



Reduced Mowing Saves Funds and Improves Natural Resources

Project Description

In 2004, a mowing reduction plan was developed by Whetstone Park in Columbus, Ohio, to address the budget cuts resulting from a severe economic downturn in central Ohio. Mowing acres were reduced by 40 percent, which considerably reduced the department's grounds maintenance costs and at the same time yielded significant environmental benefits.

All regional, community, and neighborhood parks were evaluated and categorized by level of use and development as well as the conservation of natural resources and wildlife habitat. Vegetative buffers were established to protect reservoir shorelines and other waterways, including rivulets and even drainage ditches. Grassland areas were expanded to accommodate ground-nesting bird species, such as by expanding habitat for field sparrow, bobolink, and other grassland-nesting species.

Twelve previously mowed areas, including embankments, were planted with native wildflowers and deep-rooted grasses. Although there was a public education campaign developed to support the new mowing plan, these practices were met with much public criticism. The agency followed with a marketing and education campaign promoting the environmental and economic benefits of the grounds maintenance plan and eventually received public support. When the wildflowers bloomed, park neighbors were taken with their beauty and other neighborhoods requested wildflowers in lieu of mowing.

Conservation Benefits Beyond Cost Savings

One of the best outcomes for conservation of the mowing reduction plan was the creation of the Whetstone Prairie within the boundaries of Whetstone

Park. Whetstone Park is an intensively used 300-acre urban oasis in the middle of densely populated neighborhoods in Columbus. A portion of the park that was used as an alternate soccer field, but was often too wet for play due to its proximity to the Olentangy River, was converted to a no-mow area. A five-acre area was planted with native species and established as Whetstone Prairie. The Wild Ones, a nonprofit organization that promotes native landscapes, offered to design, develop, and manage the prairie. Although this group is no longer officially involved in management of the prairie, volunteers known as Friends of the Prairie periodically remove invasive species such as thistle, work with the city to

conduct prescribed burns, and maintain the grass paths that weave through the prairie. Volunteer support has been critical throughout the life of this project because of reduced support from the park and recreation agency due to severe budget cuts.

The busy community center in Whetstone Park utilizes the prairie extensively for various purposes and it has become a valuable community nature resource for urban Columbus, Ohio.

For more information on how to reduce mowing and gain public support for new conservation objectives, contact: Elayna Grody, Water Protection Coordinator, City of Columbus Public Utilities (Ohio), 614.645.1721, EMGrody@Columbus.gov.



A previously mowed 5-acre section of Whetstone Park in Columbus, Ohio, was transformed into a demonstration prairie. The prairie requires little maintenance, protects an adjacent stream, and is a resource for teachers and students engaged in environmental education.