

Stewardship Network Notes

21 June 07

New Center

The Stewardship Network meets the second Tuesday of the month at Bruegger's Bagels on North University, UM--Ann Arbor Campus, from 7:30 to 8:30 AM. The same topic is repeated on the third Thursday of the month at The Nonprofit Enterprise at Work (NEW) Center, 1100 N. Main, Ann Arbor, from 12:00 to 1:00 PM.

Premeeting update on Bob Grese's 3-year-old green roof, the first in Ann Arbor:
Leaking required repair. The greenery was removed in 18" square pieces of thatch, which were set on the concrete below and watered while out of place. After the green roof was first planted, it was watered only twice while becoming established. Of the numerous species planted, only 2 or 3 failed to thrive under these shallow-root conditions. Roots were as deep/long as normal, but ran horizontally, thus the thatch.

Topic: Ecological Restoration

Faye Stoner, Washtenaw County Parks Naturalist

Bob Grese, Director, Matthaei Botanical Gardens and Nichols Arboretum

Jacqueline Courteau, Ecologist, Huron River Watershed Council

Summary

The Society for Ecological Restoration is turning away from the goal of reestablishing presettlement ecology. The current goal is to reestablish the historical trajectory of ecological stability and evolution by maintaining the dynamics of healthy and sustainable change.

Factors and implications in this change of goals

--Changes brought by population pressures and development have put the reestablishment of presettlement conditions beyond the resources of land stewards.

--Deer eat many rare species. Deer have increased from a presettlement 4-8 per square mile to 20+ per square mile, especially in parks. The reasons for this include an increase in area of their preferred woodland edge conditions (numerous small woods), an increase in quantity and increased stability of their food supply (suburban and farm gardens), and the disappearance of their presettlement predators. Debate continues among botanists, preservationists, the ASPCA, and hunters on the best methods of deer control: sharpshooters, birth control, hunting. Deer do help to control autumn olive and cottonwood; and deer fences result in almost immediate resurgence of species they had apparently eradicated.

--The stability of a given area influences its restoration goals. Reestablishment of oak barrens--an original or early transition phase--may require removal of native transitional species (like red maple, which changes soil chemistry) as well as of invasives.

--Too rapid restoration can open a habitat to greater population by invasives and native opportunistic species.

--Contemporary conditions are "unnatural" from the point of view of historical botanical conditions.

--New pests like gypsy moth are overriding soil type and weather as determinants of sustainable restoration.

--Global warming is an as-yet unstable and unpredictable influence on ecological conditions and species. A warmer drier Michigan would aid in the restoration of oak barrens.

--Social goals such as the reengagement of the population in nature and in ecological processes are supplanting the goal of botanical correctness.

--Restoring healthy and sustainable processes is supplanting the goal of maintenance of known historical species.

Recap

Social goals, financial resources, and site conditions are all more critical in ecological restoration than is the "museumification" of presettlement ecology.