

a voice
for the natural
landscaping
movement



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Celebrating natives
plant and natural
landscapes
since 1979.

The Grapevine

By Maryann Whitman

Kentucky Native Plant Symposium

Portia Brown, Louisville Kentucky Chapter and secretary of the national Wild Ones Board of Directors, reports back from the Kentucky Native Plant Symposium that wild Ones Natural Landscapers was recognized favorably in several contexts. The symposium included federal, state, and local agencies as well as companies that are involved in some aspect of the use of native plants.

Portia says, "I came away from the symposium with a stronger sense of where I believe Wild Ones fits into the overall picture of environmental activities and organizations. There are many organizations working to preserve natural areas and to restore remnant populations of plants and ecological communities. There are also many organizations, largely governmental, that are having an impact on landowner practices. As Wild Ones grows into a truly national organization, our role in relation to these other organizations takes on new perspectives. While nature conservation (preservation of existing native plant communities in the wild) is core to [the survival of] native plants, restoration and establishment are practices that, when carried out within the context of ecoregions, have very significant positive impacts. Wild Ones can play an important role in educating the general public about environmentally sound practices in their own neighborhoods and how these practices relate to the larger picture. Wild Ones can serve as an important link between everyday people and the broader focus of more academic, agricultural, and horticultural organizations.

"The symposium concluded with a commitment to continue meeting quarterly to work together to promote the availability and use of local ecotype plant material, and to develop guidelines that all the participant organizations can agree on regarding ecologically sound practices in Kentucky. The scope of these guidelines will extend beyond Wild Ones mission per se; however, I am delighted that Wild Ones is at the table."

This is indeed exciting and satisfying to read.

Speaking of "preservation and restoration"...this from the Columbus (OH) Chapter

Sometimes wonderful things come about by sheer happenstance.

A strip of land only 50 feet wide but one mile long lies between a heavily used road and a railroad track in north-central Ohio. Because of its size and inaccessibility, it escaped the plow, the drainage tiles, and the pasturing of sheep, oxen, horses, and cattle, unlike most of the rest of the 200,000 acres of prairie/savanna that made up the Sandusky Plants. In 1978 the 10-acre strip was dedicated as a protected area on which the railroad agreed not to spray defoliant.

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But it wasn't until 1984 that Kensel Clutter started tending it and loving it. He came in to cut out the dogwoods and other interloper trees and weeds that would in days of yore (I've never been able to use this phrase quite this appropriately), have been killed periodically by fire. He watched as the dormant seed bank expressed itself, increasing the number of native species from 61 to nearly 80.

To help himself and others understand what it was that was being preserved, he research historical records, starting with the 1819 congressional surveyor's notes and maps, county tax assessment records, federal aerial photography (from as early as 1939), and topographic maps. His research included personal tours of back roads in the prairie area and visits to "witness trees" noted in 1819, to record what grew in the area in modern times. Armed with all this information, Kensel drew a map of the Sandusky Plains, detailing the extent of the prairie at the time of the original land surveys in 1819.

Seeds collected from this narrow strip of land, now known as the Claridon Prairie in Marion County, have been used to restore and establish other prairies around Ohio.

Here we have preservation, restoration, and historical recording to the ultimate degree. Thanks for the Columbus Chapter for bringing to our attention the story of Kensel Clutter which appeared in the August 2002 issue of Ohio Magazine.

Note: A "witness tree" was a tree used by early surveyors to mark a section corner. The surveyor blazed a witness tree and, in his notebook, noted its position relative to the corner. Some of these trees are still standing, more than 200 years later; occasionally, one finds their offspring.

Apropos of thoughts of preservation and restoration...

A paper published in the August 9, 2002 issue of the peer-reviewed journal Science informs us that the

economic value of wild ecosystems far outweighs the value of converting these areas to cropland, housing, or other human uses.

The economic value of an ecosystem can be measured in terms of the "goods and services" that the ecosystem provides – including climate regulation, storm and flood protection, atmospheric carbon sinks, water filtration, soil formation, the sustainable harvest of plants and animals, and so on. Pricing these goods and services is difficult, since they include items that are not bought and sold as part of a market-driven, conventional economy. Economists assign values to non-marketed services using a variety of techniques, ranging from estimating the cost of replacing these services to assessing how much individuals and nations would be willing to pay for each ecosystem service.

In all 300 cases studied, the total economic value of the intact ecosystems ranged from 14 percent to almost 75 percent higher than the marketed benefits that came with conversion.

The researchers concluded that "Every year we continue to convert habitat, it's costing us \$250 billion over any profit that comes from development." They estimate that a network of global nature reserves would ensure the delivery of goods and services worth at least \$400 trillion more each year than the goods and services from their converted counterparts. This means the benefit to cost ratio is more than 100 to one in favor of conservation.

Lack of information about the economic worth of ecosystem services, the failure of markets to capture and value these services, and tax incentives and subsidies that encourage land conversion all contribute to continued habitat destruction, wrote the Science authors. "We have to keep track of our natural capital. We've been liquidating it and not including the costs in our calculations."

I feel like using that helpless expression of individuals finding themselves dumbstruck. "Duh."

Maryann is a member of the Oakland (MI) Chapter and the Journal's feature editor. To submit items, please contact Maryann at Wild Ones Journal, PO Box 231, Lake Orion, MI 48361 or featuresedit@wildones.org.