

Ranger Report 2006

First of all, I would like to thank the Friends of Hoyt Park for affording me the opportunity to serve as their seasonal ranger. My overall experience has been both interesting and rewarding. It was a genuine pleasure to work with all of the volunteers.

For the past twelve weeks I have had the pleasure of working throughout the park on various tasks. A majority of my time has been spent on the removal of invasive species both manually and chemically. These species include but are not limited to buckthorn, honeysuckle, dames rocket, garlic mustard, and Japanese hedge parsley. The next most time consuming task has been general trail maintenance. This has included picking up litter, pruning along the trail edges, clearing debris from the trails and in particular the rain bars, and routinely walking all trails a few times a week. As this summer has been a rather stormy one, I have also had to spend some substantial time cleaning up after severe storms. In the past two weeks alone, I have spent entire days removing fallen trees and debris from trails and repairing washed out areas.

Throughout the summer I have focused my efforts in specific areas. One such area is bordered by the playground, the bluff, and the large opened area. Working, as was suggested from better to worse, I have expanded upon the area previously cleared of honeysuckle, buckthorn, and box elders. I have also removed all dames rocket and Japanese hedge parsley from the area. I fear that the area is primed for an invasion of Japanese hedge parsley as I have already removed a half dozen stands this summer alone. In light of this, it is imperative that the area be walked once every couple weeks or so. There was no garlic mustard in the area except for along the very top of the bluff. I would suggest that future expansion of the area cleared from buckthorn and honeysuckle follow the paved path up to the parking lot. I have already cleared this area of dames rocket and all second year garlic mustard.

Another area of emphasis has been the Ready Prairie. The most pressing issue in the prairie is the reed canary grass which is encroaching along the base of the bluff. Herbicide would be desired, however, if this is not possible in the future then topping and weed-whacking are to be continued. Once the grass began to flower I topped, then weed-whacked the entire stand. A month later I went back and weed-whacked the stand one more time to hopefully ensure that no seed is produced. Other concerns in the prairie near the reed canary grass are dames rocket and burdock. I dug the burdock and pulled the dames rocket that was present. Future work in the prairie should involve expanding upon the area cleared of buckthorn and honeysuckle by the July work party. This should also include removing dames rocket from the outlying area. Within the prairie itself, non-native saint john's wart and queen Ann's lace removal is a priority. There is also a vetch present that I could not identify.

Another area which I have spent a substantial amount of time in has been the overlook. A more detailed account and general plan of attack is attached to this report.

One species which I believe is important to address is garlic mustard. I have spent some substantial time pulling and bagging the second year plants both within the park, as well as on private property along the fence line that follows DuRose Terrace. I have also applied herbicide to the first year plants in some areas. These areas include: The park property along the DuRose fence line, the hills below the bluff overlooking Bluff Street, the wooded area behind Hoyt School, and the hillside below Roy's shelter leading down towards

the prairie. The prime concern with garlic mustard is the fact that many plants are growing out from the exposed rock wall of the bluff. These plants are in an area that can only be reached by a cherry picker or similar means. My suggestion would be to notify the city and hope that they are able to send someone with the proper equipment.

I have also spent some time weed-whacking areas that are considered low-mow, but truly should not be. These areas include: Around all fireplaces, open areas near Roy's shelter, the upper picnic area, the edge of the large mowed area, and the grass foot paths. Most areas have been weed-whacked two or three times depending on ground cover and frequency of usage.

As this summer has been particularly bad concerning severe weather, I have had to deal with the repair of trails due to wash outs. As I am limited to the equipment that I have, this has been a time consuming process. In fact a few weeks ago, I installed a rain bar on the foot path that runs across the top of the bluff. Last week the path was rutted with washouts to the extent that the rain bar that was in place was itself washed down the hill. I have no resources to repair this with, but have relayed this to the city. This situation illustrates something that was often frustrating for me this summer. As I am in the park almost every day, I am immediately aware of new issues that arise. If I cannot personally remedy these issues and must relay them to the city, it appears to take an unnecessarily long time to address these issues. Concerning the wash outs, I requested that some gravel be dumped in the park on one occasion. It took three weeks for this to be done.

Other examples of similar situations include the brush piles which have been steadily growing now for the past month and a half. I have made my supervisor aware of them, and have even witnessed him pass this information on to the proper individuals. As with any budget-crunched municipality, I am aware that people and resources are often stretched to the maximum. However, when these tasks, including the removal of fallen trees were not dealt with promptly, I had to spend some substantial time getting the jobs done with essentially inferior equipment. I believe this is somewhat a communication issue, and would suggest that next year the ranger be equipped with a city radio.

My overall experience with the Friends of Hoyt Park has been rather pleasant. I have nothing but positive things to say about the individuals who I have had the pleasure of working with. If I had any criticism, it would be that as a collective, the Friends are too ambitious. That said, it has been refreshing to talk with some of them who have seen the park change through the years. I look forward to returning to Hoyt Park years from now to see how it has evolved. With the time and effort put forth by the Friends, I have no doubt that it will continue to improve.

Thank you all again,

Michael Johnson

7/28/06

Overlook Plan

Beginning in the summer of 2006, remove all woody and herbaceous species from the hillside moving from the overlook down towards the fence. As areas are cleared, herbicide stumps and foliage as necessary. Once large enough areas are cleared, cover them with tarps. In the fall of 2006 seed into the areas to the Southwest of the rock wall. In the spring of 2007 follow up with a second seeding of the area to the North and Northeast of the rock wall. Depending upon the greater success rate, continue seeding in the following years in either fall or spring. As areas are seeded, annual Spring burns should be conducted as routine maintenance. As the prairie area expands, allot room for footpaths along the fence line as well as along the rock wall. The base of the rock wall is a possible location for some benches and a garbage can or two. As far as what to use for seed one suggestion is a tall grass mix. Prairie Moon Nursery out of Winona, Minnesota has a mix which is specific to the Madison area climate. The mix is 50% grass 50% forbs, a majority of which is Big Bluestem, Indian Grass, and Canada Wild Rye. A complete species list can be found online at www.prairiemoon.com. The price is reasonable at \$79.00 for an eighth of an acre, or \$138.00 for a quarter. As with any prairie area, maintenance would involve the removal of woody species etc. In this specific location, the wooded area to the West and Southwest is a concern. The area is dominated by buckthorn. Once the prairie is established, the next step would be to eliminate the buckthorn in that area. Any other maintenance issues will arise as the project takes shape. Although a specific time frame does not exist, an optimistic one would be three years.