



## Ottawa County Parks & Recreation Commission

Dear Neighbor,

You may have noticed the recent logging activity at Riley Trails Park. Because you have a strong interest in the property, the Ottawa County Parks and Recreation Commission (OCPRC) and staff would like to explain the events that led us to the decisions that we have made.

First, let us say that as park stewards, we love trees. *Decisions regarding the removal of trees are not something we take lightly.* When Ottawa County Parks took over Riley Trails, we recognized that the pine plantations were not viable, native ecosystems and not sustainable long-term. Due to a lack of thinning over the years, the trees were competing with each other and showing signs of stress.

In 2012, OCPRC enlisted a forester to transition the land to native forest. The hope was to extend the life of a portion of the pines and maintain as much of the park's character as possible in the short-term. The plan called for a third of the pine trees to be removed from areas of the park occupied by pine plantations. Unfortunately, by harvest time in fall 2012, many of the once stressed trees were now dying or dead. This was most likely a result of the extremely hot and dry weather in the summer of 2012. OCPRC decided to keep with the original plan harvesting only one third of the pines. Those dead and dying trees left after the harvest will serve as habitat for wildlife and educational purposes.

The red pines immediately west of the parking lot, however, were severely impacted, with 100% brown and dying. The difficult decision was made to remove all the red pine trees in this 8-10 acre area preventing hazards to our park users and avoiding higher removal costs in the future.

If you are upset by the harvest at Riley Trails, we can empathize with you. This stage of the logging process is unpleasant. Over time, the

additional light from removal of the pines will promote the growth of native trees and shrubs. To expedite this process, we will be working this spring and early summer to restore the area. The three main parts to this process are: cleaning up along designated trails; planting native trees, shrubs and wildflowers in the most impacted sites; and improving the trail system.

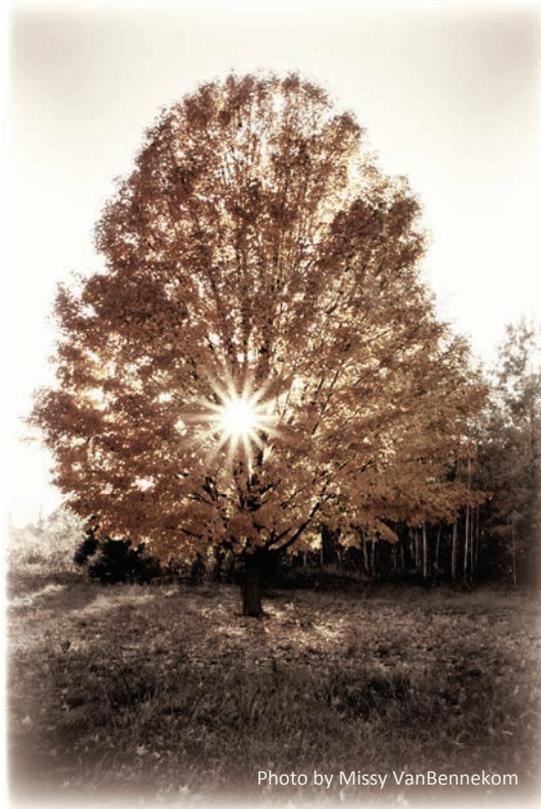
We hope this letter helps you understand our actions, and we hope you will enjoy watching as a greater diversity of plants and wildlife begin to grow and proliferate within the

park. Please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns at 616-738-4810 or email [mmanion@miottawa.org](mailto:mmanion@miottawa.org).

Sincerely,

Melanie Manion

Natural Resources Management Supervisor



# Riley Trails Restoration Plan

The severe heat and drought in the summer of 2012 had a significant effect on the already stressed red pine plantations at Riley Trails Park. One portion of park was impacted more than was documented in the forester's plan. This <8 acre area is highly visible to visitors of the park and neighbors. Even though this area would naturally restore itself with time, due to the location of the site, OCPRC staff feel that it is important to expedite the process.

This proposal is intended to meet the short-term need of improving aesthetics, while laying the foundation for an increase in diversity in the long-term. The four restoration zones, including the highly impacted site discussed above, are illustrated in the attached map.

## Restoration Zone 1- ~ 2 acres

This area was most impacted by the recent logging. It is estimated that less than 5 % of the area has trees or shrubs. Currently, there is a short grassland planting adjacent to this area along the pond.

### Plan

Plant this area with a 3-6 large trees, showy native wildflower plugs and a short grassland seed mix (with a high number of black eyed susans and other quick blooming wildflowers).



*First year-* A patchy dispersal of wildflowers and trees will create color and beauty this summer and fall. Potentially, some of the plugs will bloom as early as late spring.

*Years 2-10-* The native grassland seed mix will germinate and provide greater diversity and density.

*Years 10+-* A prescribed fire would maintain the savanna ecosystem. This would be aesthetically pleasing. Also, by creating a more mosaic landscape (with forest and open areas) there will more ecological niches for wildlife.

### Costs:

\$1800 for native seed mix (short grassland mix)

\$1000 for native wildflower plugs (760 plugs including lupine, butterflyweed, bee balm, sand coreopsis, showy goldenrod)

\$600 for 3 large sugar maples

\$0 3 large white pine trees from POC

### **Restoration Zone 2~3.5 acres**

This area is one of the most visible areas of the park because of its location near the parking lot. It is estimated that 20-40% of this area is covered in trees and shrubs.

#### **Plan**

Clean up evidence of logging, i.e. butt end logs, damaged trees. Allow the natural regeneration of the existing flora and seed bank to restore this area.



*First year-* Regularly monitor the area for invasive species such as, but not limited to, garlic mustard and honeysuckle. Monitor the area for germination of seed bank. Limit the growth of “weedy” species such as bramble and greenbriar along trail.

*Years 2-10-* Maintain annual monitoring and removal of invasive species. Reassess the need for plantings.

*Years 10+-* Manage this area for a native deciduous forest.

#### **Cost:**

Minimal cost of Stewardship Crew to monitor and remove invasive and “weedy” species with assistance from volunteers.

### **Restoration Zone 3~1.5 acres**

This is the primary landing site for the logging operation. This site was chosen because it was already highly disturbed and in need of restoration.

#### **Plan**

Restore this area using a budget grassland seed mix.

*First year-* Maintenance Staff will grade the area after the ground thaws. Because of the significant spotted knapweed density prior to the logging operation, the Stewardship Crew will need to herbicide the area after the initial germination of the seed bank. Repeat herbicide treatments two more times. Plant a budget pollinator mix in fall 2012.

*Year 2-10-* Regular monitoring and treatment of invasives such as spotted knapweed.

*Year 10+-* Allow this area to succeed to a native deciduous forest.

**Cost:**

\$500 for budget native pollinator mix

**Restoration Zone-Skid Trails** size to be determined

Most of the harvested areas of Riley Trails should regenerate quickly with the existing native understory and the seed bank. However, the skid trails, where the logging equipment regularly dragged transported harvested trees, are highly impacted. As such they will take longer to recover from the process.

**Plan**

Decisions involving the effort put into restoration of the skid trails should consider when the next thinning might occur at the site. Although the forester's original recommendation was to return in 10 years for additional thinning, he now recommends a second thinning occur sooner (possibly as early as 5 years) due to the severely stressed nature of the trees. Park staff acknowledges the trees are stressed but also recognizes the drought in 2012 was a unique occurrence and the trees may rebound. Park staff recommends the condition of the red pines at Riley Trails be monitored regularly and the potential for additional thinning and its impact on the health of the forest be weighed along with the negative aspects of logging impacts on the recreational use of the site. In consideration of the uncertain timeline for additional thinning, staff recommends the skid trails be planted for short-term aesthetic improvement because their appearance is an eyesore which negatively impacts the park visitor experience.

*First year*-Plant inexpensive native tree and shrub seedlings in the skid trails from the trail to 30' into the woods. Experiment with transplanting moderately sized trees from the site into this 30' buffer.

*Year 2-5*- No maintenance required. Monitor condition of red pines.

*Year 6-10*- After next harvest, plant larger trees in this 30' buffer. Depending on the success of the transplanting experiment, native trees and shrubs from onsite could be used in this stage.

**Costs:**

\$400 for 500 trees & shrubs

Staff time to transplant trees and shrubs.

**Total Cost: \$4300**

# Riley Trails Restoration Plan

## Legend



Restoration Area 1



Restoration Area 2



Restoration Area 3

