Final Report

Wildlife Preservation Fund Grant #11009W

Interpretive Signage at Forest Park Nature Center

Grant Number: Wildlife Preservation Fund Grant #11009W

Interpretive Signage at Forest Park Nature Center

Grantee Name: Forest Park Nature Center, Peoria Park District

Address: 5809 Forest Park Drive

Peoria Heights, IL 61616

Telephone Number: (309) 686-3360

Date: November 5, 2011

Grantee representative: JD Russell, Chief Naturalist

Email: jdrussell@peoriaparks.org

Project Objective:

Through the signage, visitors to the prairie will gain:

- Awareness of an Illinois Prairie, that once covered most of the state
- Recognition of the importance of protection of Forest Park Nature Center's prairies for future generations
- Knowledge of common plant species that grow in Illinois prairies
- Appreciation of native ecological communities in Peoria

Completed Description:

Forest Park Nature Center installed one 24" x 36" double posted outdoor interpretive sign in front of one of our prairies. The sign includes descriptions on the history and the importance of the prairie in Illinois as well as descriptions and images of common plants that visitors can find in an Illinois prairie.

Summary of the Project accomplishments:

The new prairie signage acquired through this grant had many accomplishments. This project has, without a doubt, reached its objectives. We have heard on numerous occasions on how hikers and visitors to our prairie have gained knowledge about Illinois prairies and their history, that they did not have before. On an annual basis we have over 110,000 users here at Forest Park Nature Center, with a majority of those being hikers that pass directly by the new prairie interpretive sign. Of those 110,000 users we have approximately 10,000 school age children in which we do educational programs for. During these programs we discuss our prairie plantings and the rich prairie history we have here in Illinois. The new signage has added the dimension of illustration, which works well with the prairie to

emphasize its importance. We also took out an advertisement in the Peoria Journal Star, stating that we received the grant from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources from contributions to the Illinois Wildlife Preservation fund. For additional advertisement of the new signage we posted a picture and caption on our facebook page which has over 1,300 friends. We received many positive comments through our facebook page and it proved to be a great way to make the public aware of our new interpretive signage.

Total Project expenditures:

Vendor Name and Address: Fossil Industries, Inc.
44 Jefryn Boulevard
Deer Park, NY 11729

Item Description:			**Cost**
	1	½" Exterior dHPL Graphic, 12-Color HD Printing Panel Size: 24" x 36" 4 Threaded Inserts w/ bolts	552.00
	1	Double Cantilever Pedestal. Powder Coated Alum. 45 Degree Angle with 24" Graphic Height Surface Mount	600.00
	1	Color Sample – 8" x 10" x 1/16 dHPL	40.00
	1	Shipping	168.00
		Total Cost:	1,360.00

Date of Purchase: February 25, 2011

Other Project Expenditures

Sign installation was done in house, so there were no additional expenditures. However, in complying with promotions portion of the grant, we took an advertisement out in the Peoria Journal Star that came to a total of $397.68, which came from our operational budget. The ad ran on Thursday, December 22nd and you will find it attached to this report.

Forest Park Nature Center

PRAIRIE SYSTEM

Big Bluestem

Showy Goldenrod

Compass Plant

Indian Grass

Wild Bergamot

White Wild Indigo

This project was made possible through donations to the

Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund

Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Forest Park Nature Center

Prairie System

Big Bluestem

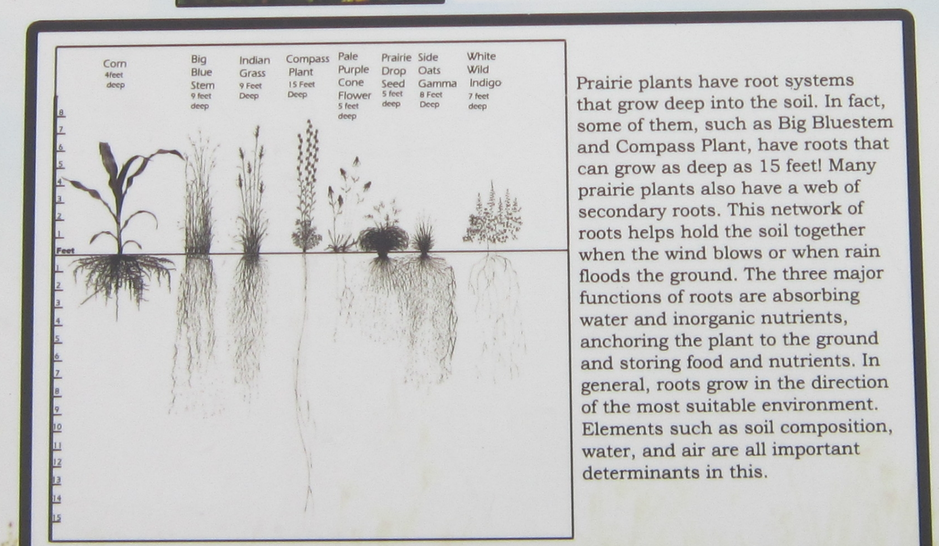
Big Bluestem is Illinois' official state grass and is one of the most common prairie grasses found here at Forest Park. It can grow to over 10 feet tall and is easily distinguished from other prairie grasses by its distinctive seed head, which resembles a turkey's foot and earns it the popular nickname "Turkey's Foot". Chippewa Indians used the roots of Big Bluestem to alleviate stomach pain, and extracts from the leaf blades were used as a wash for fevers and as an analgesic (painkiller). The plants were also used to fasten the support poles of dwellings, and moistened grass was laid on hot stones to prevent steam from escaping during cooking.

Showy Goldenrod

Goldenrod is easily recognized by its golden inflorescence made up of many small flowers on spreading branches near the top of the plant. Showy goldenrod may grow up to 4' tall and, along with other goldenrod species, is often blamed for seasonal allergies, a perception which often gives it an undesirable stigma. However, goldenrods in general are insect (as opposed to wind) pollinated and therefore are unlikely to be the cause of allergies; instead, ragweed, which comes into bloom at the same time as many goldenrod species, is typically the true culprit.

Compass Plant

Compass Plant is similar in appearance to a sunflower and may grow from 3-8' in height. It's name indicates its tendency for the leaves to align in an East-West direction in order to minimize the effects of the hot midday sunshine by reducing the leaves' surface area. The sticky sap from the leaves of this plant, once dried, was often used as gum by Native American children.



Prairie plants have root systems that grow deep into the soil. In fact, some of them, such as Big Bluestem and Compass Plant, have roots that can grow as deep as 15 feet! Many prairie plants also have a web of secondary roots. This network of roots helps hold the soil together when the wind blows or when rain floods the ground. The three major functions of roots are absorbing water and inorganic nutrients, anchoring the plant to the ground and storing food and nutrients. In general, roots grow in the direction of the most suitable environment. Elements such as soil composition, water, and air are all important determinants in this.

Indian Grass

This native grass was once found in every county in Illinois and was a dominant grass in the tallgrass prairies that covered most of Illinois during historical times. Indian Grass was also common in savannas, black soil prairies, and hill prairies. It can still be found in prairie remnants (original areas of native prairie plants) along railroads and in older, undisturbed cemeteries. Indian grass, along with Big Bluestem, is one of the most common grasses found in Forest Park's prairie plantings.

Wild Bergamot

A member of the ever-popular mint family, Wild Bergamot is well represented within Forest Park preserve. It is easily identified by its purple flowers, square stems and fragrant leaves. Wild Bergamot is a popular attractant for bumblebees and other insect-pollinators. Bergamot tea is used for a variety of medicinal properties as well as a well-known and well-liked herbal tea.

White Wild Indigo

White Wild Indigo belongs to the bean family, and reflects the common characteristics of this family in the shape and arrangement of its flowers, as well as the rubbery texture of its leaves, which are divided into leaflets of three. While this native prairie plant is known to be toxic to livestock, it was used by both European settlers and Native Americans for its medicinal properties.

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This project was made possible through donations to the

Illinois Wildlife

Preservation Fund

Illinois Department of Natural Resources

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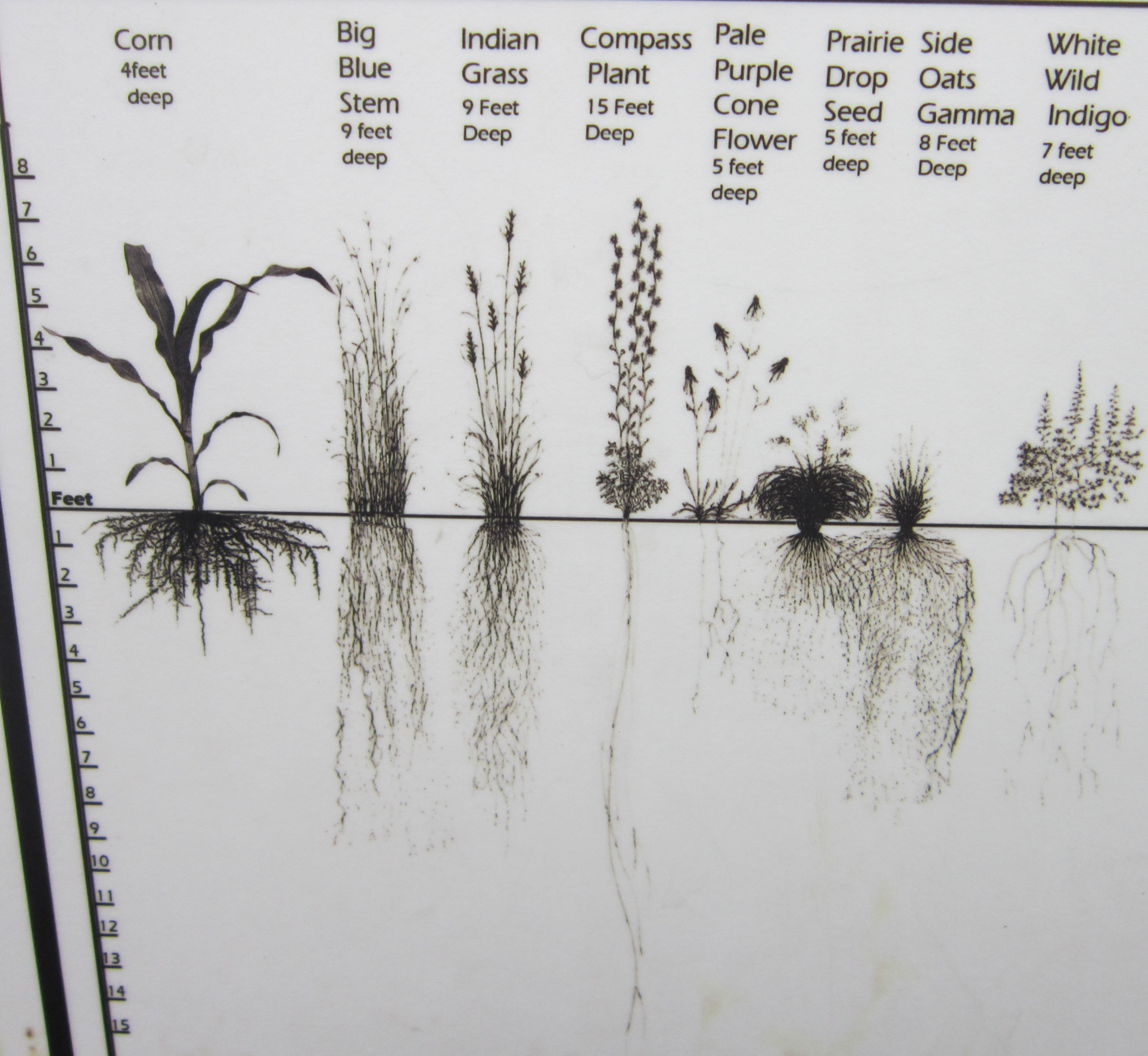

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