

# Prairie Moraine County Park Restoration

## Project Overview

In several areas of the park, invasive species have taken over, limiting the areas where dogs can run, blocking views of significant geologic features and crowding out native vegetation. The restored landscape will provide more space for dogs, improve ecosystem benefits such as water infiltration and pollinator habitat, and offer a biologically diverse landscape. Dane County Parks staff and volunteers, including the Ice Age Trail Alliance and Prairie Moraine Friends, Inc., have been working to restore the three primary natural resource communities which historically existed in the park: prairie, oak savanna/opening, and oak woodland.

## Ecosystem Benefits

### Prairies

Prairies are incredibly diverse and important ecosystems. They can soak up as much as **seven inches of rain** which helps reduce flooding and recharge our groundwater supplies. They can also absorb and sequester **half to one ton of carbon per acre per year** which is comparable to forests. Prairies also support a huge diversity of pollinators and other wildlife.

### Oak Savannas and Woodlands

Oak trees are the backbone of our savanna and woodland communities. They support many species of wildlife, including over **800 species of caterpillar** and all the birds and wildlife that feed on them. They are important for water infiltration and sequester carbon. Oak savanna was once one of the most common vegetation types in the Upper Midwest but today is highly endangered with **only a fraction of one percent remaining**. Intact oak savannas are now one of the rarest natural communities on earth.

Unlike many other native tree species, oak seedlings need plenty of sunlight to survive and grow. Without this sunlight, there is no oak regeneration and the entire community begins to unravel. Areas choked with invasive plant species block oak regeneration and provide very little benefit to wildlife which is why staff and volunteers invest so much time and energy into clearing invasive species from these ecosystems.



**Oak savanna/opening:** scattered oak trees covering 10-50% of the site. Example from Pleasant Valley Conservancy SNA.



**Oak woodland:** 50-95% canopy cover. Example from Kettle Moraine State Forest.

## What guides the work?

The **Prairie Moraine Park Master Plan**, adopted in 2002, included an extensive public outreach process, including four public meetings and many additional meetings with stakeholders, park staff, area landowners, volunteers and special interest groups. The plan identified vegetation restoration as an objective and states that it will be done under the direction of the Dane County Parks Naturalist. The **Vegetation Management Plan**, adopted in 2019, was created in order to provide a more in-depth summary and goals of the restoration work being done at the park, which was not outlined in the master plan. This plan also included a public input process.

## Project status

Over the past several years, volunteers have worked to remove invasive brush and plant trees and shrubs in an 11 acre area. They have also started working in the SW corner of the park (outside the dog park) to remove dense invasive brush and thin trees to improve the health of the tree stand and prepare the property to be added to the dog park in the future.

### Project accomplishments so far include:

- Invasive buckthorn and honeysuckle was removed from the active restoration areas and they were seeded down with a native grass mix.
- Volunteers planted 94 White and Bur Oak trees and 80 native shrubs including hazelnut, ninebark, elderberry, new jersey tea, nannyberry viburnum, and American plum. They are weeding and watering to care for the new plantings.
- A grove of young oaks, a stand of American plum, and several American hazelnut were uncovered from the invasive brush, helping to ensure their long term survival.
- Around 50 dying ash trees, infested by emerald ash borer, were removed.
- Several gorgeous views of the terminal moraine have been opened up.

*Photos: View of the moraine blocked by thickets of invasive brush (top); volunteers inside the fenced area cleaning up after removing invasives (middle); a stand of American plum cleared from invasive plants (bottom).*



## Learn more and stay connected!

Follow [@danecountyparks](#) and [@PrairieMoraineFriendsInc](#) on Facebook or Instagram for project updates. You can also learn more about this project and get updates at: [www.danecountyparks.com/prairiemorainerestoration](http://www.danecountyparks.com/prairiemorainerestoration)



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