

The Conservation Foundation

Program Area:

Natural Areas Program

County:

LaSalle County

Grantee:

The Conservation Foundation

Grant Date:

January 2013, April 2014, May 2017

Grant Amount:

\$1,095,500

Location:

Ottawa, IL

In July 2013, The Conservation Foundation (TCF) purchased the 253-acre property along the Fox River with assistance from the Foundation and two other funders. TCF points out how the protection of the land started with a phone call from one of the land trust's individual members informing the group of a For Sale sign on the property. Another critical step was that the property had been previously identified as a priority in a conservation plan for the Lower Fox developed by a group of nonprofits and government agencies and supported by a Foundation planning grant.

As part of the project to protect Dayton Bluffs, TCF formed a creative partnership with the City of Ottawa to provide for public access on the site. Per the agreement between the two parties, the city leases the land from TCF and is in charge of providing for public access and security. The nonprofit land trust remains in charge of caring for the natural habitat at the site.

After the purchase, TCF started clearing invasive plants from 45 acres of the forest and began prairie restoration. Later in 2014, the Foundation awarded TCF a grant under its newly developed Community Stewardship Challenge Grant program to help the organization raise public support for additional restoration work at the site. Under the grant project, TCF held a restoration

workday for 500 employees of a local company, Fairmount Santrol, and raised funds to contract a crew of student workers to remove invasive species.

In 2015, the Friends of Dayton Bluffs volunteer group was created and the organizers and members continue to actively work on both habitat restoration projects and care for a historic pioneer cemetery at the site. To date, the “friends of” group has logged more than 5,000 hours and completed a variety of critical tasks, including seed collection and dispersal, training new volunteers in the use of restoration tools and techniques, and completing erosion control in ravine areas to prevent habitat degradation. After three years, the TCF and the Friends have cleared invasive species from 150 acres of woods and restored 90 acres of prairie.

Besides the expanse of its woodland stretching along the shores of the Fox River, Dayton Bluffs is unique because it is the home of two sites of historical significance: 14 Native American burial mounds dating from the Late Woodland Period (AD 600-1000) and the Daniels Family Pioneer Cemetery, both of which are accessible on foot.

What’s New With This Project? In May 2017, the site was opened to the public with over 150 people attending the public ceremony where the master plan for the site was unveiled. Plans for the site include a picnic shelter and tables, a nature playground, accessible family trails, and a kayak landing. The Friends of Dayton Bluffs will continue to hold monthly stewardship workdays at the preserve, which was enrolled in the Illinois Nature Preserves system as a Land and Water Reserve in 2014. The care of the preserve’s 90 acres of prairie and 150 acres of oak woodlands will be forever guided by a management plan approved by the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission.

The Conservation Foundation continues to work with its partners to protect additional sites that, like Dayton Bluffs, are identified in the Lower Fox River Conservation Plan as a priority for protection for their natural resource values.



The property runs for 6,000 feet along the Fox River.





A mature oak tree rises over the edge of the 90-acre prairie.



The prairie and treeline put on a beautiful fall color show.