

NATURAL LAND INSTITUTE

Conserving Land
in Northern Illinois

Notes from the Field

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Photo: Laura Helmich



Brittany Micho holds seeds she collected from plains oval sedge at Burr Oak Valley Nature Preserve in mid July. This was her first time volunteering as she joined her father, Joe, Barbara Williams and Greg Ruffner to collect seeds that day.



Photo: Jill Kenney

Elliot and Catalina Oliver enjoyed collecting seeds in the Anne Meyer Prairie at Nygren Wetland Preserve during Fall Prairie Harvest Day last year.

Your Help Collecting Seeds Is Invaluable

By Laura Helmich, NLI's Field Biologist

One of the most expensive parts of restoring native ecosystems is the cost of purchasing native seed. Standard seed mixes can range anywhere from \$600 to \$3,000 per acre depending on the type of area being seeded and the number of species in the mix. One of the ways we can offset the expense of purchasing seed is by collecting it ourselves.

Last year, we collected seed from 181

species of native prairie, woodland, and wetland plants. The estimated value of that seed is \$63,884.73! Take into account that 36 of the species we collected are rare enough that I could not find values for that seed online, so the actual total value of seed is higher than this estimate.

It is important to note that we do not sell any of the seed that we collect. I calculate the estimated value so we have an idea of how



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much money we are saving by not having to purchase those species and because it helps with providing matching funds for grants.

Volunteers Play a Huge Role in our ability to collect so much seed. Of the 181 species collected, 46 of those were collected with the help of volunteers. That may seem like a small proportion, but the estimated value of just those 46 species is \$24,526.93. Thank you to all of the volunteers that helped to collect seed last year!!

In addition to our big fall seed collection day at the

Nygren Wetland Preserve (Fall Prairie Harvest Day, Sat., Sept. 9), staff will be hosting many other seed collection opportunities throughout the summer and fall. Since we cannot always predict exactly when a certain species is ready for collection, sometimes our collection days are scheduled last minute.

If you are interested in helping with seed collection or would like more information about how you can help, please contact me at lhelmich@naturalland.org.

The Patience in Land Restoration

By Rowan Mermel, AmeriCorps Service Member, NLI Summer Stewardship Intern

Photo: Kim Johnsen



Interning at NLI, I have been lucky to experience working in a diverse range of ecosystems at different stages in restoration. Examples include pulling invasive species and collecting seeds in incredibly diverse remnant prairies such as Wilson Prairie Nature Preserve (privately owned) or Harlem Hills Prairie Nature Preserve (owned by Illinois Department of Natural Resources with public access, Loves Park), to targeted spraying of birdsfoot trefoil in the high quality plantings at Burr Oak Valley Nature Preserve, or in less mature

restoration areas at Silver Creek Woods Preserve.

All of these sites are interesting in their own ways, not just the high quality remnant areas undisturbed by development (although they are spectacular). They are all interesting because they are all in the process of being restored in some way, and all of the different stages of restoration present unique challenges and opportunities for diversity.

It has been fascinating to see how restoration mimics the natural evolution of ecosystems, to say that neither are linear and neither are quick. There will always be disturbances such as a new invasive moving in, and there will be unexpected successes such as rare plants coming up in areas where brush was cut back at Lost Flora Fen on Raccoon Creek over the winter.

It's hard to observe the growth and evolution of these ecosystems in just a few weeks; however, I think it is important to recognize the progress that is being made to restore these amazing natural places. It is always important to appreciate the fruits of your labor, even when they ripen at the pace of nature.

I think that ecological restoration is an excellent exercise in practicing this patience. These ecosystems didn't evolve in a day, and they won't be restored in one either, but with the hard work of the land stewards at NLI and a supportive community, they are on the right track.



Beauty and Biodiversity

By Lillian Robertson, AmeriCorps Service Member,
NLI Summer Stewardship Intern

Photo: Kim Johnsen



I recall at the beginning of the term Laura Helmich informed me of the chances I would have to see uncommon, perhaps even rare, species. From that moment, I decided to take a mental note of one of the first we encountered at Burr Oak Valley Nature

Preserve. We came across the downy yellow painted cup (*Castilleja sessiliflora*), and I remember thinking about how cool it was that this plant was so uncommon, yet there was such an abundance of it in the small section of Burr Oak Valley Nature Preserve. I felt so privileged to be able to experience this beautiful plant in such a number of patches when other people may not be able to ever see it.

Feeling Awe and Privilege

This was just the beginning of my awe for the beauty of NLI's preserves, as when we were at Loss Flora Fen on Raccoon Creek, collecting marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*) seeds, suddenly a beautiful orange butterfly crossed my path. I thought nothing of it until Laura informed me that the butterfly was the Baltimore Checkerspot (*Euphydryas phaeton*), a threatened species,

Photo: Lillian Robertson



Lillian was delighted to discover this habitat restricted butterfly, a Baltimore Checkerspot, while collecting seeds from marsh marigold.

which just happened to have emerged from its chrysalis with dozens more of its kind flying around us.

Words cannot begin to express the privileges I have felt, to experience the high quality sites that are preserved by the Natural Land Institute which allow for large arrays of biodiversity to flourish.

Stewardship Wish List...

Do you want to help improve local habitat efforts? Donating items from the stewardship wish list is a great way to accelerate the effort. You can also donate funds, including gifts of stock, and we'll put it right to work. Listed in order of priority. Contact the NLI office at 815/964-6666 or info@naturalland.org if you would like to donate any of these items.

1. Clean yellow kitty litter buckets (with tops if possible)
2. Rubber boots and waders (looking for smaller sizes)
3. Materials/supplies for raised bed construction
4. Pull behind mower for ATV/UTV
5. Clippers/hand pruners
6. Chest freezer
7. Tractor canopy
8. Air compressor for truck
9. 500 gallon water tank (baffled or leg tank)
10. 4x4 pickup truck for "farm use"



Become Involved...

Photo: Laura Helmich

This photo shows the results after 10 years of work by volunteers who helped remove invasive species in the oak savanna and the now restored prairie. Volunteers also distributed native wildflower and grass seeds in both areas at Burr Oak Valley Nature Preserve. The healthy native prairies and woodlands here help lessen extreme weather impacts to the environment and nearby residential neighborhoods.

Volunteer Land Restoration/ Stewardship Days Schedule

Make a difference in the natural world in your community for now and future generations to breathe fresh air and drink clean water when you volunteer at land restoration/stewardship days.

Dress for the weather in layers, wear sturdy shoes or boots, bring work gloves, a bottle of water and snacks. Always check with the site steward before heading out to make sure it's still on for that day and to get directions to the site.

New: Pop-Up Stewardship Events

As needs emerge, from removing invasive species to collecting seeds, Stewardship staff will send out an email to the stewardship volunteer list to notify folks when help is needed for what day, time and location.

Send an email to Zach Grycan, zgrycan@naturalland.org, and ask to be added to this list so you can be notified about pop-up stewardship events.

Pop-Up Stewardship Events will be held on Wednesdays at Nygren Wetland Preserve: November – May, and on other days at other preserves throughout the year as needed.

At-a-glance Volunteer Land Stewardship/Restoration Days Schedule

(Subject to Change)

Location	Schedule	Staff/Site Steward
Howard D. Colman Dells Nature Preserve	Days Vary 9:00 a.m. — 3:00 p.m.	Site Steward: Chris Reisetter reisetterc@gmail.com 815/985-7208
Lost Flora Fen on Raccoon Creek	Every Thursday November - March 9:00 a.m. — 1:00 p.m.	Staff: Tyler Pellegrini tpellegrini@naturalland.org 815/970-5012
Nygren Wetland Preserve	Every Wednesday June - October 9:00 a.m. — 3:00 p.m.	Staff: Tyler Pellegrini tpellegrini@naturalland.org 815/970-5012
Silver Creek Woods Preserve	3rd Saturday 9:00 a.m. — 1:00 p.m.	Site Steward: Jim Akers jnakers@hotmail.com
William & Gayle Keefer Nature Reserve	1st Saturday November - March 9:00 a.m. — 1:00 p.m.	Staff: Laura Helmich 712/301-1208 lhelmich@naturalland.org



Fall and Holiday Events

For more information and to register by the day before each event please visit: www.naturalland.org, or call 815/964-6666, or email: info@naturalland.org



Raccoon Creek is in the foreground of this view looking west over Lost Flora Fen on Raccoon Creek.

Open House at Lost Flora Fen on Raccoon Creek

Sat., Oct. 7 | 11:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. | Free
5565 Yale Bridge Road, Rockton | Parking on site

Come explore with us on this special day as we host an open house at this 387-acre preserve. Ongoing guided tours will be available or walk around on your own. Easy hiking. Wagon rides. Snacks and beverages provided.

OAKtober Hike at Burr Oak Valley Nature Preserve

Sat., Oct. 28 | 1:30 p.m. | \$5 each/\$10 family,
Free for NLI Members

Across from Cross and Crown Lutheran Church, 7404 Elevator Rd., Roscoe

Parking on site and at the Church.

Celebrate OAKtober – Oak Awareness Month in Illinois as you join us to take a guided walking tour of Burr Oak Valley Nature Preserve. Tour starts at 1:30 p.m. and it will last one and a half to two hours as staff lead hikers through the rolling hills and oak savannas.

Book Signing Meet and Greet with Alan Branhagen

Tue., Nov. 14 | 6:00, 6:30 and 7:00 p.m. | Free
NLI office, 320 South Third Street, Rockford



Photo: Judith Barnard

Meet NLI's new Executive Director, Alan Branhagen, and get your book written by him signed. He has authored three books: *Midwest Native Plant Primer*, *Native Plants of the Midwest*, and *The Gardener's Butterfly Book*.

Bring yours or buy one at the NLI office (we'll have two on hand to purchase) and get it signed by Alan as you have a chance to visit with him. Space is limited.

Holiday Open House at the NLI Office

Tue., Dec. 5 | 4:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. | Free
320 South Third Street, Rockford

Visit with NLI Trustees, staff, members and friends at the Natural Land Institute office to celebrate the holidays while enjoying hot cider, coffee, punch, snacks and sweets.

Photo: Robert Clark



Zach Grycan, right, talks about the process of restoring the oak savanna behind him as he led the 2022 OAKtober Hike.



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your annual or monthly membership gift.**

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Fall Events

For more information and to register by the day before each event please visit:
www.naturalland.org, or call 815/964-6666, or email: info@naturalland.org

Fall Prairie Harvest Day

Sat., Sept. 9 | 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. | Free
Nygren Wetland Preserve, 3190 W. Rockton Rd.,
Rockton | Parking on site

Collect Seeds for Nygren Wetland and other NLI preserves. Start anytime and work as long as you like. This is fun and easy community service for nature! Any age can do this. Individuals and all kinds of groups are welcome to participate. Dress for the weather and wear sturdy shoes. Snacks and beverages provided.

Photo: Jill Kennay



Collecting seeds is a fun and easy way for the very young to learn the value of caring for nature.



This site map highlights the pollinator meadow in the heart of the Lind-McGeachie Preserve.

Open House at Lind-McGeachie Preserve

Thu., Sep. 28 | 4:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. | Free
6100 Fitzgerald Rd., Rockford | Parking on the street

Visit this newly expanded preserve that will be open to the public as of this Open House date. Ongoing guided walks will be provided or explore on your own. Dress for the weather and wear sturdy shoes. Moderate level hiking. Snacks and beverages provided.

See more events on page 5

