Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund Grant #04-012W
"Illinois River Bluffs Habitat Restoration Display"
Final Report: July 2004

Introduction

The Illinois River Bluffs Habitat Restoration Display was undertaken to increase the local awareness of the native flora of the Illinois River Bluffs and those human activities which both diminish and encourage the growth of such. Forest Park Nature Center, which receives between 70,000 and 100,000 visitors per year, is a Peoria Park District public facility that is a gateway to the natural areas of the "Peoria Wilds" section of the Illinois River Bluffs. Much of this section of the river bluffs is either owned or managed by the Peoria Park District. Some 1,500 acres of this park district land is dedicated Illinois State Nature Preserves while several hundred more acres are managed as natural areas. The purpose of creating a habitat and restoration display is to highlight the special qualities of this habitat, the ecological problems this area faces, and the things being done to restore some of the ecological components that have been lost.

The display is a mix of mediums and materials. It is created such that one part highlights the native habitat and importance of certain elements to that habitat such as periodic burns. The other is to highlight some seasonal aspect of the flora and fauna of the bluff habitat.

The display area consist of two display cases with glass fronts and two murals above them. One of these cases contains the seasonal aspect of the habitat while the other highlights some of the ecological components and work done to maintain those components. While the contents of the former display is made to rotate with the seasons, the latter display is a mixture of stationary habitat information with a seasonal depiction of restoration activities. Above these display cases are two murals of mixed mediums depicting the diverse hill prairies and open woodlands of the Illinois River Bluffs.

Materials and Methods

In creating these displays we used any available existing materials and volunteer assistance wherever possible. Forest Park Nature Center staff was used to assist in design of the displays, coordinate the volunteer effort, supervise volunteers, research and write display materials, assist in acquisition of display materials, and the compilation and completion of the displays.

While two volunteers produced the bulk of the display, many additional hours were clocked on this display complex by short-term volunteers and Forest Park Nature Center (FPNC) staff. In addition, local students were involved in the painting of one of the murals in the display which consequently received media coverage in the local newspaper (see attached Peoria Journal Star article dated January 15, 2004). A short chronology of the production of this display follows (with type of personnel who did the work):

1. Design overall layout of display (Volunteers and FPNC staff).
2. Contact volunteer photographer, carpenter, and local art class to work on the project (Volunteer and FPNC staff).

3. Purchase, assemble and prepare the material for the hill prairie mural (Volunteer and FPNC staff).
4. Conduct three painting days with art class to paint hill prairie mural (Volunteers).
5. Complete painting of hill prairie mural (Volunteers).
6. Install mural of hill prairie (FPNC staff).
7. Purchase, assemble and install the frame for new display case (Volunteer).
8. Research material for seasonal display on insects of the Illinois River Bluffs (Volunteers).
9. Continue research, write display materials, and install seasonal insect display (Volunteers and FPNC staff).
10. Research, compile, and install interpretive materials for open woodland habitat display and complete project (FPNC staff).

This chronology is in no way complete as there was progress occurring simultaneously. For example, the photographer was taking pictures while the mural was being painted and the display frame was being built.

The display cases are made with 2"x 4" wood frames with particle board backing and plywood siding. The front is glass framed with 2x4's and covered with plywood siding. This siding is stained to match existing display cases. The size of these display cases are 4'6" X 7' with a 3'3" X 6'4" viewing area. The murals above them are painted on 1/4 inch plywood with is mounted on 1"x 2" framing. These murals are directly mounted (with screws) onto the existing sloping ceiling.

Results

The results of this effort should draw interest to the habitat of the Illinois River Bluffs as this display complex is both educational and attractive. It is something the visitor immediately sees when entering the nature center and is colorful enough to draw that attention to the interpretive materials incorporated in the display. Some of the drawing power of the display is due to the hill prairie mural which has a three dimensional quality about it. It consists of a painted hill prairie in front of which (and at the base of the mural) is artificial prairie plants placed in such a way to look as though they are growing in the foreground of the display. A cardboard poster tube was roughened and attached to the foreground as well. This then was additionally roughened with an application of "gesso" and then painted to depict a snag. On this was placed a red-headed woodpecker to highlight a typical local hill prairie inhabitant. Additional prairie animals and flowers were painted onto the mural. (See enclosed photos).

The seasonal display portion is currently highlighting insects of the bluffs. It attempts to highlight the beneficial qualities of insects such as pollination and decomposition. In the fall, we plan to change this display over to depicting the diverse tree species occurring in the bluffs and some of the food and medicinal aspects of those. This display is a mixture containing the following: painted open woodland/prairie scene as background, glass shelves hung by monofilament to display small materials such as insects or seeds and nuts, natural materials (leaves, bark, etc.) at the base (currently also containing insects), and photographs accompanied with interpretive writings mounted on foam core.

Discussion and Summary

With regards to the glass fronted display cases, the original design was to have one 4'6" X 7' display case and a second one at two thirds that size. Adjacent to this latter display case we were to install an interactive computer with native flora and fauna programs. This plan was altered so as to make better use of the existing space. Thus both display cases are now the same size (4'6" X 7'). We plan to create the computer display in the future as time and funds allow.

Creating these displays was definitely a learning process for all involved. The volunteers who worked on this project not only learned new things about the native flora and fauna but also experienced new skills, from painting to carpentry to photography. Because these displays and murals were created in a public atmosphere, there were many visitors to the nature center that stopped and asked questions and discussed the content of the displays. Therefore, the process of creating the displays became an interpretive event in itself as this project involved not just those whom worked on it but many visitors to the nature center.

Originally, we had budgeted for an artist to paint the murals but then found volunteers who were willing and able to do the painting. While this involved more of the community including local students, it took more Forest Park staff time to manage as well as more time to complete the project. Consequently, it did not make the project any more economical to complete. The positive note to this is that more community members were involved in this project.

Response by visitors thus far has been very positive. Both the artwork in the mural and the interpretive signage has been complimented. These displays and murals give the nature center a good basis to expand the awareness and knowledge that the Peoria community has of the Illinois River Bluff habitat. It provides a good foundation to build interpretive displays and add on to these existing ones. It also provides an entry way for people that want to get involved in outdoor volunteer work such as habitat restoration.

Expendures

1) Following is a list of direct expenditures on materials made during the grant agreement time on this project. Copy of receipts is attached.

Date	Location or Business	Purchase	Amount
10/17/03	Peoria Camera Shop, Inc.	Film Development	$14.56
11/11/03	Peoria Camera Shop, Inc.	Film Development	$33.48
12/15/03	Jeffrey Alans	Art Supply/Paint	$19.48
12/15/04	Hobby Lobby	Art Supply/Artificial Plants	$36.13
01/07/04	Lowe's	Mural Hardboard & Paint	$60.22
01/27/04	Jeffrey Alans	Paint/Artificial Plants	$46.19
05/13/04	Jeffrey Alans	Art Supply/Artificial Plants	$61.39
06/3/04	Peoria Camera Shop, Inc.	Enlargements	$37.84
06/5/04	Sheridan Road Lumber Co.	Framing Lumber	$51.00
		Subtotal:	**$360.29**

2) Following is a list of Forest Park staff hours provided for this project. Staff hours cost Peoria Park District $13.25 per hour labor and $5.77 per hour for health insurance coverage. The charge to the grant line was for labor hours only (not health coverage).

Forest Park Staff Hours:

9/9/03: 9:30 AM-12:30 PM = 3.5 hours
9/30/03: 10:00 AM-12:00 PM = 2 hours
12/15/03: 9:30 AM-12:00 PM = 3 hours
1/7/04: 9:30 AM-7:00 PM = 9.5 hours
1/9/04: 3:00 PM-5:00 PM = 2 hours
1/10/04: 8:00 AM-12:00 PM = 4 hours
2/4/04: 9:30 AM-12:30 PM = 3 hours
4/6/04: 11:00 AM-1:00 PM = 2 hours
4/8/04: 12:00 PM-1:00 PM = 1 hour
5/25/04: 9:00 AM-12:00 PM = 3 hours
5/28/04: 9:30 AM-12:30 PM = 3 hours
6/15/04: 12:00 PM-2:00 PM = 2 hours
6/24/04: 9:30 AM-=1:30 PM = 4 hours
Total = 42 hours

Forest Park Staff Expense = $13.25/hour

Charge for Forest Park's Staff: 42 Hours X $13.25 = $556.50

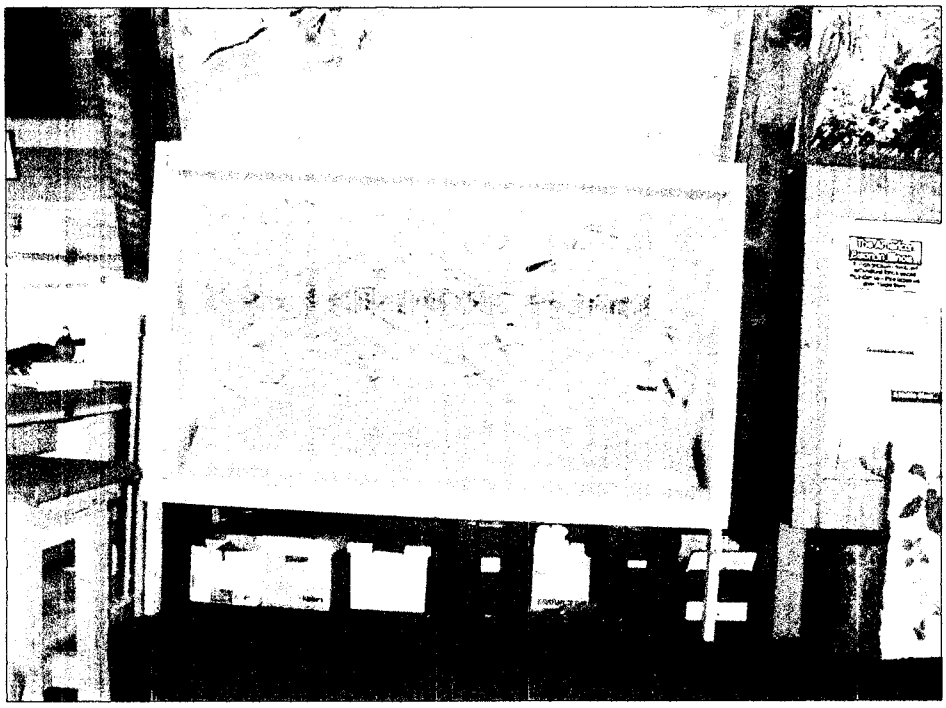
Total Bill for reimbursement for Grant Project: $556.50 + $360.29 = $916.79

In-kind Contributions or Match

Forest Park Staff Heath Insurance Coverage for project: 42 hours X $5.77 =	$242.34
Ten Volunteers: 96 Hours @ $10/Hour* =	$960.00
Framed Glass Front from Peoria Park District =	$100.00
Wood framing material contributed from Peoria Park District =	$50.00
Total match funds to project = $1352.34	

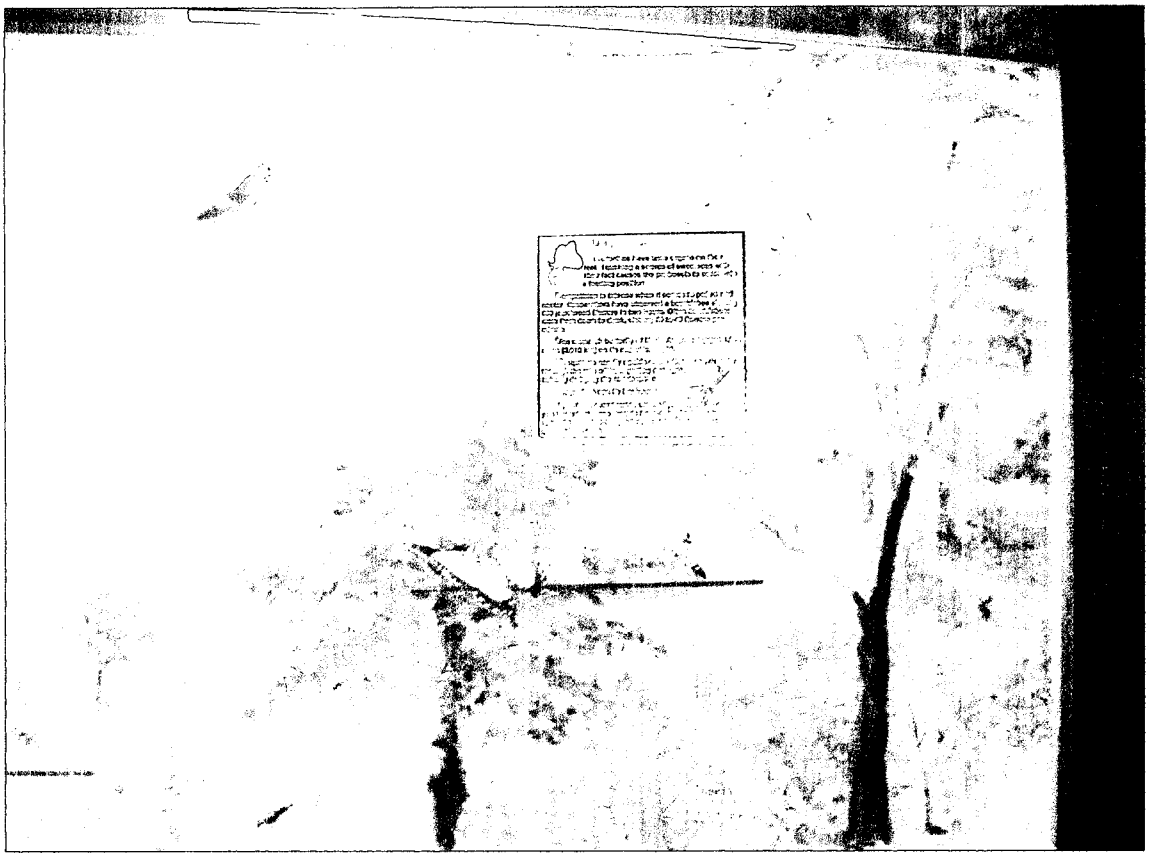
*The 2002 dollar amount assigned by the Independent Sector Study to figure the value of one hour is $16.54. For the sake of this grant, given the wage scale provided for like work of Peoria Park District, we set the value per hour at $10.

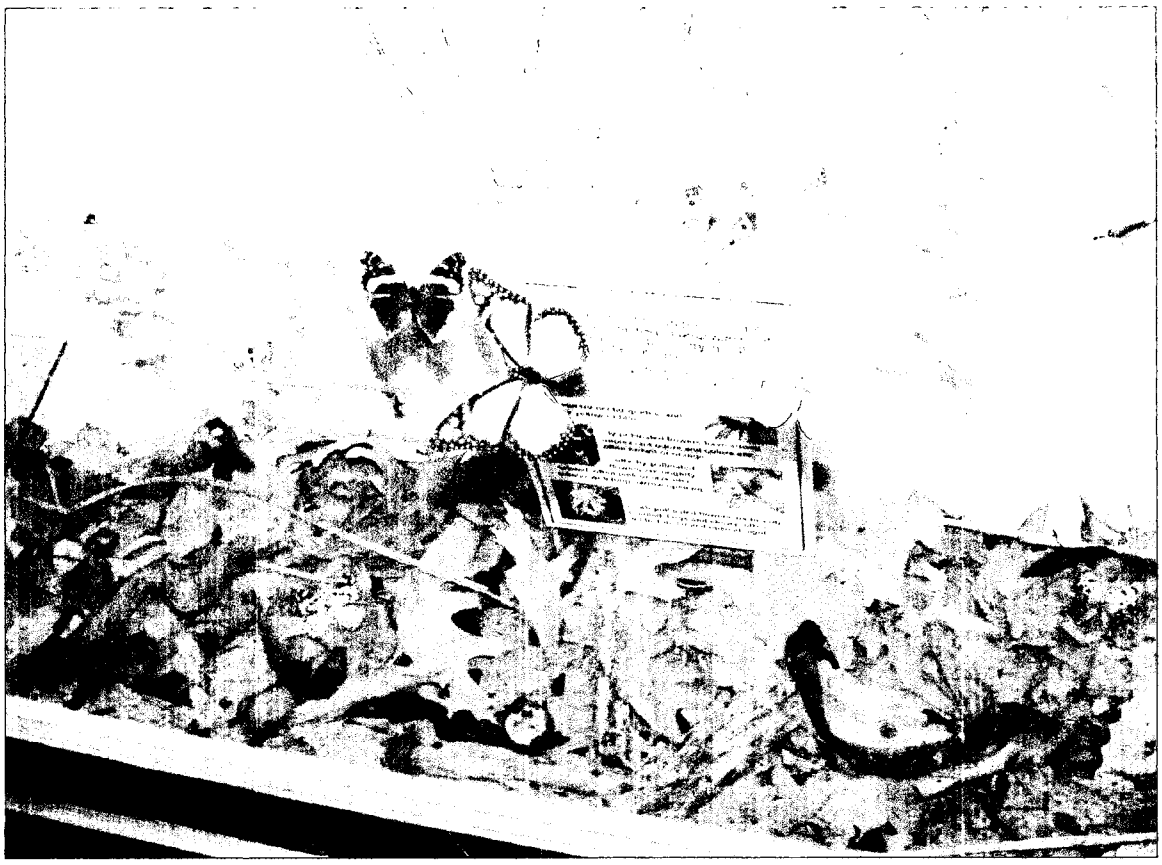
Photos of displays created in Forest Park Nature Center as part of Illinois River Bluffs Restoration Display. Grant # 04-012W



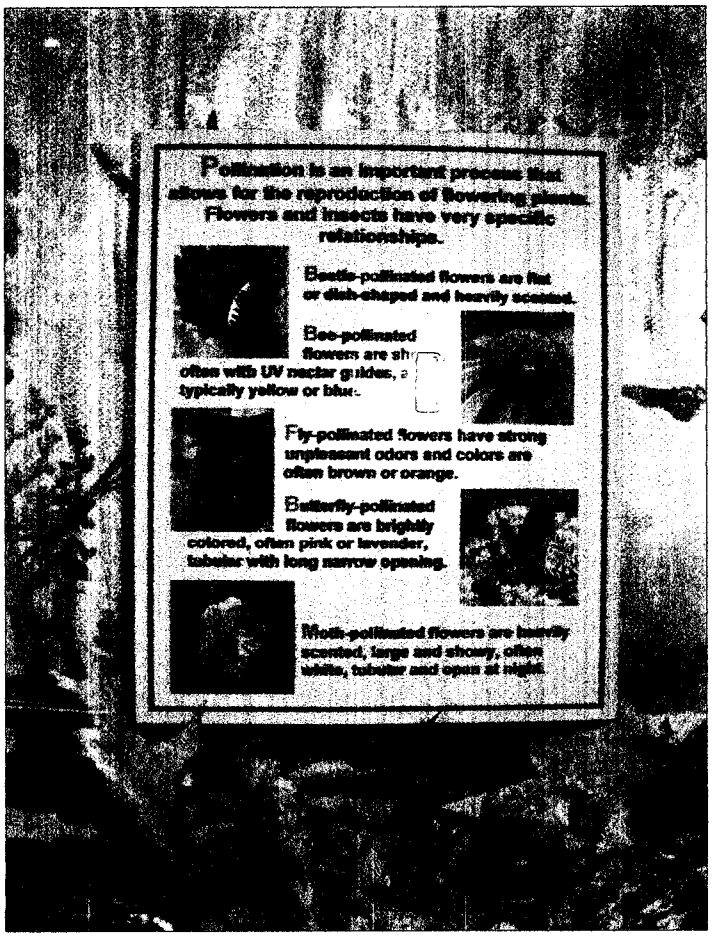
Display Case Under Construction.

Completed display case with hill prairie background and insect display in foreground. The foreground will change seasonally.

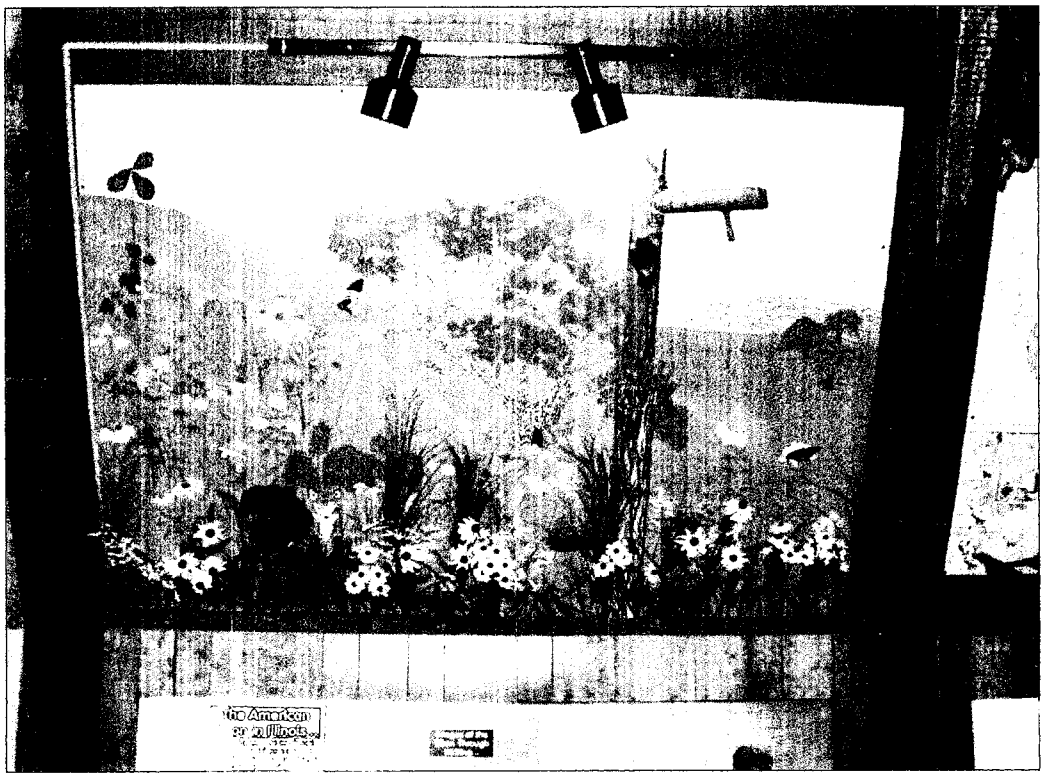




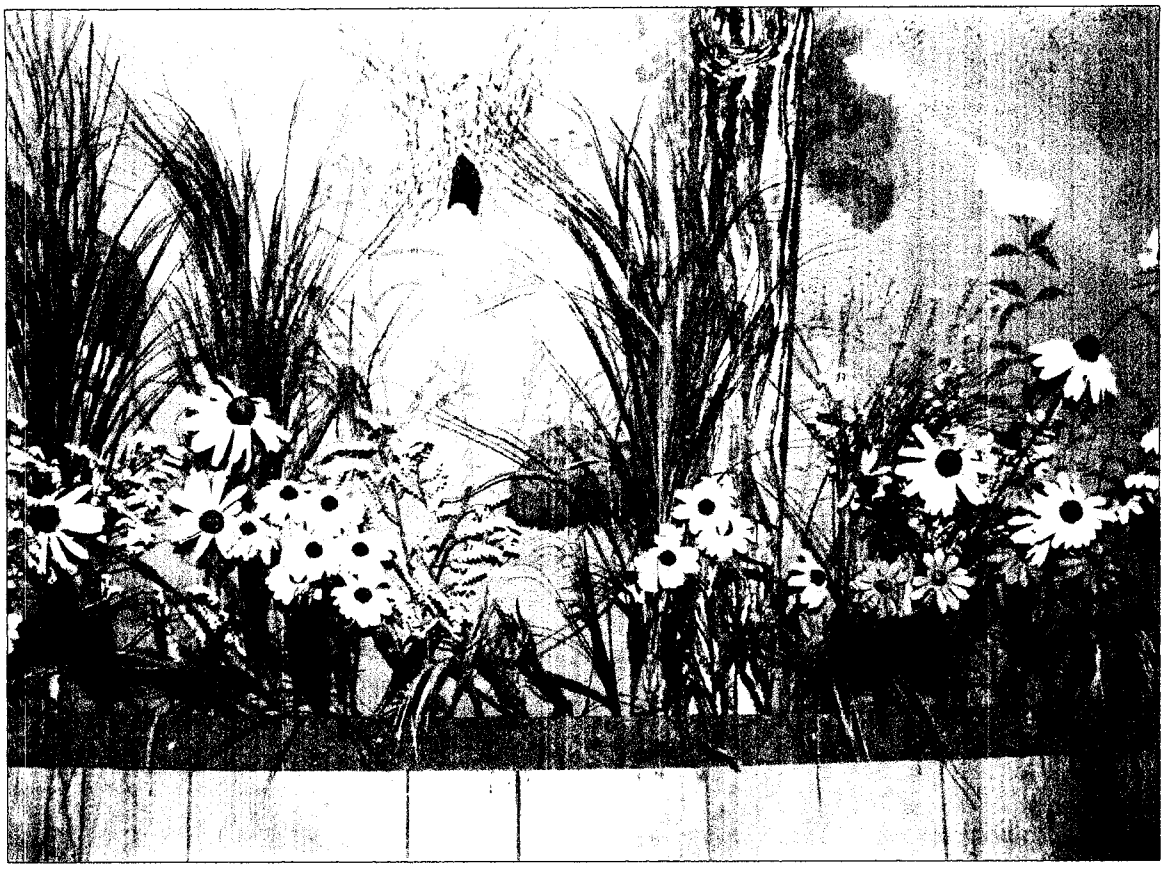
Close-ups of insect display and accompanying text.



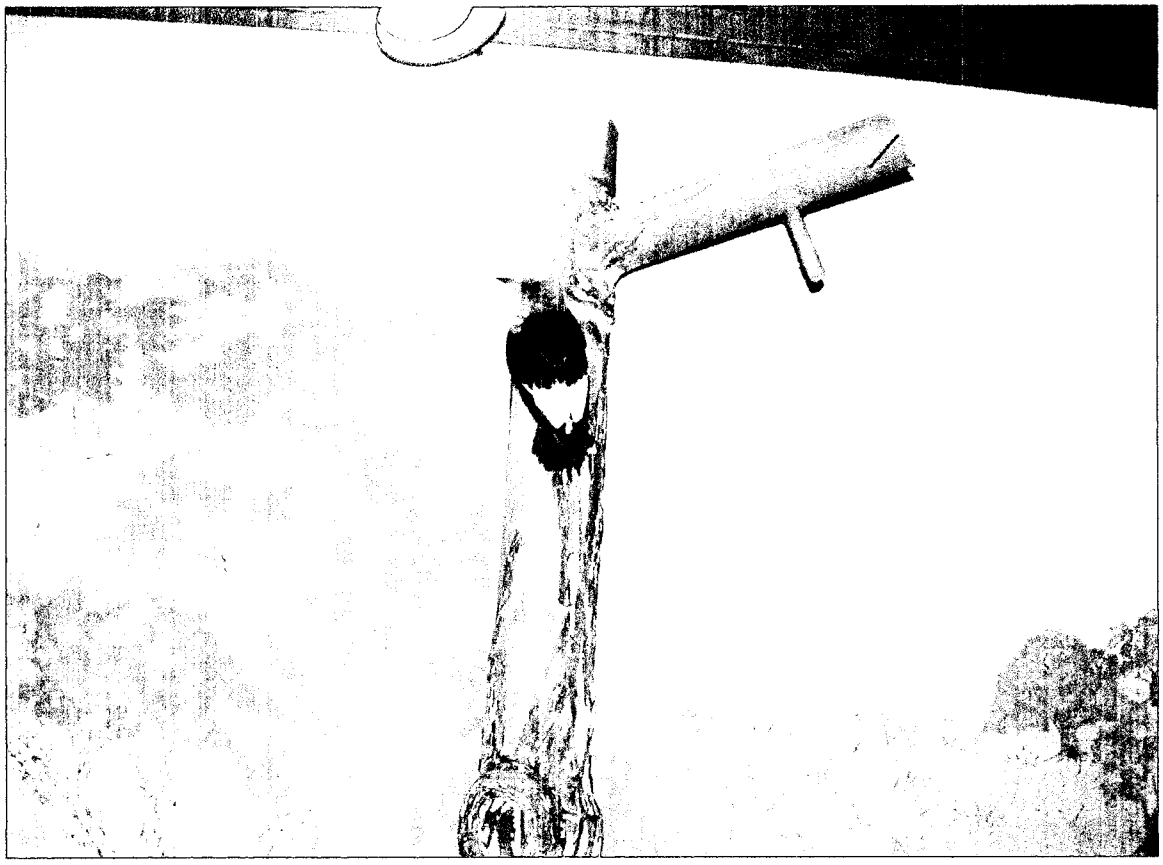
Text on display boards.



Hill prairie scene compiled by staff and painted by volunteers.



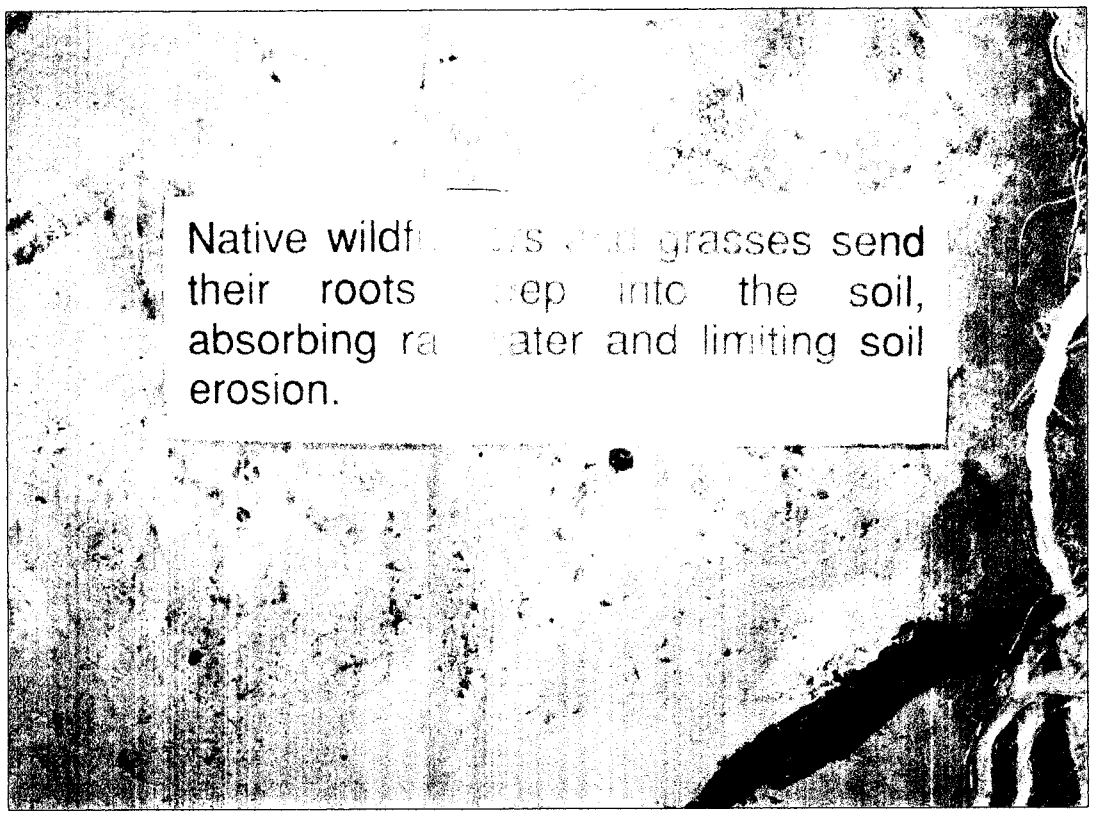
Close-up of the base of the hill prairie mural.



Close-up of red-headed woodpecker mounted on snag in hill prairie scene.

Associated hill prairie mural showing a more close-up scene of root systems.

Close-up of roots and nest from hill prairie mural.



Text from mural highlighting root systems of hill prairies.