

**Natural History Survey and CYCLE
Creation of a Prairie: A Final Report**
Michael Jeffords, Ruth Green, Susan Post, and William Handel

The Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS) engaged in an exciting educational program with a very special group of students called The Whiz Kids. These students are part of a unique educational program called CYCLE, Community Youth Creative Learning Experience. This organization is based in Chicago and supports young learners from the Cabrini-Green community, elementary through college, through tutoring, mentoring and scholarship assistance. CYCLE also reaches out to the families through adult education and after school child care programs.

The INHS worked with CYCLE to assist them in planting a prairie reconstruction. A Chicago YMCA donated approximately one-half acre of land near their facility for this project. The INHS oversaw the plant propagation, plant culture, site preparation, and site planting. This is an educational project for these inner city students, staff, parents and volunteers. These students were exposed to the significance of native tallgrass prairie species and created a prairie reconstruction.

Most all seeds, plants and rootstocks were donated for this project from Grand Prairie Friends of Illinois (GPF), several Midwest nurseries, and from the State Tree Nursery. Seeding and transplanting labor was provided by INHS staff, the CYCLE and YMCA students, staff, volunteers and parents. Transportation to Champaign (for initial planting) and meals for students, staff and volunteers were paid for by the CYCLE program.

The project has met all of its proposed goals:

- To provide hands-on plant science experience to inner city students.
- To acquaint these students on the importance of native species and the unique habitats found in Illinois.
- To inform these students as to what plants need to grow.
- To provide a long-term learning laboratory for these students to learn more about plant growth and development (photosynthesis, pollination, seed dispersal), insects (pollinators), ecosystems and habitats.
- To teach these students about Illinois' natural heritage.
- To esthetically improve their urban environment.
- To provide these students the opportunity to share the seeds from these plants with their local community, thus sustaining Illinois' native species.

CYCLE will manage the site with guidance from the INHS and the assistance of the Whiz Kids, YMCA staff, volunteers, and the Chicago Fire Department.