

PRAIRIE RESTORATION PROJECT AT GIRL SCOUT CAMP MADE POSSIBLE BY KANE COUNTY RIVERBOAT FUNDS

The Girl Scouts – Fox Valley Council owns and operates Camp Dean which is a 160-acre camp located in Big Rock in southwest Kane County. An evaluation of Camp Dean was conducted by Applied Ecological Services (AES). Experts estimate that less than one tenth of one percent of the Illinois prairie remains in its original condition. AED found that a proposed site at Camp Dean provided an excellent opportunity for additional prairie restoration. They further stated, “establishing prairie in this area will help stabilize the soil, increase rain water infiltration, and improve water quality to the pond and Welch Creek.” This project is part of a larger plan to enhance the outdoor program for the Girl Scouts and other school and community partnerships that are formed. Girl Scouts – Fox Valley Council is taking an active role in environmental responsibility, and in 2006 Kane County awarded this organization \$44,250 in Riverboat Funds for this prairie restoration project.



Jan Carlson, Kane County Board Member, and Jerre Henriksen, Girl Scouts – Fox Valley, visit Camp Dean.

The specific site of the project is identified as “old field” in the AES evaluation. The “old field” comprises over 40 acres and surrounds the detention basin and a previous prairie restoration project of about 6 acres. The primary goal of the project was to return approximately 25 acres of mesic prairie to its native condition. A secondary goal was to provide outdoor education opportunities and “hands on” involvement in the project for Girl Scouts. Over 5,500 girls and adult volunteers attended programs at Camp Dean in 2005. These participants learn the value of conservation and restoration of natural resources; receive education on native plant and animal species; participate in seed collection, redistribution, and seed exchange; conduct vegetation transects to evaluate the project; and learn restoration efforts involving prairie and wetlands.



*Prescribed burn conducted at
Camp Dean prairie project*

Removing the non-native grasses, brush, and trees so that the prairie can support and sustain itself was as important as the actual seeding of the 26 acres. Herbicide was applied to the field in the fall of 2006. In the spring of 2007 there was a controlled burn of the field. Fire prevents brush and trees from overtaking the prairie, prevents build-up of dead vegetation that encourages weeds and retards new growth, and improves habitat for prairie birds, mammals and butterflies.

The existing grasses were killed off to prepare the site to be seeded with native grasses and forbs. Follow up has included mowing for 3 months to allow the new grasses and forbs to get a good footing. Prescribed burns will be conducted on a regular basis to maintain viability of the new grasses and forbs as well as control of the invasion of non-native species. The Camp Ranger, certified in fire fighting and licensed by the State of Illinois as a pesticide applicator, will oversee and coordinate ongoing monitoring, evaluation and maintenance activities in the future.



Another view of the controlled burn



Jan Carlson and Jerre Henriksen review the prairie restoration site in late summer, 2007

This project positively impacts the county by adding both dedicated green space and an additional site with native habitat. Because the property is adjacent to the Big Rock Forest Preserve, the added prairie acreage also creates a large expanse of open space in one area. Camp Dean is located within easy access to several expanding population centers which will be of value as the number of people in the area grows.



Campers enjoy their surroundings at Camp Dean

The over 1,000 girls who participated in residential and day camp at Camp Dean during the summer of 2007 benefited from the excellence of the natural habitat. Amidst the friendship, adventure, laughter, and fun, nature was there in all its splendor – woodlands, creek, wetlands, pond, and finally prairie. Being able to play and live in nature speaks more clearly than lectures. Repeated studies indicate the most frequently cited influence for environmental activism is childhood experience of natural, rural or other pristine habitats.

Campers taking advantage of the camp on the weekends throughout the year are able to see nature change through the seasons. Troops have the opportunity to access the property every weekend, and all visitors to the camp will benefit from seeing and understanding what environment is natural to our state.

The Girl Scouts – Fox Valley Council is currently working with the Mighty Acorns program. Mighty Acorns involves leading 4th - 6th graders in the exploration of natural areas, hands-on stewardship projects, and other direct experiences in a natural area. There is also a group of middle school and high school age girls who are trained facilitators of the Mighty Acorn program. Using the Mighty Acorn program they will be teaching younger girls.



Girls experience Camp Dean

Future plans include building the prairie into a self-sustaining seed bank that is pleasing to the eye and varied in plant species. They eventually plan to construct a trail through the area with signage to identify plants along the trail.

The mission of Girl Scouting is to build girls of courage, confidence, and character who make the world a better place. Girl Scout Law includes the responsibility to use resources wisely. As Girl Scouts – Fox Valley Council puts into practice the Girl Scout Law by respecting and valuing the lands of Camp Dean, the council leadership is also modeling the type of behavior that helps girls grow into strong leaders.

Kane County is proud to partner with the Girl Scouts – Fox Valley Council on such a valuable environmental project as this prairie restoration. Further we are delighted to see this organization educate and promote a sense of environmental stewardship in future generations.

More information about the Girl Scouts – Fox Valley Council can be found at www.fvgsc.org
More information on the Kane County Riverboat Fund Program can be found at www.countyofkane.org/Pages/RiverboatFundProgram.aspx