

2015 Ranger Report

Jessica Bauer

Introduction:

In the 2015 Ranger Report, I, as the summer conservation ranger for Hoyt Park, will be discussing the projects completed, my experiences over the summer and any ideas or improvements I have for the future of Hoyt Park. From the months of May to September, I spent the weeks within the 26 acre park learning the terrain and species within, while discovering projects to further establish Hoyt as a popular Madison park. Also, in the Ranger Report I will discuss the park usage by the public and details about the invasive species found throughout Hoyt. Attached to the bottom of the report is a complete species list of wildflowers and plants found in the Parking Lot garden as well as the Fireplace Assessment.

Summer Agenda:

Throughout the summer, I acquired multiple projects from the Friends of Hoyt group. These projects included remodeling the kiosk, excavating unwanted or invasive plants from the Parking Lot Garden, an assessment on the remaining fourteen historic fireplaces located in Hoyt, plus two at Brittingham Park, and the removal of any and all types invasive species.

Beginning with the kiosk project, the information added last summer by the previous ranger was left, but there is now new information added. An idea I had for relaying the Friends of Hoyt Parks mission was to fill the kiosk with pictures and descriptions of both positive and negative plants seen throughout the park. The negative plants, or invasive species, to explain the mission of restoration and ridding our woodland areas of invasives that outcompete native plants. The positive plants, or native species, to educate people on the importance of these plants so natural areas, Hoyt Park specifically, can survive. Occupying the kiosk is a miniature tour of plants seen throughout Hoyt, including plants seen in the two prairies located in Hoyt, the overlook restoration prairie and the Ready Prairie, the Parking Lot Garden and invasive species that I as the ranger focused on. Each plant description consists of a short paragraph and a photo to help the public identify it and to explain the importance of why each was chosen. The Ready Prairie list contained Prairie Doc, Rosinweed, Compass Plant, Cup Plant, Butterfly Milkweed and the Purple and Pale Purple Coneflowers. The Parking Lot Garden list consisted of New England Aster, Common Milkweed, Wild Ginger, Solomon's Seal, and the Ostrich and Lady Ferns. Each plant listed in the Ready Prairie list along with the Parking Lot Garden list is native to Wisconsin and is important to many insects including bees, beetles and butterflies.

A third list placed in the kiosk is the Invasive Species list. This bulletin has the four main invasive plants I had worked on removing for the majority of the summer. Garlic mustard, Dame's Rocket, Honeysuckle and Buckthorn. Each description narrates the importance of why these species need to be removed from protected areas so these areas can be considered a "natural area" again. These plants and wildflowers named above are important to share with the public visiting Hoyt Park, mainly for awareness. Many people see plants and do not know if they are good or bad so these images and short descriptions are a simple way to share the Friends of Hoyt group's knowledge and mine to the public.

A handful of other wildflowers added to the kiosk are also native plants that are beautiful flowers that are frequently seen throughout the park. I had many people ask what type of flowers they were and if they were good or bad. These three plants are Common Spiderwort, seen in the Ready Prairie, Shooting Star, an early spring phenomenon and American Lopseed, which is seen all throughout Hoyt. Also, added to the kiosk is a key to identify Poison Ivy.

Unfortunately, this is seen quite commonly throughout Hoyt Park, particularly along main walking trails, and was also a frequented question. Hopefully, this key will help the public identify Poison Ivy.

Thanks to the help of a Friends of Hoyt member, Vaughan, an aluminum map was printed and added the kiosk. Vaughan and I took an afternoon to walk the park and mark anything worth checking out in the park. Thanks to his resources, he was able to print a map, color coded and everything! Along with the aluminum map Vaughan printed an aluminum version of a tree pamphlet of the different species of trees seen throughout Hoyt. Lastly, nearing the end of summer a University of Wisconsin graduate student sampled the soils of Madison, including Hoyt Park. The students report came back with a positive I.D. on Jumping Worms, an invasive worm first found in Wisconsin in 2013 that has now reached the soils of Madison. A negative impact they have on the area is the rate at which they decompose litter and leaves, causing the composition of the soil to change therefore changing the native understory and vegetation. Anything else found in the kiosk is previous information from the Parks Department in the City of Madison, Friends of Hoyt Park or the 2014 summer conservation ranger.

The Parking Lot Garden was the second project I took on with direction from Friends member Pamela Mather. Pamela had given me a blueprint of the species planted in the garden when it had been first put in over five years ago. However, over time some species had died off, while others had appeared and taken over. This garden comprised of many different species, mostly native, however one main species engulfed this garden. Day lily, a native lily that owns an aggressive root system that outcompetes many other root systems. Between removing the day lily, along with a multiple falls of Oak leaf litter, this garden project lasted approximately three weeks. I removed over twenty-five garbage bags of lilies and leaves. Also, within the weeks spent in the Parking Lot Garden, I came up with a list, to the best to my ability, of species found inside (attached at the end of the report).

The main mission of the Friends of Hoyt Park is to rid the park of invasive species to make the park a natural area once again. Therefore, the main agenda for the summer conservation ranger is to practice conservation by maintaining natural, native species in plants and trees. My first day was May 18th, so that day entailed touring the park with the Friends members, but beginning the next day until the second week in July I pulled Garlic Mustard and Dame's Rockets. The main areas of focus over that time were the ravine behind the Ready Prairie, the woods southeast of the Ready Prairie along the paved path and the woods south of the overlook. Throughout this time there were close to seventy-five garbage bags of Garlic Mustard and Dame's Rocket removed from the park.

In the beginning of July I received my pesticide certification to apply chemicals to roadsides and right-of-way areas. I primarily used the pesticide Pathfinder 2 on cut-stump Buckthorn. This required cutting down Buckthorn with a loppers or a saw, removing it from the area and applying pesticide to the remaining stump. I worked on this project with a Friends member Tim Kessinich who showed me how to properly apply these pesticides and provided them for me, along with the proper protective equipment. There were two areas I focused on for this project, the area next to the Ready Prairie where "work days" were held and the woods next to Owen Parkway overlook on the South side of Regent Street. The woodland hillside along Regent Street is about an acre long and had been completely taken over by Honeysuckle and Buckthorn, primarily Buckthorn. This is an area isolated from the rest of the woods of Hoyt, thus an easy work area that can act as a visual aid for a "before and after" Buckthorn removal. After a section was cleared of these invasives it was then replanted with native species. Tim Kessinich had been distributing these seeds to me all summer, such as Blue Cohosh, Spikenard, Jack-In-Pulpit, Solomon's Seal and Shooting Star. I removed a lot of these invasives, however, there is still many years left to rid Hoyt with these invasives.

The final project I took part in, working again with Pamela and Vaughan, was the fireplace assessment. Hoyt Park is home to fourteen historical fireplaces that were built in the 1930s during the new deal. These fireplaces were built with leftover stone from the two shelters and bathroom building on Hoyt property. Over time, and through many Wisconsin winters, these fireplaces have slowly deteriorated. In the early 2000s a stone mason had done minor repairs, but sadly the fireplaces have fallen back to a poorer state. I was asked to do an assessment of each of the fourteen fireplaces, along with two similar fireplaces in Brittingham Park. This assessment included their overall condition, what one fireplace had that may have been different on another, whether they contained an apron or spark arrestor, damage or graffiti to the stone and the size of each opening. After my initial assessment, we then had a fire marshal, Edwin Ruckriegel, and a historic stone mason, Jacob Arndt, assess the fireplaces from their professional standpoint (both reports attached). Finally, we met with Amy Scanlon, a preservation planner, who is working with the Friends group to make Hoyt Park and the fireplaces inside a known historical landmark in the nation. For my last two weeks of work at Hoyt Park, I took the time to dig in front of each fireplace, looking for an apron. Each fireplace, other than #8, #5 and possibly #4, has a rock apron consistent with the rocks the fireplaces are built from. These fireplaces are an amazing piece of history and show how old Hoyt Park is in the Madison area.

Other than the four projects keeping me busy for the summer I did basic maintenance throughout the day. Last summer a boy scout troop had built a bat house within the Ready Prairie. I kept an eye on the bat house throughout the summer, but had never seen any sign of bats using this house. I had done some research on bat houses and a reason they may not be using this house could be one of three reasons. Poor design, poor construction or poor placement. Perhaps it is one of these ideas, but it is a newer establishment and may take time for the bats to use it. This would be an idea for a future ranger to look into or research. Between trimming the walking trails, repairing the constant washouts and clearing and sweeping the three stone staircases I had a few interesting experiences. The second week of working in Hoyt, while picking Garlic Mustard along the paved path nearing the Ready Prairie, I had stumbled upon a tent containing a tarp, a tent, sleeping bag and a single slipper along with a few alcoholic bottles. I notified Laura Bauer and she had sent the West Side Parks Ranger out about a week later who had removed the tent immediately. The second event was a break in. After arriving at the park on a Tuesday morning, I walked up to my shop door to find the latch busted in half. Again, Laura had sent a repairman out to fix the door within an hour and there was never another problem. The culprit did not take anything from the shop other than a pair of broken, dirty sunglasses.

Park Usage:

The usage of the park is a main concern for a Friends group, especially when they are trying to raise awareness and money for this park. I was asked to keep a log of the usage and what parts of the park they were using. After the second week of June the MSCR used the Hoyt school next door for their summer school program. At lunch time, the younger kids would be in Hoyt for their lunch and recess and every morning a group of kids met in Hoyt to take a bus on their daily trips. This happened Monday through Thursdays up until three weeks before school began. Other than these students, a majority of the park use were people who "drove in" to use the park. This included kids using the basketball hoop or soccer field, parents bringing their children to the playground, smokers, runners, people eating lunch or walking their dogs. I would estimate about 90% of the park users drove a vehicle in. However, most of these people never left the main area to walk throughout Hoyt, to enjoy the Prairies or the hiking trails within. The people I met walking below the quarry or near the Ready Prairie or on the more remote trails

were the same people again and again and they were all people who lived along Hoyt. I met many neighbors and their dogs and got to know a few of them quite well. The most common use was by far the playground. I would see 1-15 different groups in one day. The second most use was dog walkers, many of which were great about cleaning up after their pets.

City:

After the break in and multiple incidents with people not using the restroom in the restrooms, a request to Laura Bauer was made about adding a sign to the lower shop indicating it is not for public use. A sign reading "authorized personnel only" will be added in the spring when the Hoyt bathrooms are reopened for the year 2016. Another request was made to Laura by a Friends member pertaining to the Ready Prairie. The City will do one pass with a tractor mower around the sides of the Ready Prairie to help when it comes time to exercise prescribed burns. The City will not, however, cut the paths along the prairie throughout the season, so that will have to be left to a volunteer. The small, open area below the playground in the direction of the service road will be cut once in the beginning of the spring season, but again will not be further maintained by the City. Again, below the playground, where the paved path ends, an area is continuing to wash out on the regular. Before winter, a load of larger rocks will be dropped in that washout to prevent further damage and provide future stability in that area. Another request sent to Laura was for the removal of the ball diamond backstop. This backstop is rarely used in Hoyt, however, the City will not remove it for fear of a future request to add a new one. Currently, the backstop is in relatively good shape and has not provided any inconvenience. Starting next spring the City Park Division and Forestry Department will be removing dead Oak trees in the woodlands between the old Hoyt school and the Main Shelter. Along with tree removal, a large, old Black Cherry tree was removed from Hoyt over the summer. Located in the open field near the Main Shelter, a Black Cherry tree had lost a limb in high winds. Forestry later came in and removed this historic tree. I was curious as to why they would remove the entire tree, so I asked around. The City had a tree assessor look at this Black Cherry and he deemed the tree a hazard because the branch removed was so large and would be more susceptible to future damage. This information was reported from Laura Bauer, the lead supervisor for the West Parks Division.

Ideas and Improvements:

Working alone in the park there were a handful of things I could not accomplish. One item in particular I did not get to was an old, wire fence near the overlook. When the restoration prairie was built a fence was taken down along the path, but never removed. The fence is wired around multiple trees and is dug deep into the ground. I did not have the proper tools or manpower to remove it alone. The eight Interpretive signs surrounding Hoyt trails have been weathered over time and are beginning to show it. Throughout the summer I had washed the interpretive signs twice and applied minor repairs. However, the Interpretive sign below the quarry, near the Dott Rock, has a stripped bolt and will not tighten. Again, I did not have the necessary tools to repair the sign. As mentioned earlier, an idea for a future ranger would be research on the boy scout bat house. Daily maintenance is also a thought for the new ranger to take action in. With the Parking Lot Garden revamped, the leaf litter should be removed yearly, along with the excavation of unwanted plants. Also, now that the fireplace aprons are open, they should remain that way to help the fireplace project. Basic maintenance is key, especially on items as fragile as the fireplaces.

The only idea or improvement I can think of for the Friends of Hoyt Park would be a more descriptive or direct plan for the ranger. When I first started I was not one hundred percent sure what I was supposed to be doing on a daily basis, but certain Friends members gave me ideas that I dove into. Not that there needs to be set instructions but ideas that can occupy them for when they are not pulling the invasives. I loved working in Hoyt Park. It is a beautiful park with a lot to offer and I am grateful for the opportunity to help bring such a historic piece of Madison back to life.

The next documents contain a species list from the Parking Lot Garden along with the Fireplace Assessment. The first part of the assessment is the initial report I did containing photos of each opening along with the recently dug aprons. Also attached are the reports from the fire marshall and the stone mason. The stone mason's notes have been written and pasted near photos of each by Vaughan. He did such a good job putting it together I left it because I could not have done any better. Thank you to the Friends of Hoyt Park and in particular Vaughan, Pamela and Tim!!!