

**Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund
Large Project
Grant #13-L02W for *Earth Day in the Parks*
Final Report**

**Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Division of Education
One Natural Resources Way
Springfield, IL 62702**

Sixteen Illinois state parks hosted 19 *Earth Day in the Parks* events during April and May 2013. A total of 44 teacher applications were received for the events. The 1,198 participants included 941 students, 198 teachers/parents/volunteers and 59 staff members of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). Participating parks were Argyle Lake State Park, Beall Woods State Park (two events), Cache River State Natural Area, Eldon Hazlet State Park, Ferne Clyffe State Park, Fort Massac State Park, Giant City State Park, IDNR Headquarters (two events), Jim Edgar Panther Creek State Fish and Wildlife Area, Lincoln Trail State Park, Mermet Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area, Pere Marquette State Park (two events), Pyramid State Park, Volo Bog State Natural Area, Weldon Springs State Park and William Powers State Recreation Area. Projects included removing invasive exotic plant species, installing pollinator gardens, transplanting redbud trees, building and installing bird-feeding stations and planting native wildflowers and grasses to develop new or enhance existing prairie habitat.

More than 10,400 native plants and thousands of native plant seeds were planted by the participants. A few plants were purchased, but the majority of them were raised for the events through cooperative agreements with Illinois Valley Community College in Oglesby, Kishwaukee College in Malta, Robinson Correctional Center in Robinson, Western Illinois Correctional Center in Mt. Sterling, Illinois Valley Correctional Center in Canton and Vandalia Correctional Center in Vandalia. Plants were delivered to the event sites by staff from the IDNR Office of Strategic Services and Division of Natural Heritage. Some plants and seeds were also obtained from the IDNR Mason City Nursery.

Two events received publicity through local media (three newspapers and one TV station, also posted on Web site). Snacks and other assistance were provided by the Friends group at several parks.

IDNR site coordinators and participating teachers were each asked to complete an evaluation through the IDNR Survey Monkey site. Two IDNR site coordinators (13 percent) completed the form. Eleven teachers (27 percent) completed the evaluation. The responses for both groups are included at the end of this report. The responses were very positive from both groups.

Funds for the project were provided as follows.

1. Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund Grant - \$4,000.00

Red Buffalo Nursery - \$170.00 – native plants for use at Eldon Hazlet State Park, Carlyle

Aviston Lumber Company - \$259.98 – drills for digging holes to plant in for use at Eldon Hazlet State Park, Carlyle

Krajec Landscaping - \$392.00 - native plants for Beall Woods State Park, Mt. Carmel

Earthskin Nursery - \$248.95 – native plant seeds for Beall Woods State Park, Mt. Carmel

Vienna Nursery - \$1,435.12 – native plants for Cache River State Natural Area, Cypress

Rusty's Home Center - \$580.25 – edging, fertilizer and mulch for Mermet Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area, Belknap

Red Buffalo Nursery - \$96.00 – native plants for Volo Bog State Natural Area, Ingleside
Genesis Nursery - \$385.98 – native plants for Volo Bog State Natural Area, Ingleside
Partridge Landscaping - \$45.00 – mulch for Cache River State Natural Area, Cypress
There is \$386.72 remaining from the grant with \$3,613.28 spent from the grant award.

2. IDNR Division of Education Expenditures = \$15,624.42, not including staff time
Total Event Expenditures = \$19,237.70, not including staff time

Site Staff Evaluation

Each participating state park coordinator for the *Earth Day in the Parks* event was asked to complete a survey. Responses were through the IDNR's Survey Monkey site and were anonymous. Two site staff completed the survey. Responses are listed below.

1. Were you pleased with the *Earth Day in the Parks* event at your site? Why or why not?

- a. Yes. Having so many young "hands on deck" allows us to accomplish so much in our restoration efforts.
- b. Yes. The park staff felt like the students, teachers and volunteers accomplished two major projects that will increase the plant diversity at the park, enhance wildlife habitat and increase awareness "educational aspect" of the importance of prairies to visitors.

2. Have you noticed any benefit to wildlife at the location where the *Earth Day in the Parks* activity was conducted? If yes, how was wildlife benefitted?

- a. Yes. As our ecosystems move toward a more native state, many animals from insects to birds will benefit.
- b. Deer have been snacking in the prairie, numerous insects are pollinating and feeding on nectar, rabbits are hiding and eating grasses/foilage, and a covey of quail is using the area for cover.

3. Do you conduct any other educational programming at your site?

- a. Yes. We provide a guided tour of Volo Bog, an Illinois Nature Preserve and National Natural Landmark for the participating students. Our site is primarily Education and Preservation in focus and we offer EE programs year round to all ages (preK to senior citizens).
- b. Yes, educational programs are scheduled throughout the year.

4. What could we do to improve the *Earth Day in the Parks* program?

- a. It works very well for us.
- b. The staff at Springfield is very helpful in preparation for the event. Thank you for all that you do and for making this program possible.

5. Will you be willing to participate in *Earth Day in the Parks* again in 2013?

- a. Yes. We will be establishing a Prairie Demonstration Garden at McHenry Dam, a high-traffic area that will get lots of visibility.
- b. Definitely!

Teacher Evaluation

Each participating teacher was asked to complete a survey. Responses were through the IDNR's Survey Monkey site and were anonymous. Eleven teachers completed the survey. Responses are listed below.

1. Why did you want your class to participate in this *Earth Day in the Parks* event?

- a. I want my students to develop a love of nature and a passion for keeping the planet beautiful. I want them to know it is within all of our reach to protect the earth for future generations.
- b. I wanted my class to participate in an Earth Day event to show them that we are to be stewards of the earth that God gave us and give them an opportunity to take care of a little piece of it.
- c. For the community service experience and to gain a sense of stewardship for a local park.
- d. I wanted my Botany class to have an opportunity to volunteer at a park.
- e. Part of the science unit plant biology and for nature appreciation.
- f. We are the school environmental club. They are very interested in actively participating to help with the local environment.
- g. My Environmental Club students look forward to the chance to get outside and feel like they have done something “concrete” for the environment. Most of the things we do you can’t see the results of so easily.
- h. My class has implemented a recycling program at school and we have been looking for more ways to help the environment.
- i. To provide community service and stewardship as well as work hard while enjoying themselves in physical activity.
- j. To have the opportunity to learn outside the classroom and about interesting things.
- k. I wanted the students to be able to practice land stewardship and be able to be outdoors.

2. Were your expectations for the event met? Please explain.

- a. Yes. I have done Earth Day in the Parks for four years. My students and I always have a great time. The park employees want to educate the kids on what they do.
- b. Yes, the students were allowed to get out of their comfort zones and try something new.
- c. Yes. My students enjoyed the day and said it was their best field trip.
- d. Absolutely.
- e. It will be a memorable activity for my students. The hands-on experience was irreplaceable.
- f. Yes they were. The plantings were also accompanied with an educational piece about local prairie plants and a walk through the bog.
- g. Yes – create directions, all the equipment we need, we had enough time to do more planting if more had been available.
- h. Yes, we were put right to work, and everything was prepared for us to help.
- i. Yes and above – we always enjoy working with Argyle. The staff is very professional and friendly.
- j. Yes, the event is well-organized and enjoyable.
- k. I was hoping the students would be able to do more while we were at the park. We planted trees but the holes had already been dug, so all my students were able to do was put the tree in and cover it with dirt.

3. What could we have done to make this event better for your students?

- a. Nothing, really. I think the class had a great experience. We always go on a nature walk after we help! This year we saw a mother goose with her babies! How cool.
- b. Explain a little more the equipment that would be used and the more detail of the work they would be doing so that I could prepare them more for the experience.
- c. Nothing really. We did what we expected to do. In the past we did have lunch provided for us but that is not necessary.
- d. I felt everything was fine.
- e. More content information on science from the horticulturist to get little background information on the project would’ve been beneficial.
- f. No suggestions.

- g. Nothing.
- h. The day went smoothly. I can't think of any changes.
- i. We cannot think of anything. It has always been an excellent experience for us.
- j. A whole hour is too long for lunch. Our students are used to eating in 20 minutes. 30 minutes would be better.
- k. It would have been better if there had been more for us to do.

4. Would you consider attending this event again next year at this or another Illinois Department of Natural Resources site?

- a. Yes! This field trip is the culminating activity for the year. I teach different units throughout the year on how our carbon footprint can and does affect the planet. We end it with Earth Day!
- b. Yes.
- c. Yes. This was my second time taking students to Earth Day in the Parks. Both times have been at Pere Marquette. I would consider going somewhere else, but this is what my students opted to do this year.
- d. Yes!
- e. We would definitely be interested.
- f. Definitely. We have come for the past two years and would be happy to participate again.
- g. Yes.
- h. Yes, we had a great time and definitely want to come back.
- i. Yes, we plan on applying again.
- j. Yes, as long as we can afford buses. Any grants for buses would be helpful.
- k. I would consider attending this event again.

5. How did you find out about *Earth Day in the Parks*?

- a. I heard Valerie talk at the Title I conference in Chicago several years ago and have applied ever since.
- b. Through my school administration.
- c. The IDNR Web site.
- d. The regular IDNR emails.
- e. I saw the advertisement for the event on the IDNR Web site.
- f. Not sure. But I think it may have been through a Volo Bog newsletter.
- g. This was the 5th or 6th year in a row we have participated. I think I originally heard about it through the ISTA list server.
- h. email from principal.
- i. The website the first year we applied and every year after we just applied because we enjoyed it so much.
- j. email
- k. Through an email sent by Valerie Keener

















