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## **Volunteers spend Saturday improving wetland**

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Fayetteville Natural Heritage volunteers spent Saturday morning pulling invasive plants and picking up trash as part of the city's continued efforts to restore the Woolsey Wet Prairie.

“ During our last Council of Neighborhoods meeting, [Fayetteville Environmental Consultant ] Bruce Shackleford gave us a presentation about the project and all the progress that's been made, ” said Julie McQuade, neighborhood planning coordinator for the city of Fayetteville. “ Several people seemed very interested, so we decided to step up. ”

Located beside the new West Side Wastewater Treatment Facility, off Wedington Avenue, the Woolsey Wet Prairie restoration project has been under way since 2001, according to Shackleford. The 28-acre area was set aside as a mitigation site when the treatment plant was planned.

“ The initial project started when we were looking around at locations on city property, ” Shackleford said. “ We did an alternative analysis and divided the 370-acre property into eight quadrants and evaluated why or why not the city should build a plant on each quadrant. We looked at environmental and engineering issues. ”

Though the property lacked high quality wetlands, Shackleford said he and other surveyors initially discovered scattered wetland inclusions throughout the area.

“ If you permanently alter wetlands, you have to do a compensatory mitigation, ” he said. “ It's a permit requirement through the [U. S. Army ] Corps of Engineers, so we didn't have a choice. ”

As preliminary plans for the wastewater treatment plant developed, so did the prairie restoration project.

The first step to re-establishing the land's native plant and animal species was removing cattle to re-establish the area's hydrology.

Through adaptive management techniques, the prairie has continued to restore itself. Many native and rare species now call the area home again. Baby goslings, ducks, scissortailed flycatchers, turtles and coyotes are among the wildlife that roam the area.

“ This project is going beyond a typical wetlands restoration project, ” McQuade said. “[Shackleford ] has done a lot of research and it’s going to be historically accurate as far as native species and the type of wet prairie it was years ago. ”

Despite the area’s natural development, Shackleford said several invasive, nonnative vegetation continue to thrive.

Queen Ann’s Lace and Fescue are among the invasive plant life that hinder native growth. Though vegetation management techniques, like prescribed burns and herbicides, can help remove non-native vegetation, some plant life is harder to remove than others.

“ One thing we really need help with is removing the Queen Ann’s Lace, ” Shackleford said. “ Different plants mature at different times of the season. It’s hard to go out there without experiencing any collateral damage. The best way to get rid of it is by pulling it. ”

That’s where members of the Fayetteville Natural Heritage Association came in on Saturday.

Shackleford provided a crash course, teaching volunteers the plants to look for and how to effectively remove them. In addition to uprooting unwanted vegetation, volunteers picked up trash and transplanted several native plant species.

“ This is a chance to us to preserve a real treasure for future generations, ” McQuade said. “ We had such a terrific representation for our Scull Creek cleanup — I thought we’d take another opportunity to step up for Fayetteville’s natural heritage. ”

Shackleford said the wetland prairie restoration project has come a long way since its initial state.

“ It ended up being a much better resource than we imagined, ” Shackleford said. “ The amphibian, bird and plant life has really done well. Before, it was just a very degraded prairie with little wetland inclusions and had been overgrown for decades. We also went from 47 native plant species to 292 plant species. ”

Now Shackleford wants to grow the sanctuary to nearly 70 acres by including surrounding city-owned land, part of which is a natural savannah region. Savannahs were associated with prairies in Northwest Arkansas 150 years ago. Most prairies and savannahs no longer exist because of continued development. In Northwest Arkansas, only 1 percent of original prairies and less than 0. 003 percent of savannahs remain.

Through preservation and proper management, Shackleford said, these landscapes can be restored in a relatively short amount of time.

The next step in the prairie restoration plan is to open the site to the public, possibly in late August to mid-September.

Shackleford said the prairie will serve as a living museum for generations to come

“ This will be a natural preserve in the middle of town, ” he said. “ We plan to make it a park for passive recreation. ”

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