



High Point Conservation Area

High Point Conservation Area is the home of the highest glaciated point in the county, at 1,189' above sea level. The overall topography of the site is gently sloping, hilly by Illinois standards, with moderately rugged slopes and knolls where clay, silt, pebbles and boulders were deposited from melting glaciers over 11,000 years ago.

This 253-acre oak and hickory savanna and ephemeral wetland, complex mix, located between Reese and Wright Roads in Alden Township, creates attractive habitat for many savanna and declining grassland bird species, such as the bobolink and meadowlark. Fifty-two species of songbirds, hawks and waterfowl have been spied within its boundaries, including sandhill cranes, snipes, wood ducks, killdeer, American woodcock, Baltimore Orioles and barred owls.

The area surrounding High Point contains about 70 vernal ponds, creating one of the highest concentrations of ephemeral wetlands in Illinois. These spring ponds provide critical breeding areas for amphibians and reptiles. These ponds cannot support fish because they dry up in the summer;



Painted turtle

instead they provide crucial habitat for frogs and salamanders that need water to reproduce, and grow through the tadpole phase. Without fish to prey on them, these amphibians thrive.

Gracing the woodland floor and restored sedge meadow areas, 108 native plant species thrive including Marsh phlox, Turk's cap lily, downy gentian, Solomon's seal, May apple and wild bergamot, geranium, sweet potato and strawberry.



Turk's cap lily



Cedar waxwing

Protecting the Land

In 2006, the District purchased 203 acres in the area. In 2007, another acquisition enlarged the site by 49 acres. Restoration work began almost immediately; removing dense buckthorn, garlic mustard, and box elders, making way for native wildflowers seeds which lay dormant on the woodland floor.



Buckeye butterfly

Bob Williams
Dedication & Woodland Hike
Saturday, May 7, 10:00-11:30 a.m.
10250 Reese Road, Harvard

In July 2008, staff also sowed 118 acres of former agricultural fields with prairie seed.

The impetus to protect this property was enhanced by the dedication of the surrounding landowners to conservation. Over the last seven years, neighbors who live within a five-mile radius have committed half of their 800 private acres to restoration. Additionally, 60 acres of private lands adjacent the site are being permanently protected through conservation easements with the assistance of the Land Conservancy of McHenry County, another 60-acre tract has received a state Land and Water Reserve dedication, and two additional properties have been designated as Illinois State Natural Area Inventory sites.

Site Improvements

High Point Conservation Area provides hikers with a quiet respite from which to enjoy the outdoors. Roughly 1.25 miles of looped nature trails provide ample opportunity for visitors to appreciate the scenic views and observe wildlife in the woodlands and meadows. Future improvements may include additional nature trails and environmental education programs.



Green Since 1971— Best Management Practices

by Amy Peters, Planning and Development Manager

Best Management Practices

A variety of techniques and materials are used to address stormwater runoff and minimize impervious surfaces in favor of pervious surfaces — all conditional on a sites' specific characteristics:

Bio-retention Areas— To help manage stormwater that falls within parking lots and other hard surfaces, bio-retention areas are designed to collect, filter, and infiltrate small storm events; while larger storm events overflow into a storm sewer and are captured by a constructed wetland.

Rain Gardens— Planted with native plants, rain gardens are a type of bio-retention, as a depression in the ground. The roots of these plants then help filter the water that enters the garden thus improving the water quality.

Constructed Wetland— Functioning similar to a natural wetland, a man-made or constructed wetland captures water, filters sediment and slowly infiltrates water. A diverse plant palette and seasonal water level variations provide habitat within the constructed wetland. Emergent plants within the constructed wetland act as the cleansing station for the stormwater within. Microorganisms associated with these wetland plants aid in breaking down pollutants that are delivered from impervious surfaces. Examples of common wetland plants include Pickerel Weed and Blue Flag Iris.

Infiltration Trench— A BMP that reduces surface runoff is an infiltration trench which captures rainfall runoff in a gravel trench and allowing it to infiltrate in the soil below.

Level Spreader / Filter Strip— A level spreader converts concentrated pipe or channel flow into dispersed, low-velocity, sheet flow, allowing the runoff to be filtered and absorbed into the landscape within the filter strip.

Native Landscaping— When properly designed, installed and managed, native plants can create a diverse, living landscape of species that can sustain themselves and thrive in the unique temperature and moisture extremes typical of the Midwest. The environmental benefits include reduction of surface water runoff and downstream flooding, reduced soil erosion and the re-development of organic topsoil, increased groundwater recharge, enhanced regional air and water quality, restored wildlife habitat, and increased biological diversity of both plants and animals.

Pervious concrete— When a sidewalk is constructed with pervious concrete it reduces impervious surfaces and helps reduce runoff by allowing water to percolate directly through the profile and into the native soils beneath.

Porous Unit Paving— Porous pavers also allow runoff water to pass through, rather than off. These systems are constructed using interlocking pavers, pervious concrete, or pervious asphalt. They are extremely long lasting and flexible and can tolerate frost heave. Beneath the surface is a layer of open graded stone that serves as the structural base and temporary storage runoff.

Vegetated Swales— A swale will capture stormwater shed from entrance drives and other hard surfaces. Swales slow the flow of water, decrease the quantity, and improve the quality of the stormwater prior to entering a constructed wetland.

McHenry County Conservation District's approach to land development and management practices has always been to create sustainable landscapes in the most environmentally sensitive means possible. Since 1971, the District has recognized the critical connections between healthy ecosystems and human well-being.

Fast forward 40 years and the objectives then are the same today; address stormwater runoff generated by structures, pavements, and compacted areas within a site prior to it being discharged on the surrounding landscape; minimize impervious surfaces in favor of pervious surfaces, where stormwater can be infiltrated at the point of contact and stored in base layers where water can then percolate through to native soils below. These environmental design principles are what are now known as Best Management Practices (BMP's).

While, "Being Green" is not new, it is current and now is a perfect time to showcase the numerous techniques and sustainable design elements that were applied to reduce runoff volumes and velocities, prevent sedimentation, enhance treatment, and maximize infiltration of stormwater on new and retrofitted conservation areas. The Conservation District has several sites where BMP's can be viewed first hand:

- Lost Valley Visitor Center, Ringwood – Porous Unit Paving, Bio-retention Areas, Gravel Infiltration Trenches, Level Spreaders & Native Landscaping
- High Point, Harvard – Grass Paver
- HUM Trailhead Prospect Street, Marengo – Pervious Concrete
- Kishwaukee Headwaters, Woodstock - Pervious Concrete, Bio-retention Island, Constructed Wetland, Vegetated Swale, and Native Landscaping
- Lake in the Hills Fen, LITH – Rain Gardens
- North Branch, Richmond – Rain Garden and Porous Unit Paving
- Nippersink Canoe Base, Spring Grove – Porous Unit Paving
- Winding Creek, Hebron – Bio-retention Island

As designs and technologies continue to be evaluated and implemented, McHenry County Conservation District will continue to provide ecologically significant landscapes to the public that incorporate green infrastructure (BMP's) in combination with ecological restoration. In doing so, we ensure that newly proposed facilities and surrounding landscapes remain connected, healthy, and further protect the groundwater-based hydrological systems of McHenry County.