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Forest Preserves - turf grass + native wildflowers = pollinator habitat

GENEVA, IL — Newly created pollinator habitat will bloom across 22 acres in the Kane County forest preserves, thanks in part to a collaboration with ComEd, through their Green Region Program.

The Forest Preserve District of Kane County completed work on its “Pollinator Meadows across Kane County” project last December, but the impetus for the project first began in 2016. At that time, to increase efficiency and decrease carbon emissions, mowed areas were reduced in a number of preserves. However, by 2020, areas that were no longer mowed became dominated by Kentucky blue grass, and common weed species, such as Queen Anne’s lace and Canada thistle.

The District developed a plan to convert these previously mowed areas into pollinator habitat, and applied for a Green Region Program grant, as part of the project. ComEd Green Region Grant Program awards up to \$10,000 for conservation projects based in Northern Illinois. The Pollinator Meadows project included chemically treating or mechanically removing weeds from 22 acres, across five preserves, and then enriching the soil with a pollinator-friendly mix of native wildflower seeds.

“This work accomplishes two primary goals,” said Natural Resource Manager Patrick Chess. “The first goal is to increase pollinator habitat and native biodiversity county-wide. These kinds of small pollinator habitats can act as important stops for migratory pollinator species, as well as forage for local species. By spreading the work across several preserves, the hope is to aid in the creation of a functional corridor for migrating species like the Monarch Butterfly. The second goal of the project is to promote native species restoration and pollinator awareness,” he said.

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Tallgrass prairie plants were the focus of the restorations at LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserve in St. Charles and Gunnar Anderson Forest Preserve in Geneva. Fabyan Forest Preserve in Geneva and Tyler Creek Forest Preserve in Elgin received savanna mixes; and Brewster Creek Forest Preserve in St. Charles received a woodland mix.

“By converting turf to a native species community, the biodiversity of an area will greatly increase. Not only will the number of plant species present on site increase, but those species will provide greater habitat value. While pollinators are the highlight of the project, many non-pollinators will benefit too, including birds, small mammals and other insects. Plus, by improving the habitat aesthetically, all preserve users will benefit,” Chess said.

The project cost \$23,000. ComEd contributed a \$10,000 Green Region Program Grant in 2020, in support of the Pollinator Meadows project.

For more information on the ComEd Green Region Program, visit <https://openlands.org/get-involved/greenregion/>. For more information on Commonwealth Edison, visit <http://ComEd.com>.

For more information on the Forest Preserve District of Kane County, see <http://www.kaneforest.com> or search @forestpreserve on social media.

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