

Hoyt Park Season Ending Report

Summer 2007

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This summer was quite productive in Hoyt park, and as the ranger, I have some suggestions on effective task management that will continue this trend and keep the park happy and healthy. Over the course of the season I devised several strategies for keeping the park both aesthetically pleasing, and accessible for a broad range of users. These strategies were arrived at through trial and error with limited supervision, and many of the benefits may not become apparent for seasons to come once several native plantings have come to fruition and invasive species control efforts have been continued and solidified. I have found that with dedicated hard work and input from the Friends of Hoyt Park, the ranger position can bring noticeable change in just one summer. In this report I will describe some of the strategies that worked for me, and some that did not, as well as indicate some suggestions for the future of Hoyt.

When I first arrived at Hoyt, nearly the entire park was overrun with invasive Dame's Rocket. Nearly all the wooded area not mowed by the city's crew above the bluff and continuing on to Regent street, was completely choked with this plant. I found that the best way to control it, though not always the easiest, was pulling it by hand. I began at the park's entrance and gradually moved down the hill until I reached the fence that lines the bluff. I estimate that I removed between 40-50 bags of Dames Rocket and the occasional Garlic Mustard plant in the first month that I was at Hoyt. The Dame's Rocket did not return this season because I pulled it all by the roots and was meticulous enough to get every plant from Regent street all the way to the bluff and to the east of the westernmost bluff stairs. I even went so far as to climb the bluff fence and remove patches that could easily seed areas I had already worked on. Dame's rocket is a biannual so it is unlikely that the infestation will be as severe next year though there most certainly will be some sprouting from the seedbank in the spring. In order to control this I would suggest that next season, and in subsequent seasons this area is cleared the same way until the seed bank is adequately depleted. This goes for any Garlic Mustard that comes back as well. This may be a several year long struggle as the seed of both plants is very prolific and may take some time to deplete. The benefits of all this hard work was apparent immediately, as native plants began to fill in the cleared area and a more natural balance was restored for at least this summer's growing season.

The other invasive species that I attempted to control above the bluff were Buckthorn and Honeysuckle. In a similar pattern to my attack on Dame's Rocket, I started at the top of the hill and worked down toward the bluff hand pulling all that I could by the roots. I avoided cutting at the crown because this tends to make the problem worse as the thicket that resprouts from the stump is generally more difficult to remove in the future. I was blessed with soft soil at the beginning of the season so with the help of the three weed wrenches I was able to remove nearly all of these invasive species by hand. Even after I received my pesticide certification, I still greatly preferred to remove these plants by the roots where possible. I would suggest a similar method of control in this area next season to keep a lid on the baby plants that will undoubtedly sprout from the seedbank. After all, buckthorn and honeysuckle are much easier to pull as juvenile plants than adult plants.

Graffiti is always a problem in the park, and I found out that it is much better to let the city know about it and control it than to try and tackle the problem by oneself.

Graffiti tends to show up on our sandstone shelters as well as the interpretive trail signs. Due to the porous nature of the sandstone shelters, I found it nearly impossible to remove the graffiti with any of the chemical graffiti remover that I tried. Though punctuality is not their specialty, the city, if given enough time, does the best job getting graffiti off sandstone so I tended to leave this up to them. The interpretive trail signs are sealed with a polymer that will melt with most of the solvents strong enough remove the graffiti. The best method for graffiti removal here is with a clean razorblade. Barring that, I would allow the city to deal with the defaced trail signs to prevent any further damage that may be caused by harsh chemical solvents. When they get around to it, the city does an excellent job of graffiti removal.

The task that most consistently occupied my time was garbage removal. Every day I would walk through parking lot and along all the main trails and picking up garbage. The areas that always seemed to need the most attention were the woody margin of the main parking lot and the area just below the overlook (likely because these are the areas to most conveniently toss a beer can from a car window). The shelters need occasional attention, but for the most part they stayed surprisingly tidy. Additionally, I would walk along the roadsides on Bluff and Regent streets to collect what accumulated there at least once a week. Poison Ivy is a very serious concern on Regent and Bluff, as this year it was the most common understory plant I picked garbage out of with the exception of Woodbine. I received many compliments about the park's cleanliness, and I would suggest this same garbage removal regimen in the future.

Trail maintenance was an ongoing challenge this season, and I spent a great deal of time trimming trail margins and pruning trees that sagged onto them. The pole pruner was a very helpful tool dealing with hard to reach areas, and plants encroaching from the woods were most effectively removed with the gas trimmer, and either the brush cutter attachment or the standard chord cutter. Heavy rains washed out the trails in several areas, and raking and adding new gravel where needed seemed to alleviate this problem, though care must be taken to ensure the most effective drainage. I found that the addition of waterbars in areas of high water flow can always improve drainage issues; and input from Russ Hefty as well as load of gravel strategically placed, really helped in completing these projects.

The amphitheatre was one of my pet projects this season. When I first arrived at Hoyt, the entire grassy area was overgrown with junk plants and the rocks were choked with weeds, and a mound of partially burned garbage and ash, there was no fire ring. At first I mowed this area with a the trimmer to clear it and later I got help from the city to keep it mowed and looking presentable. I used rocks that were strewn about on the amphitheater wall to make a fire ring, and I also hand pulled all the weeds covering the rock wall. During a period of a little over a month, I planted 15-20 ferns (thanks to Helen), 10-15 jack in the pulpits (thanks to the surrounding woods), as well as a whole coffee can full of Red Bainberries (thanks to Tim). The ferns are doing well, and the Jack in the Pulpits initially died back, but I expect them to sprout from bulbs in the spring of 2008. It will be interesting to see if the Bainberry reemerges in the spring as the amphitheater provides an excellent habitat. Periodically I would engage in what I liked to call "micro-weeding" along the rock face. This was a hands and knees attack on the creeping Charlie and Yellow Sorrel that was constantly resprouting from the dirt and competing with more desirable plants. I did this once every three weeks depending on

weather conditions, and this really seemed encouraged the plants to gain a foothold. I would love to see this area get equal attention in the future, especially since I noticed an upturn in the use of the adjacent shelter once my improvements were complete.

I spent a great deal of time in the prairie this season maintaining the trail and removing invasive species. At least once a month I used the weed trimmer to maintain the perimeter path. I also removed all the Dame's Rocket, Garlic Mustard and Queen Anne's Lace that I could find from the prairie itself, and then along the margin by way of hand pulling. Additionally, I removed woody plants such as Black Walnut, Boxelder Maple, Honeysuckle and Buckthorn by the root with the weed wrenches, as these junk trees/shrubs had begun to shade out desirable species. The prairie seems much healthier as a result. Plans to burn the prairie this fall will further improve its native character and encourage a natural balance of already established prairie plants. In the future I would love to see this trend continue to maintain our beautiful prairie, and possibly extend the boundary further outward with the removal of more junk trees, especially at the northern margin.

The overlook was the most ambitious project we (FHP and myself) undertook this season. With the help of dedicated volunteers we were able to clear nearly an acre of Buckthorn and Honeysuckle thickets. I subsequently treated the stumps in this area with Garlon 4 herbicide. This treatment seems to be working as the resprouts from these stumps have browned and with any luck have died down to the roots. I met with Tim, Russ, Helen and Nancy at the overlook during mid-August to devise a future plan for invasive species control, with the hope that this area can one day be transformed into more prairie. In addition to the work we have already done, we agreed that we should take the following actions to jumpstart this process. Till the soil and plant a mixture of fairly aggressive native prairie plants during the second half of October or into November (Russ suggested Woodland Sunflower). This will provide ground cover and hopefully discourage unwanted plants while allowing something native like Woodland Sunflower to be gradually replaced with more prairie species. During the winter, our massive brush piles can be burned without the threat of them getting out of hand, freeing up more open space. Once early summer roles around a foliar application of either Escort, or Garlon 4 herbicides should be used to control the resprouting. Resprouts will inevitably occur from the seedbank in addition to any invasives that were not fully killed during the original treatment. Herbicide application will occur while valued broadleaves are dormant and dead back to the crown. All this may require a follow up Escort/Garlon 4 treatment to be certain all invasive sprouts are killed. Hopefully, as the prairie matures, native grass (Indian grass etc.) will allow a burn, and a less labor intensive method of removing woody invasives.

I feel that the work I have done alone, and with the help of our volunteers, has set the course toward a better Hoyt park. I am eager to see how some of the projects I and others have initiated pan out in the future. Rangers in the coming years should not hesitate to ask for input from the Friends of Hoyt Park, especially as they set project priorities. FHP members were accommodating and eager to help me during my stint at the park. FHP was a wonderful resource to me, and their thoughtful suggestions, as well as their knowledge of native and non-native flora and fauna, greatly assisted me in accomplishing my goals in the park. I really enjoyed the board meetings for this reason. This has been one of the most rewarding jobs I have ever held because of my opportunity

to make a positive difference in the park that I have loved since I was a child. It has also allowed me to meet some wonderful, supportive, and selfless people in the FHP organization with whom I have formed lasting bonds. I can only hope that the ranger for next season can see through the buggy, sweaty, sometimes unpleasant work to appreciate what this job is really about. Making a difference in this unique and lovely urban park, which has few rivals, especially in the city of Madison has been a very rewarding experience for me. It has been a privilege to work in Hoyt this summer, and I hope that next season is equally productive. Let's keep on fighting the good fight!