District had public support from the start, as evidenced by the success of bond referenda which partially paid for land acquisition and improvements for this project. Good says that overall, input from the public has been positive.

#### **Outcomes**

The Hadley Valley Preserve now has a meandering creek surrounded by native vegetation and diverse animal habitat (over 15,000 species<sup>ix</sup>), and a greenway connecting forest preserves and open lands, restoring nature's services (the greenway helps protect a shallow aquifer that provides a significant portion of the City of Joliet's water supply), natural beauty, and healthy outdoor recreation for the public. All this is in the midst of one of the most rapidly developing counties in the nation.

The District has received awards from regional, state, and national organizations including Chicago Wilderness, the Illinois Parks and Recreation Association, and both the National and Illinois Chapter of the American Planning Association.

#### **Lessons learned**

The Forest Preserve District staff has much helpful advice to offer from their experience with the restoration and trail, including information on weed treatment and use of weed-free agricultural fields, the best size of trees to install, maintenance of trails, erosion prevention, unique partnership opportunities (e.g., adjacent farmers conducting weed control work), best practices to establish native plants, and coordination of timelines for the different components of the project. For detailed recommendations, see <a href="http://l.usa.gov/pqPqik">http://l.usa.gov/pqPqik</a>.

## **Location Map:**



Contact Lindsay Banks (lbanks@cmap.illinois.gov) to submit a case study.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>i</sup> Forest Preserve District of Will County, *Hadley Valley Preserve* , 2010.

ii Mitigation is generally defined as actions taken to avoid, minimize, or compensate for losses to natural resources.

A savanna in this region is an area characterized by an open landscape with a mix of shrubs, grasses and wildflowers and featuring trees spaced widely enough, or sufficiently small enough, so that the canopy does not close.

iv Forest Preserve District of Will County, <u>Hadley Valley Preserve</u>, 2010.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>v</sup> Bonds, requiring voter approval, are issued as a way to borrow money to fund capital projects

vi 2011 National Planning Excellence Award, Planning, American Planning Association, April 2011.

vii 2011 National Planning Excellence Award, Planning, American Planning Association, April 2011.

viii Forest Preserve District of Will County, <u>Hadley Valley Preserve</u>, 2010.

ix Forest Preserve District of Will County, *Hadley Valley Preserve*, 2010.

ix Communication with John O'Lear, Natural Resource Manager/Landscape Architect——, Forest Preserve District of Will County