

## Natural Areas & Trails Crew 2006 Annual Report



Milwaukee County Department of Parks,  
Recreation, and Culture

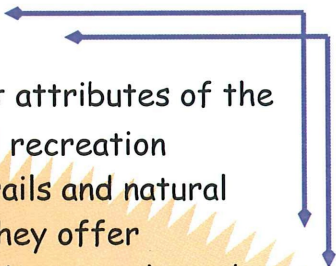
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**N**atural areas and trails are some of the best attributes of the Milwaukee County Park System. Providing traditional recreation opportunities is important, but Milwaukee County's trails and natural areas bring increased vitality to the Park System. They offer aesthetically pleasing settings that provide connectivity to parks and the local communities, not to mention all of the health benefits.

The 2006 Annual Report details several new key initiatives. Prescribed burns, new trail construction, bluff stabilization, extensive native plantings, invasive exotic plant control, as well as creating meaningful partnerships with Americorps and the Milwaukee Conservation Leadership Corps were among the priorities for the crew.

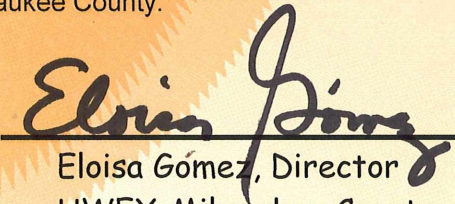
Invasive species are a threat to the quality of our natural areas and park spaces. Constant oversight and restoration efforts are needed to contain this threat. The 2006 Natural Areas and Trails Crew Annual Report will provide an overview of the work carried out in 2006. Much of this work was done in partnership with a variety of local community groups and parks friends groups.

These initiatives will continue into 2007 with the expansion of trail and natural area management throughout Milwaukee County. We look forward to continuing the working relationship between Milwaukee County Parks and the University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension-Milwaukee office.

We hope this report will provide you with interesting reading and knowledge of the quality of work being done on behalf of the people of Milwaukee County.



Sue Black, Director  
Milwaukee County  
Parks Department



Eloisa Gómez, Director  
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## Foreword

Welcome to the 2006 Natural Areas and Trails Crew Annual Report. In 2004 the Milwaukee County Parks Director, Sue Black, created the first-ever Natural Areas & Trails Crew. This Crew was charged with the maintenance and proper management of the Parks' extensive trail and natural area system. Since then "The Crew" has been very busy.

This report highlights some of the work that they have done and provides a sense of how fortunate Milwaukee County residents are to have such a wonderful resource right here in their own backyard. On any given day a park patron can experience everything from the highly urban setting of the Oak Leaf Trail through downtown Milwaukee to the isolation and tranquility of one of three designated State Natural Areas. And with nearly one-half of Parks' property being "undeveloped" the Natural Areas and Trails Crew has plenty of work to look forward to.

This document represents the combined efforts of numerous groups and citizens who share a similar vision; that being the protection, promotion, and prosperity of the County's "Emerald Necklace." This report is the culmination of a year's worth of work, but it represents the long-term commitment that the County has towards its trails and natural areas. With just a little help these areas can truly blossom and become the gems that they were always intended to be.

*"THERE ARE RISKS AND COSTS TO A PROGRAM OF ACTION. BUT THEY ARE FAR LESS THAN THE LONG-RANGE RISKS AND COSTS OF COMFORTABLE INACTION. "*

*-JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY*

## Introduction

Welcome to the 2006 Annual Report of the Milwaukee County Parks Natural Areas & Trails Crew (the Crew)! 2006 was a year of growth for the Crew as they continued to expand the scope of their work, while holding to the core of their mission. Invasive species management, native plantings, effective monitoring, and promoting partnerships remain the focus of the Crew's activities. With that in mind, this document is broken down into several parts. First, the Executive Summary highlights the year's major accomplishments and how they fit into these four broad headings. This is followed by a park by park break down of the Crew's activities. Part III will take an in-depth look at a specific project on which the Crew spent a significant amount of time. I hope you will find this document both informative and useful. At the very least it can fill in 15 minutes of a very slow day. Thanks for reading!

## Part I

### Executive Summary

In 2006 the Crew expanded its footprint countywide by performing work in over 26 parks. Collaboration, as always, was key to the Crew's performance. In every major project, the Crew worked closely with one of a variety of volunteer groups, concerned citizens, community or "Friends" groups. Below is an overview of the work performed by the Crew this past year. As always, the Crew's primary responsibility is the stewardship, protection, maintenance and restoration of the County's natural areas and trails. These responsibilities can be broken down into four broad categories.

#### 1) Invasive species control

Invasive, non-native plant species remain the number one threat to the County's natural areas. These plants have a detrimental impact on everything from biodiversity to public safety. Protecting high quality natural areas from unwanted plant invasions is at the

heart of the Crew's work. There is no threat more damaging to the County's natural areas (aside from their outright sale and development) than the growth and spread of these insidious plants and animals.

Late in the year the Crew discovered a new, and potentially very damaging, invasive vine in Grant Park. This vine, called Porcelainberry (*Ampelopsis brevipedunculata*), is adept at climbing, smothering, and ultimately killing even the tallest trees. It is an extremely aggressive invader and can grow up to 30 feet a year. Fortunately, the infestation is fairly small, which should help with the Crew's efforts to completely eradicate this plant. Additionally, the Crew continued its garlic mustard eradication work in the Seven Bridges area of Grant Park. Supported monetarily by the Friends of Grant Park, this is the second year of this joint venture and initial results are very promising. Early returns indicate that the Crew's treatments appear to be attacking the seed bank, which bodes well for the success of this eradication effort.

PHOTO 1: SCA WORK @ ESTABROOK.



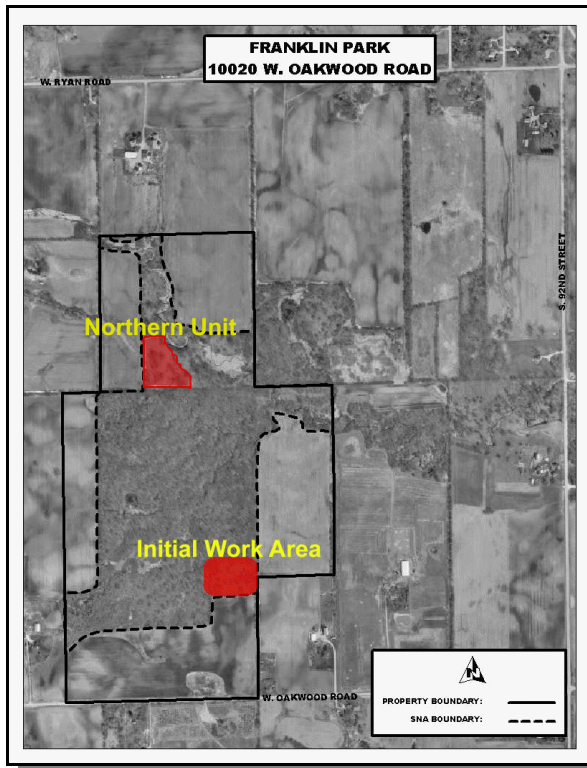
In Estabrook Park the Crew began work on a slope stabilization project, aided greatly by several Milwaukee Conservation Leadership Corps (MCLC) groups. This slope was dominated by two species of invasive exotic shrubs, common buckthorn and bush honeysuckle (*Rhamnus cathartica*, *Lonicera spp.*), and the MCLC groups undertook the daunting task of removing these mature trees by hand (see cover

photo and photo 1). In this way approximately 1 acre was cleared and prepared for planting.

PHOTO 2: LAKE PARK VOLUNTEERS.



Both Franklin and Lake Parks saw the continuation of invasive species control projects. In Lake Park, the Crew was also able to organize a volunteer planting of 108 shrubs with the "Friends of Lake Park," which proved extremely productive. (see photo 2). This project was, however, hampered by a difficulty in accessing



Funds from a Great Lakes Commission Grant. Due to the difficulty in purchasing needed materials, the work performed on this project was somewhat limited.

In Franklin Park work was expanded to the northern, more open, unit of the State Natural Area. With the help of a 10 person Americorps crew this area was cleared of non-native (buckthorn) and native (but unwanted) shrubs. The material was piled and will be disposed of during the winter months in anticipation of a controlled burn in the spring. Work on this parcel, especially the controlled burns, will be enhanced by the Crew's ability to purchase equipment with the Root Pike WIN grant that was secured

for this purpose. The ability to access these grant funds will be a welcome boon to this project.

## 2) Planting

Plants provide the long-term structure necessary to meet the management goals of erosion control, non-point source pollution reduction, biodiversity enhancement, sustainability, and improved aesthetics. The Crew, in partnership with two Americorps crews, more than doubled their native plantings from 2005 (see table 1).

**TABLE 1 2006 PLANTING**

| LOCATION                | YEAR |        | % CHANGE |
|-------------------------|------|--------|----------|
|                         | 2005 | 2006   |          |
| LAKE PARK               | 2220 | 2624   | 18       |
| ESTABROOK PARK          | 323  | 5482   | 1597     |
| MISCELLANEOUS PLANTINGS | 1478 | 334    | -77      |
| TOTALS                  | 4021 | 8440   | 110      |
| BAREROOT CRP PLANTINGS  | 0    | 20,000 | N/A      |