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19 ACRES OF OAK SAVANNA TO BE RESTORED AT TERRACE OAKS PARK

Project is Partnership Between City of Burnsville and Great River Greening

The City of Burnsville, along with Great River Greening, will soon be working to restore 19 acres of natural habitat and oak savanna at Terrace Oaks Park in Burnsville. The multi-year project will occur in the northwest corner of the park, which is one of the largest natural areas in the Burnsville park system. The project will include buckthorn removal, tree thinning and controlled burns.

Great River Greening is a local nonprofit working to secure the legacy of Minnesota land and water through community-based restoration, stewardship and partnerships. This partnership will help bring in $76,000 in grant funding from the Minnesota Outdoor Heritage Fund for the project.

"Restoring the savanna will require long-term land management," said Burnsville Natural Resources Technician Caleb Ashling. "This will start with Great River Greening removing the overgrowth of trees currently choking out the oaks, a controlled burn, and then seeding to increase native plant diversity."

"The aim is to return this portion of Terrace Oaks to the oak savanna it once was, which is so beneficial to wildlife, water quality and views," said Steve Thomforde, restoration ecologist for Great River Greening .

Benefits of an Oak Savanna

Until approximately 60 years ago, Terrace Oaks Park was predominantly an oak savanna. Oak savannas are characterized by widely spaced oaks with a diverse, prairie-like understory of grasses and wildflowers. Oak savannas have become one of the rarest habitats in the state, largely due to changing land practices and invasion of buckthorn.

Land within Terrace Oaks was once grazed by wild animals, and later cattle, which helped keep the area open and reduced overcrowding of trees. Natural and man-made fires also maintained the area. Fires help savannas by stimulating plant growth while controlling weedy trees and shrubs. Oaks are fire-adapted and have thick, insulating bark that protects them during burns.

When fires and grazing no longer occurred at Terrace Oaks, the savanna area was rapidly invaded by box elder, buckthorn and other aggressive trees and shrubs. These invaders created dense shade, limiting the growth of understory plants, which lead to erosion and reduced habitat for wildlife. The invaders also competed with mature oaks and shaded out young oaks, which need sunlight to grow.

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Long-term Land Management
The first step of the Terrace Oaks restoration project will be to remove specific types of trees and shrubs, such as buckthorn and box elder, while leaving bur oaks and other typical savanna trees.

The tree removal will help return the area to an open-canopied oak savanna. Next, a controlled burn will stimulate understory vegetation growth, which will be followed by a seeding to increase native plant diversity. The hope is that the end product will be a beautiful oak savanna, benefitting both park visitors with its beauty, and wildlife with the more productive habitat.

However, this change will not happen overnight .The factors that led to the current conditions at the park occurred over many years, and it will take several more to restore the area. At the end of the grant partnership, the City will continue to maintain the savanna with periodic controlled burns.

The project area does not directly border private property. Work on the project will begin in winter of 2014 and continue until 2017, or until all grant funds have been used. For more information contact Caleb Ashling, Natural Resources Technician, at 952-895-4543 or caleb.ashling@ci.burnsville.mn.us.

About Great River Greening –
Great River Greening is a local conservation nonprofit that inspires, engages and leads communities in conserving and caring for the land and water that enriches our lives. They work side-by-side with 33,000 volunteers to improve, restore and care for Minnesota's natural heritage – 12,000 acres and counting. Their experienced, committed ecologists apply state-of-the-art practices to restoration projects, sharing skill and knowledge with landowners, volunteers, students and at-risk youth. They also help the next generation discover opportunities in environmental science with a confidence and connection to the world. Through active participation and learning by doing, volunteers become advocates with a deep connection to the land and water. For more information visit www.Greatrivergreening.org.

(High-Res Image Available Upon Request)

Cutline:
Oak trees in the savanna at Terrace Oaks Park show their fall colors.

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Terrace Oaks Park Project Area 0 0.125 0.25 Miles N