

PRAIRIE RESTORATION: RECONSTRUCTING PRAIRIE IN THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF THE HUMAN COMMUNITY

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Abstract: Despite status as the flagship public university of “The Prairie State”, the University of Illinois has never represented the region’s prairie heritage in its campus design and landscaping. This presentation chronicles establishment of a prairie garden at the College of Veterinary Medicine (CVM) and demonstrates successful culmination of sustained efforts to promote prairie awareness and conservation. The present UIUC veterinary complex was established in 1971 and expanded in 1982 at the expense of adjacent open land and potential natural area (prairie). In following years, inroads were made in promoting ecologically sound perspectives, motivated by escalating fuel and other resource costs as well as continuing efforts by dedicated supporters of natural areas conservation and sustainability. In 2008, the CVM agreed to sponsor a project for a Restoration Ecology course in the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences for development of site plans for low-maintenance native plantings at the CVM. The plans were subsequently implemented with site preparation and planting of prairie seedlings completed in late 2009, a result of collaborative efforts by multiple departments at UIUC, local conservation groups, environmentally-conscious individuals within the University and surrounding communities and successful engagement of newly-inspired CVM faculty, staff and student volunteers who will provide ongoing management of the site. Now 1 year old, the prairie garden features 6 native prairie grasses and 40 native prairie forbs in a prominent location on the veterinary campus and has already made an impact in positively influencing the perspectives of the CVM community and beyond.