



City of Burnsville

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FIRST PHASE OF TERRACE OAKS PARK RESTORATION IN EFFECT

19 Acres of Oak Savanna Being Restored by City of Burnsville, Great River Greening

Passersby in Terrace Oaks Park may have noticed crews working on tree removal. The work is part of the City of Burnsville's plan to restore 19 acres of natural habitat and oak savanna in the park.

The first phase of the project includes removing an overgrowth of trees that are choking out the natural savanna – and will continue with buckthorn removal, additional tree thinning and controlled burns. The final step will be seeding the area to increase native plant diversity.

The multi-year project is taking place in the northwest corner of the park, which is one of the largest natural areas in the Burnsville park system. The City is working with Great River Greening, a local nonprofit dedicated to securing the legacy of Minnesota land and water. The project is supported by \$76,000 in grant funding from the Minnesota Outdoor Heritage Fund for the project.

Benefits of an Oak Savanna

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

Land within Terrace Oaks was once grazed by wild animals, and later cattle. Grazing, along with natural and man-made fires, helped keep the area open and reduced overcrowding of trees.

When fires and grazing no longer occurred, 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, competing with mature oaks and shading out young oaks.

Long-term Land Management

Removing specific types of trees and shrubs (such as buckthorn and box elder) while leaving bur oaks and other typical savanna trees 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.

The project area does not directly border private property. Work on the project began in winter 2014 and will 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.