

VOLUNTEERS MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR SHIRLEY HEINZE LAND TRUST IN 2008

“2008 was a banner year for volunteers at Shirley Heinze Land Trust,” says Jim Erdelac, coordinator of the group’s volunteer program. “Sixty-eight individuals contributed 473 volunteer hours during the year,” he notes. “Most of them responded to our 16 scheduled workdays, but a number also undertook individual projects tailored to their skills and availability.”

Volunteers were offered a wide variety of tasks on the more than 1,000 acres of natural land managed by the trust. They assisted in a reforestation project at Ambler Flatwoods that installed 3,700 young tree saplings at the state-dedicated nature preserve in Michigan City. They also helped build two new boardwalks over wet areas on Ambler’s hiking trail.

Volunteers put in many hours of work on savanna and wetland restoration projects at John Merle Coulter Preserve in Portage. They also made significant contributions at two project sites in Hobart. At Hidden Prairie, volunteers planted native species and helped construct a firebreak in preparation for a controlled burn. At Bur Oak Woods, they were engaged in vegetative monitoring, savanna restoration, and boardwalk construction projects.

Volunteers also constructed a firebreak at Gary’s Ivanhoe South Preserve, and they participated in the pulling, cutting, and herbiciding of non-native invasive plant species at several sites. Individual volunteer projects included digital photo monitoring, seed collection, information kiosk maintenance, species list updating, brush chipping, and trash pick up.

Among groups working at Shirley Heinze preserves this year were students from Valparaiso High School. Under the tutelage of David Kings, the junior and senior honors students used the opportunity to help fulfill community service requirements for an environmental science course.

“Volunteers play an integral role in our restoration efforts,” explains Paul Quinlan, stewardship program manager. “They represent more than just free labor. In many cases their work hours count as match toward funds provided by grant-providing agencies. Volunteers’ efforts not only contribute to the completion of restoration projects, they indirectly help us pay for the necessary supplies and equipment. We’d be hard pressed to do without them.”

Shirley Heinze Land Trust has been protecting natural land in the southern Lake Michigan watershed since 1981. It owns 900 acres outright, holds conservation easements on 138 acres, and has transferred some 30 additional acres to Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources. Five of its properties – Cressmoor Prairie, Seidner Dune & Swale, John Merle Coulter Preserve, Barker Woods, and Ambler Flatwoods – have been dedicated to the people of Indiana as state nature preserves. Included in the Heinze Trust’s holdings are examples of the entire spectrum of natural communities in this area: tallgrass prairie, high dune, oak savanna, boreal flatwoods, dune-and-swale, woodlands, marshes, swamps, ponds, fens, and riparian habitat. The Heinze Trust has also made contributions toward the purchase of natural areas owned by other entities, including the Indiana DNR, The Nature Conservancy, LaPorte County Parks, Lake County Parks, and the Portage Parks Department.

For more information on the work and programs of Shirley Heinze Land Trust, including volunteer opportunities, call 219-879-4725, or visit its website www.heinzetrust.org.

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