

Land Use Committee Report October 2024

Written by Christyl Burnett and Mariah Scott

Here are some short updates about various land use initiatives happening or planned at Circle Pines. If you would like to know more, please reach out to Christyl Burnett or Mariah Scott. We would love to know your thoughts and how you want to become involved! Please know that all the efforts described below were the work of dozens of people. For those of you who have helped out, your work is deeply appreciated!

Department of Natural resources Grant:

We are wrapping up this year's bug collection for our bug study. Christyl will be handing over all our specimens to our entomologist soon. Christyl will also be meeting with our project partners to wrap the project up for the year and evaluate what we have learned.

History of Land Use Committee:

In the coming months Christyl will finish a presentation that details the work we have done over the past seven years to be loaded to YouTube for folks to access. In the future we can use this presentation to onboard new volunteers, like Mariah, to the committee, as well as other interested members and friends.

Tree donation:

We would like to thank Till Utopia for the donation of over 100 tree starts! All the species, including white oak, elderberry, chokecherry, red bud, american plum, and american persimmon, are native, fruit-bearing trees. Russ, our garden manager, led the work with volunteers transplanting this boost in local tree diversity across the grounds.

Saw Mill and Lumber Harvest:

The mill is important to Circle Pines' sustainable future. At the moment, we are entering the cold months and focused on processing dry firewood to reduce costs and our use of fossil fuels. So, the saw mill is put away for the season. The stockpile of lumber from the mill is being stored and used. For example, the summer camp construction work project used lumber from our trees to make many useful items, including bird houses, benches, and a collaborative art piece. Campers learned important life skills, while creating functional and aesthetic goods, primarily using trees historically planted for harvest.

Waterfront:

Our waterfront has seen a boost in species diversity as we allow it to gently rewild. With Noah as our waterfront director, our beach was used for swimming, sailing, boating, and so many other activities, while also being an important habitat for amphibians, snakes, birds, and numerous plants. During the summer, we even began documenting the lakefront species diversity with campers, using the research software iNaturalist. Every sighting, confirmed by experts, is data utilized for various environmental projects. In the future, we hope to continue

learning about our lakefront habitat, enjoying the space we share with our local flora and fauna, and developing informational signage that incorporates scientific knowledge and artistic expression. We also are hoping to get our shoreline certified as Gold Level shoreline habitat by the Michigan Shoreline Stewards Program.

Invasive Species Removal:

Invasive species often thrive in disturbed habitats. So, the CPC areas used and cleared by us tend to be the most vulnerable to invasive species. This summer, a lot of work was done at the waterfront and through trail crew efforts to combat invasive species. Eurasian milfoil, multi-floral rose, and autumn olive removal were the biggest focuses. Also, our Foraging Weekend featured a workshop on which invasive species we can eat and how!

Sharing Space:

Circle Pines leads many events that use our grounds. The largest is Buttermilk Weekend. It is a continued debate over how much should be mowed for attendees to use. Certain prairie habitat was left untouched, like the restoration area by Norris Rd and the wild flower area near the apiary. However, the native plant garden was reduced in size. During this reduction in size, every effort was taken to keep the native plant garden large, transplant as many native plants as we could, and relocate monarch caterpillars. The reduction in this native plant garden was controversial, but a compromise, albeit a rushed one, was attempted.

Impact of Larger Environmental Shifts:

Circle Pines is part of a changing world and we felt that in many ways this year. While we document, observe, and enjoy a noticeable improvement in overall species diversity, there are clear issues occurring as well.

This year was another example of the climate crisis, emphasized by a strong El Niño year. Intense snow storms, followed by a thaw, caused many trees to fall in our area. We took care to only clear fallen trees near roads, trails, and buildings. In order to avoid stressing our forests, we also limited our maple syrup harvest. Instead of installing over 90 taps, like we did last year, we limited the harvest to only around five taps. This gave our trees needed rest, as they did not experience their typical cold winter.

Invasive species were also quite prevalent this year. The most notable invasive insect was the spongy moth. Their numbers in our woods were astounding and lasted for weeks. It genuinely sounded like rain, till you realized it was the sound of their collective poop falling from the canopy. Many trees were impacted, including our apple orchard. This contributed to our apple harvest this year being so small. Spongy moth populations go in boom and bust cycles and next year may be less. Their devastation was spread throughout the area with the Barry State Game Area and Yankee Springs Recreation area being hard hit for the past few years. This past season may have been the height though as many of our neighbors have noticed the moth stage was a small population and also note fewer noticeable egg sacks on our trees.

There are also suspected cases of deer contracting a disease known as bluetongue (epizootic hemorrhagic disease or EHD). This disease does not hurt humans, but is fatal to deer. Our seven suspected cases have been reported to the Department of Natural Resources.