



Friends  
of  
MINNETONKA  
PARKS

2022

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ANNUAL  
REPORT



# Executive Summary

The Friends of Minnetonka Parks (FoMP) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization composed of residents of Minnetonka, which has a goal of collaborating with the city on park natural spaces restoration. We are individuals and volunteers who live, work, study or recreate in the City of Minnetonka, who value our city's unique natural amenities, and who care about restoring them by removing invasive species and proposing and working on projects that will enhance and protect the parks from further environmental degradation.



community partnerships

We had an eventful year and produced significant results restoring high-priority areas within our parks in collaboration with the City of Minnetonka. FoMP strives to be a **catalyst of positive change in the community**, playing an integral role in reversing the trends of environmental degradation in our park system. We are creating a verdant and vibrant community in which ecological stewardship, and community connectedness and partnerships thrive.



# Board of Directors

## *Executive*

**PRESIDENT**  
John Mirocha  
SHADY OAK

**VICE PRESIDENT**  
Diana Houston  
BIG WILLOW

**SECRETARY**  
Linda Russell  
LONE LAKE

**TREASURER**  
Tom Stockert  
LONE LAKE

**TECHNICAL OFFICER**  
Heather Holm  
LAKE ROSE, CULLEN,  
PURGATORY



## *At-Large*

Cindy Eyden  
CULLEN & PURGATORY

Jerrold Gershone  
CULLEN

Mary Hammill  
MEADOW

Sabrina Harvey  
HILLOWAY

Angela Moreira  
CULLEN & PURGATORY

Sally Wahlburg  
MEADOW

Dennis Yockers  
MINNEHAHA CREEK  
HEADWATERS



# By the Numbers

**117**  
organized  
restoration  
events

**1792**  
volunteer  
restoration  
hours

**93**  
pounds  
of seed  
broadcast

**82**  
hours  
surveying  
birds

**28**  
acres under  
restoration

**10**  
park  
leaders

**140**  
volunteers  
recruited

**58**  
hours  
surveying  
plant plots





# Vision



We envision a park system that honors and builds on our city's heritage of preserving, restoring and managing our distinctive high-value natural spaces that enhance Minnetonka's quality of life and distinguish it from other cities.

# Mission

Our mission is to work with the City of Minnetonka to ensure that all park visitors can experience high-quality, biodiverse places that provide a multitude of positive nature-based interactions, thereby improving the quality of life and the sustainability and ecological resiliency of our parks, park system and community.

## *We will accomplish this by:*

- investing in the restoration of our parks and preserving the park system's ecologically-significant areas because natural landscapes in a suburban context require ongoing management to maintain their ecological quality,
- transforming degraded landscapes to high-quality, biodiverse ecological plant communities,
- educating park visitors that the investment in and restoration of our natural resources provides the community with a distinctive amenity,
- growing the size and involvement of friends groups to assist with education, restoration and preservation activities,
- helping to streamline communication with the city to coordinate and manage volunteer restoration activities, and celebrating the outcomes.



# Values

## *We value a park system that:*

- is inclusive for all residents,
- is sustainable both financially and environmentally,
- anticipates, funds and plans for climate change effects,
- provides both active and passive recreational opportunities,
- facilitates a long-term investment in the restoration, management and preservation of our natural resources as a defining and distinctive characteristic of our city, and
- communicates, monitors and enforces clear expectations and rules for use so that everyone is respectful and feels safe and welcome.



*Cullen Nature Preserve*

sustainable and  
resilient natural amenities

We consider our natural landscapes to be an amenity that can be enjoyed and appreciated by everyone, and also need to be protected from negligence, misuse, overuse, and overt or benign degradation. Each park and/or preserve in the city may have its own unique, natural, biodiverse features and should have its own unique restoration management plan and guidelines for use guided by a comprehensive, city-wide vision and plan for our park system.



# Our Work in 2022



## Habitat Restoration

During 2022, we initiated significant habitat restoration efforts, implementing our habitat management plans that were approved in collaboration with the city's Natural Resources staff. We plan to continue expanding our high-priority restoration areas and update our long-term habitat goals with key restoration actions in Big Willow, Cullen, Hilloway, Lake Rose, Lone Lake, Meadow, Purgatory, Shady Oak Isthmus, and Victoria-Evergreen parks. We anticipate providing input on the upcoming park-specific master plans currently in development by a city-hired consultant. We will meet with Natural Resources staff and attempt to foster collaboration between city departments whose responsibilities include planning for or working in our parks. We hope to encourage communication, collaboration and coordination across departments to ensure effective and efficient restoration actions and outcomes. We will consider writing a grant that aligns with the goals and priorities of the Natural Resources Master Plan (NRMP) to fund a large-scale restoration effort in one of our major park preserves to augment our volunteer efforts.



## Volunteer Framework/Recruitment

With the newly developed volunteer framework created with the city staff in 2022, FoMP will continue to grow membership and build a community of dedicated volunteers or supporters with a master communications list. We aim to continue to build a group of unique volunteers for each park, focused around park specific plans linked to the NRMP. The plans will be developed, coordinated and communicated through a joint effort with city staff and officials.

We will strengthen our network through a newsletter that will keep membership informed on FoMP efforts across the Minnetonka park system. New for 2023, we will host a volunteer appreciation event to thank our dedicated and hard-working volunteers for their contributions.



## Collaborative Park Stewardship Meetings

We began meeting with city staff, park stewards and key volunteers from various city parks to improve communication, coordination and collaboration on specific park restoration activities (the three C's). The meetings are held once per month for 60 – 90 minutes and are planned and facilitated jointly between FoMP and the city's Natural Resources staff. Visitors from the Park Board and City Council are welcomed as are city staff members whose park work responsibilities fit topics covered by the meeting agendas. These meetings have been instrumental in creating significant, positive strides in park planning and restoration activities. We receive assistance from Public Works and Natural Resources through communications and marketing, field technical support, brush and other invasive hauls, event signage, tools and safety equipment, along with other items that increase our effectiveness such as supplying seed for the restoration areas.





## Education and Outreach

FoMP created educational opportunities for volunteers and the wider public by developing an invasive plant informational link on the FoMP website, hosting a table at the Minnetonka Farmers Market, leading park walking tours, and implementing monthly joint park stewardship meetings with city staff (see above). For 2023, our goals are to continue to educate the city, public, and elected officials on restoration efforts. We plan to develop educational materials to denote the importance of such restoration efforts with ideas such as habitat handouts on target plant communities, citizen science, and/or family nature education events, while continuing the park walks and table at the Minnetonka Farmers Market. We will educate the broader community about the need and importance of ecological restoration and enlist their help in planning and implementing restoration actions.



## Social Media Presence

In 2021, we created a Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/mtkaparks](https://www.facebook.com/mtkaparks) and Instagram page at [www.instagram.com/mtkaparks](https://www.instagram.com/mtkaparks) to help advertise our volunteer events and promote our parks to the community. In 2022, we established a YouTube channel at [www.youtube.com/@mtkaparks](https://www.youtube.com/@mtkaparks) to post short videos about our organization and members, our work and educational outreach efforts.



# Park Volunteer Activities

## Big Willow

2022 restoration activities continued in the south section of the park, designated with highest restoration priority, south of the bridge and north of Minnetonka Blvd. Work started in January with seeding in the areas cleared of buckthorn in fall 2021. The June garlic mustard blitz had 14 volunteers who contributed 34.25 hours; we also have two adopt-a-spot volunteers who remove garlic mustard and other invasives throughout the year. The initial buckthorn blitz in October was followed by 12 additional removal events. We cleared a very dense thicket of buckthorn along the west side of the main trail up to the old homestead hilltop and seeded about 1 acre, including re-seeding a few areas that were seeded in 2021, with 3.5 pounds of buckthorn replacement seed.



Volunteers throughout the year contributed 165.5 hours, by 27 discrete signups, and we gained nine new participants. Plans for 2023 focus on additional buckthorn, garlic mustard and other invasive removal in the south section, in addition to wetland seeding on the east side of the main trail next to the wetland. Additional goals for 2023 include increasing the volunteer base, a spring ephemeral wildflower walk and a learn-about-the-park walk. *Diana Houston*



## Cullen Nature Preserve

The year started with restoration of the 13 acres of oak savanna on the south- and west-facing slopes of the Preserve. State, county and city grants funded hiring contractors to bring in equipment and remove 100 truckloads of buckthorn and other non-savanna species. The Friends have been working for several years to remove garlic mustard in preparation for the major restoration. We had planned to do a prescribed burn and seeding in the savanna areas; unfortunately, the drought in late summer/fall precluded the burn. We hope that can be accomplished in the spring. The Friends were able to seed (with Friends' funds) the island since the buckthorn regrowth was not as prevalent there. In addition to invasive species removal, the Friends were busy with bird and vegetation surveys. Fourteen new bird species were identified during bird surveys, 17 study plots created for long-term vegetation surveys, \$2,642 in native seed purchased by the Friends for the island restoration, 387.5 volunteer hours for the year, and a total of 29 events. In 2023, the Friends will be doing visioning along with the Natural Resources staff in preparation for master planning in 2024. In addition to the ongoing savanna restoration, state grant funds will restore the wetland edge. Also, the ravine will be restored in 2023.

*Jerrold Gershone*



contractor removing buckthorn



## Gro Tonka

A walk through with Natural Resources staff was held to complete an informal site survey and discussion of Natural Resources management issues in the park (two hours). A plan for park restoration for 2023 will be drafted as a result of this work and shared with city staff to begin a more formal plan and implementation of the plan in 2023. *Dr. Dennis Yockers*

## Hilloway

We hosted ten events focused on removing garlic mustard, buckthorn, and other invasive plants such as Dame's rocket, Canada thistle, narrowleaf bittercress, etc. 36 volunteers contributed 220 total hours of service. We focused on the "buckthorn forest" north of the fen, where the target plant community is oak savanna. In that area, a total of 1.64 acres has been cleared and seeded with four pounds of buckthorn replacement mix. By April 2023, a plan will be developed by the Natural Resources staff in collaboration with FoMP that will specify target plant communities and restoration actions for 2023-2028. That plan will likely include a management plan for the pine forest and expansion of the oak savanna north of the fen and west of the main trail. We will request that the city remove excess dead material throughout the park and rework the drainage area south of the fen to slow water flow and install native plants. *Sabrina Harvey*





## Lake Rose

Lake Rose continues to get restoration maintenance including monitoring and removing undesirable plants such as garlic mustard, stick seed, flowering spurge, and Canada thistle. This fall, we seeded the south- and west-facing slopes with 4 pounds of buckthorn replacement. The vegetation from seeding events conducted in the last three years is beginning to establish. For example, the wetland edge now has an abundance of blue vervain and common boneset, and wild ryes are establishing on the savanna slopes. We look forward to providing input on the park-specific plan in 2023 so target plant communities and associated actions are defined for the entire neighborhood. We plan to do a "maintenance pass" for any remaining buckthorn in the park in 2023. *Heather and Brent Holm*

## Lone Lake

We had two city-sponsored events and three other days of related work. We have mostly had volunteers from the Friends of Lone Lake Park email group and the members of the Friends of Minnetonka Parks. We had two new volunteers this year, including one boy scout, for a total of 14 individuals who volunteered. The total number of volunteer hours at LLP in 2022 was 64. The project area is the Aspen Grove Pollinator restoration of about half an acre, just east of the basketball court. We mostly have removed garlic mustard and buckthorn including buckthorn regrowth and stumps from earlier efforts. There is another project area, the Playground Pollinator Walk, that has not been started yet. Both projects are part of the agreement between the city and the Center for Biological Diversity to create new floral resources for the rusty patched bumble bee in light of the mountain bike trail construction. The 0.56 acre Aspen Grove will be a restored oak savanna. We were asked by the city forester if we could work on the area adjacent to it, across the entrance road, so we have started working on that as well, bringing the total area worked to 0.61 in 2022. We seeded the project area with the mixes that city staff provided. We broadcasted 6.7 pounds of savanna mix and 19 pounds of cover crop. *Linda Russell*

## Minnehaha Creek Headwaters

Wildlife species, invasive vegetation and area phenology were observed at this park. A site visit and discussion of Natural Resources management issues was undertaken as a result with city staff to begin forming a restoration plan for 2023. One volunteer provided 21 hours of volunteer work. A more formal plan will be developed with city staff for implementation in 2023. *Dr. Dennis Yockers*



## Purgatory

The Friends of Purgatory Park hosted 32 restoration events to actively restore 3.7 acres of grassland habitat including a short-grass prairie remnant and oak savanna. 26 volunteers worked 318 hours and pulled garlic mustard and removed populations of birdsfoot trefoil, crown vetch, leafy spurge and lily of the valley. We planted, caged and watered 19 bare root bur oaks, broadcasted 20 gallon buckets of native seed and removed invasive woody brush from over three acres. 2023 will be busy as the Friends continue expanding the restoration margins of the prairie remnant. We will continue to monitor and manage the grasslands under active restoration, and will tailor our seasonal actions for the timing of the 2023 prescribed burn. We will also plan for and fund interpretive signs featuring value and diversity of prairie remnant and/or oak savannas. We will ask the city to remove the remaining large Siberian elms, cut and spray the reed canary population and burn two areas in fall of 2023.

*Heather Holm and Angela Moreira*



oak savanna restoration

## Shady Oak

2022 marked the beginning of our restoration of the isthmus. We held 1 event with 7 volunteers to begin the process of uncovering the many oaks along the path there that are being overwhelmed by invasive buckthorn, honeysuckle, prickly ash and bittersweet vines. Volunteers contributed 34.5 hours. 10 pounds of seed was distributed to cover the areas where the invasives were removed. We started near the center of the isthmus in an area of about 1/3 acre to provide a demonstration plot for neighbors and park users. In 2023 we will continue our restoration process, grow our volunteer base and work with the city on a longer-term plan for the isthmus. *John Mirocha*



## Meadow North

2022 was the year that restoration efforts began on the north side of Meadow Park. We hosted five buckthorn blitz events in October through early November. There were four participants at the garlic mustard blitz who contributed 8 hours. A total of 58 discrete signups for the buckthorn blitz events contributed 144 ¼ hours. 11 participants were new to working on park restoration. We totaled 92 volunteers who contributed 216 volunteer hours and cleared and seeded 1.2 acres with 7 pounds of native seed. Plans for 2023 are to continue clearing buckthorn in the areas approved in the 2022 plan. An additional request would be to begin some restoration effort on the Plymouth Road entrance to Meadow Park to ensure there is a welcoming view to the park on the north side. *Mary Hammill*



*Meadow Park north*

## Meadow South

Meadow Park south hosted one garlic mustard blitz in the area that is parallel to Plymouth Road and two buckthorn blitz events in September. 45 volunteers worked 89 hours to restore ½ acre in the park. We attracted seven new participants. Six of those participants were teens from Minnetonka High School. 2 ½ pounds of seed were sown. The restoration effort has renewed the park areas described. Plans for 2023 are to continue clearing buckthorn to the small oak knoll that is north of the footbridge and to clear the buckthorn behind the tennis courts. In addition, there is a larger oak knoll further north on the trail by the slough where we would like to begin restoration efforts. *Sally Wahlberg*



## Victoria-Evergreen

We held two city-sponsored events: garlic mustard removal on May 11 and a buckthorn blitz on September 28. During the spring and summer 2023, we removed invasives as necessary such as burdock, garlic mustard, stick seed and hedge parsley. We monitored the work monthly and cleared as needed. We have a volunteer base of 29 who contributed a total of 198 hours; 0.71 acres are under active restoration. In 2023, we will remove understory trees (4 inches or less) within the dripline of large and smaller oaks, and flag undesirable trees greater than 4 inches for removal by the city. In fall 2023, we will seed the area with a shade mix, since it is on the north side of Skunk Hill. We will also request that the city help us spruce up the parking area, supply seed and tools, and remove flagged understory trees. It will also be important to add signage to help park visitors become more aware of proper park uses. *Nate Thorton and Larry Wade*

## Celebrating Our Successes and Acknowledging the Contributors

Our colleagues at the Cullen Nature Preserve and Bird Sanctuary held a celebratory event From the Ground Up on September 9 that marked a milestone in their restoration efforts. 125 people attended the event including 10 elected officials from state and county offices and the City of Minnetonka, and six members of the Cullen family, the preserve's namesake family. A silent auction raised \$10,000 surpassing the organizing committee's goal. The event featured presentations from Cullen's President Jerrold Gershone, the Cullen family, Matt Kumka (City of Minnetonka), representatives from the various governmental organizations and Dr. Lee Frelich, forest ecologist at the University of Minnesota.

## Restore Minnetonka!

There is a great deal of personal and community satisfaction from the work we are doing and the significant difference it is making in our parks and greater community.

## Contact Us

We look forward to connecting with community members. Email us at [mtkaparks@gmail.com](mailto:mtkaparks@gmail.com) or visit our website [www.mtkaparks.org](http://www.mtkaparks.org) or Facebook page [www.facebook.com/mtkaparks](http://www.facebook.com/mtkaparks) for more information.

