Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund
Large Project
Grant #12-L06W for *Earth Day in the Parks*
Final Report

Illinois Department of Natural Resources
Division of Education
One Natural Resources Way
Springfield, IL 62702

Eighteen Illinois state parks hosted 21*Earth Day in the Parks* events during April and May 2012. A total of 43 teacher applications were received for the events. The 1,187 participants included 929 students, 214 teachers/parents and 44 staff members of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR). Participating parks were Argyle Lake State Park (two events), Beall Woods State Park (two events), Cache River State Natural Area, Clinton Lake State Recreation Area, Eldon Hazlet State Park (two events), Ferne Clyffe State Park, Fort Massac State Park, Fox Ridge State Park, IDNR Headquarters, Jim Edgar Panther Creek State Fish and Wildlife Area, Jubilee College State Park, Mermet Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area, Pyramid State Park, Rock Island State Trail, Trail of Tears State Forest, Tunnel Hill State Trail, Volo Bog State Natural Area and Weldon Springs State Park. Projects included building fish attractors, installing pollinator and butterfly gardens, developing amphibian breeding pools, installing a vernal pool, transplanting eastern red cedars to develop an owl roost and planting native wildflowers, grasses and trees to enhance existing habitat.

More than 16,000 native plants and thousands of native plant seeds were planted by the participants. Some plants were purchased, but many of them were raised for the events through cooperative agreements with Illinois Valley Community College in Oglesby, Kishwaukee College in Malta, Lake Land College in Mattoon and the Robinson Correctional Center in Robinson. Plants were delivered to the event sites by staff from the IDNR Office of Strategic Services and Division of Natural Heritage. Some trees and seeds were also obtained from the IDNR Mason City Nursery. The list of plants is attached.

Eight events received publicity through local media.

IDNR site coordinators and participating teachers were each asked to complete and submit an evaluation. Nine IDNR site coordinators (50 percent) returned the form. Twenty-eight teachers (74 percent) completed and returned the evaluation. The responses for both groups are included at the end of this report. The responses were overwhelmingly positive from both groups.

Funds for the project were provided as follows.
1. Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund Grant - $4,000.00
Red Buffalo Nursery - $1,000.00 – native plants for use at the two events at Eldon Hazlet State Park, Carlyle
Genesis Nursery - $379.43 - native plants and seeds for Fort Massac State Park, Metropolis/Mermet Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area, Belknap
Genesis Nursery - $199.63 – native plant seeds for Mermet Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area, Belknap
Boehm's Nursery - $234.88 – native shrubs for Fort Massac State Park, Metropolis
Genesis Nursery - $510.58 – native plants for Beall Woods State Park, Mt. Carmel
Earthskin Nursery - $402.86 – native plant seeds for Beall Woods State Park, Mt. Carmel
Vienna Nursery - $438.60 – native plants and fertilizer for Trail of Tears State Forest, Jonesboro

Red Buffalo Nursery - $419.50 – native plants for Volo Bog State Natural Area, Ingleside
Genesis Nursery - $414.52 – native plants for Volo Bog State Natural Area, Ingleside
Total Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund Grant Expenditures = $4,000.00
2. Illinois Conservation Foundation Grant Expenditures - $5,000.00
3. *Earth Day in the Parks* Donations to the Illinois Conservation Foundation Expenditures = $83.38
4. IDNR Division of Education Fish and Wildlife Funds Expenditures = $18,519.35
Total Event Expenditures = $27,602.73
McDonald's of Vienna provided snacks for the Ferne Clyffe State Park and Tunnel Hill State Trail events.

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Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Site Evaluation

Each participating state park coordinator for the *Earth Day in the Parks* event was asked to complete a survey. Nine site coordinators (Beall Woods State Park, Cache River State Natural Area, Eldon Hazlet State Park, Fox Ridge State Park, Jim Edgar Panther Creek State Fish and Wildlife Area, Trail of Tears State Forest, Tunnel Hill State Trail/Ferne Clyffe State Park and Volo Bog State Natural Area) returned the completed survey. Responses are listed below.

1. Were you pleased with the *Earth Day in the Parks* event at your site? Why or why not?

a. Yes. The creation of a pollination garden was made possible this year due to the *Earth Day in the Parks* event. Not only do students acquire a sense of accomplishment and giving back to nature, but this area will be used for years to come as an educational resource for future school groups and visitors. We are fortunate to have this addition to the park.

b. Yes. The teacher helped to oversee students. Students did a very good job of following instructions and planting over 300 plants which were added to an expanding wildlife area near the visitors' center.

c. Yes, the kids were well supervised and mature.

d. It turned out OK.

e. Yes. The students enjoyed it, and we planted lots of native plants and trees.

f. Yes. The participants did a very good job planting the wildflowers around the White Barn at Trail of Tears.

g and h. We were pleased with *Earth Day in the Parks* this year at both Ferne Clyffe and Tunnel Hill State Trail. Support from Springfield staff helped us meet the requirements to administer and implement the program.

i. Yes. We always are grateful and appreciative of the efforts of young people in helping return native plant species to our prairie and woodland landscape. It is our hope that as these young people grow and return to visit Volo Bog State Natural Area they will see the results of their hands upon the land.

2. Have you noticed any benefit to wildlife at the location where the *Earth Day in the Parks* activity was conducted? If yes, how was wildlife benefitted?

a. As part of the prairie restoration project, the quail population has gone from this species being rarely seen at the park to hearing or catching a glimpse of one almost daily. Deer and rabbits are also using this area frequently. With more nesting boxes being built, the eastern bluebird population is more abundant.

b. Bobwhites are new to the area of the wildflower plantings. Bluebirds are more plentiful.

c. Flowers are blooming from previous *Earth Day in the Parks* events, and the prairie is more diverse.

d. Frogs and salamanders in ponds.

e. The benefit to the plantings will increase as the trees mature and the wildflowers take hold and bloom.

f. The program is benefitting the bees, butterflies and hummingbirds.

g and h. Yes. We planted butterfly gardens, and butterflies were observed in the gardens within two-three weeks using blooming wildflowers.

i. As past efforts take a foothold, they help return plant species that complete a part of the landscape that is habitat to our native animal species as well. Insects especially see an earlier and direct benefit.

3. Do you conduct any other educational programming at your site?

a. Yes. Approximately 50-55 interpretive programs are scheduled throughout the year. The park also has a visitors' center containing educational exhibits.
b. Yes.
c. Yes.
d. No.
e. Not very much any more. Some speaking engagements and bus tours.
f. No.
g and h. Other educational programming at Ferne Clyffe consists of Ecology day held for all Johnson County seventh graders. There is no formal educational programming at Tunnel Hill State Trail.
i. Yes, We have 17 different environmental education programs at our site. With a Natural Resources Coordinator on staff, backed up by a strong volunteer program, it is a natural for us to incorporate students in our habitat restoration efforts.

4. What could we do to improve the *Earth Day in the Parks* program?
a. Since the park has been participating in the program, there have been no problems or concerns.
b. No response.
c. It is all I can handle right now with limited staff and other duties so I would not change anything.
d. No response.
e. Hire me some more help so that I can put more effort into education programs.
f. Nothing at this time.
g and h. Of the *Earth Day in the Parks* projects we have had on these (2) sites, planting balled and burlapped trees was the most beneficial. From an operational standpoint, this was the easiest to implement with short staffs. It also met a critical need to replace trees lost to age, storms, etc. in the campground, picnic areas and day use areas. And this still allowed for a hands-on educational component for the student.
i. We are quite happy with the program as it runs.

5. Will you be willing to participate in *Earth Day in the Parks* again in 2013?
a. Yes. Teachers have mentioned that transportation funding may be an issue next year.
b. Yes.
c. Yes.
d. If enough people retire, no.
e. As long as I am still working, I will support the program.
f. Hopefully so. I'm retiring so it will be up to someone else.
g and h. The AmeriCorps worker at Tunnel Hill State Trail has always been key to providing *Earth Day in the Parks* projects at Ferne Clyffe and Tunnel Hill State Trail. We have been told that we will not be able to hire AmeriCorps workers next year. This will likely cause us to be unable to participate next year.
i. Yes indeed. It is our pleasure.

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Teacher Evaluation

Each participating teacher for the *Earth Day in the Parks* event was asked to complete a survey. Twenty-eight teachers (Beall Woods State Park - 2, Cache River State Natural Area - 2, Clinton Lake State Recreation Area – 1, Ferne Clyffe State Park - 2, Fort Massac State Park – 2, Fox Ridge State Park - 1, IDNR Headquarters – 5, Jim Edgar Panther Creek State Fish and Wildlife Area - 1, Jubilee College State Park – 1, Mermet Lake State Fish and Wildlife Area – 6, Pyramid State Park – 1, Tunnel Hill State Trail – 2, and Weldon Springs State Park - 2) completed the survey. Responses are listed below.

1. Why did you want your class to participate in this *Earth Day in the Parks* event?

a. To increase their understanding of the importance of community stewardship through hands-on participation in a community science project. To build a better understanding of the importance of protecting and preserving our environment.

b. I am a major advocate of outdoor education. Many o f our young people never have the opportunity to experience nature. It is such an educational opportunity for the students to gain firsthand knowledge of plants, roots, physical requirements of plants and even the role of earthworms. One of my students just said "I never knew this park existed." No better reason to participate.

c. To make real world connection to Earth Day. To do a service project. To show more students great resources available to them (i.e., Cache River, Visitors' Center).

d. To learn to work together as a group. To get some work experience at following directions in a different setting. To understand the importance of preserving the special environment of the Cache River.

e. I had heard about it for a few years and finally decided to give it a try. I had no idea the amount of personal attention our students would get from IDNR officials. They had their own private workshop! Amazing.

f. To get outside and work!

g. Contribute to our local park!

h. The students love to be outside the classroom learning.

i. I had previously taken a class to the Cache River for *Earth Day in the Parks*. It was a great experience.

j. I wanted the students to have an opportunity to participate in a community service event and learn more about preserving natural resources.

k. To learn the importance of giving back to the environment and taking care of the environment.

l. We do a unit on recycling and our earth, so it tied in perfectly with our curriculum.

m. We thought it would be a great learning experience as many kids may not have planted in the ground before.

n. To experience the purpose of earth day and helping nature.

o. For conservation education – a hands-on experience.

p. Astoria High School has a very active Environmental Club. The students are completely volunteered and do not get class credit. This type of activity is exactly why they joined the group.

q. It is a way our students can learn and start giving back to our community and earth.

r. Culmination of Science unit "Prairie Plants in Illinois."

s. Culmination of a plant unit.

t. After discussing Earth Day with my students I realized many of them didn't understand their impact on the environment (both positive/negative). I thought this would be a great experience for many of our students to be able to get the opportunity to plant flowers and work "hands-on" with the environment.

So many of our students live in apartments or rental properties, never having had the satisfaction of planting something whether a garden/flower bed and watching it grow.
u. I thought it would be a great way to get my students involved in a service-learning project to give back to the community.
v. I really didn't know that much about Earth Day. Ms. Weatherbee came and told me that 5th grade would be going with 6th grade. I said "OK."
w. To participate in Earth Day activities by actively contributing to a healthy "greener" environment. To develop a sense of community pride through our local conservation park.
x. I wanted the kids to do this activity so they'd have a tangible result of our lessons on conservation. This garden has already been posted on their Facebook pages and our school blog. The kids are really proud of this accomplishment!
y. It gave them a hands-on way to help make a difference. We studied butterflies before so this was a great follow-up.
z. For the hands-on experience.
aa. I want my students to develop an understanding of what it means to help the environment and that they can do something worthwhile by helping at a state park.
bb. Several reasons – This was a grant-funded field trip. Our school no longer has funding for field trips, so I had spent time looking for opportunities for my class to go on a field trip through grants. We also wanted to participate in the event to raise awareness of Earth Day and take the time to help the environment.

2. Were your expectations for the event met? Please explain.
a. Yes, Students got to experience hands-on activities and got to play an active role in creating an environment that will bring a greater diversity to Beall Woods.
b. Definitely. The park staff were ready and waiting for us with all of the needed materials. They provided snacks and refreshments.
c. Definitely. It can be hard to keep this many students busy, and this was perfect. It was enough work to keep them really busy. It is also a place they can come back to visit and see the results of their hard work.
d. Yes. The plants and tools were ready to go. The instructions were clear. The video set up the event nicely.
e. Exceeded expectations. We had no idea that we would get to plant such a large butterfly garden that students can re-visit as they grow up. What a wonderful opportunity to encourage young people to care for the environment.
f. Yes. Expectations were exceeded.
g. Yes. We were informed of exactly what we would be doing.
h. Yes, I especially liked that the high school students were used as mentors.
i. Enjoyed the Earth Day project.
j. Yes. The activity was valuable, and the rangers we worked with were very helpful and knowledgeable.
k. Yes, very organized, plenty to do!
l. We didn't know what to expect exactly, but yes we were very satisfied with the activities.
m. Yes!! Even better than learning to plant, they had the satisfaction of giving their time and energy to help others!
n. Yes, students were involved in contributing to the earth. They loved it!
o. Yes! I was not sure what exactly would take place. It was very educational – the kids loved digging and planting the prairie plants and throwing the seeds! The snacks were nice, too.
p. Yes. We had all of the supplies and tools we needed, and Mike Wickens gives great directions.
q. Yes, everything was well organized.

r. Yes – positive experience with plants. Extra bonus "fish identification."
s. Yes, it greatly enhanced their learning.
t. Yes – I was very impressed with the organization of the event and how pleasant the staff was with the students. (Great patience.)
u. My expectations were definitely met. The students did all of the work and had a great time.
v. I would say yes, but I really didn't know what you expect. At the last minute, I learned students would be using shovels and digging in the dirt. That's exactly what happened.
w. Yes! Our class was able to plant flowers and grasses native to our area. We were allowed to contribute to our local park and receive the sense of "making a difference." Many students were amazed that they could learn how to plant and plant so many in one short time. They are going to bring their families out to see what they helped to do.
x. The day went very smoothly, and park staff members were vey helpful and accommodating. The plant layout was very organized and easy to follow. The benefits of the garden were clearly explained. Many of my parent chaperones commented that the activity was very well executed. The kids also enjoyed all the media attention.
y. Absolutely! Everything was well-prepared and ready to go.
z. Yes, all the supplies were on hand and the students learned a lot about butterflies and planting.
aa. Yes! I think the kids loved the idea that they were planting trees that would be homes for owls.
bb. Somewhat. I did expect the tree planting project to be somewhat more advanced. It took many kids under 10 minutes to do the whole thing.

3. What could we have done to make this event better for your students?
a. Everything was great. It was nice that you provided drinks, snacks and all the necessary equipment to complete the project.
b. Nothing. It was an excellent experience.
c. I would have been more selective about which students came and make them apply for the trip.
d. Can't think of a thing you could do better.
e. Transportation was an issue. There were no building funds to pay for a bus, and the district bus was $300.00! So I was able to borrow a mini-bus from the high school, but then we could only bring 14 students. Maybe coordinate with state agencies for bus service, if needed (like prison buses or park vans)?
f. None. Great event and well put together.
g. Better care and follow-up of the garden we planted last spring.
h. It was perfect!
i. Better communication with teacher on schedule of day. I never "spoke" to anyone.
j. No suggestions.
k. Possibly having two portable toilets, line was long which wasted some time.
l. Our leader gave very good directions and also gave the kids good explanations. I think it was great!
m. I was content with everything. You had everything well laid out!
n. Event was organized very well. Additional restrooms would be beneficial.
o. Nothing – Well planned – Do it again!
p. Everything went very well; I don't think that I would change anything.
q. Nothing!
r. Distribute teacher materials before experience.
s. No response.
t. I think the students would benefit with a mini-lesson/tutorial of how to properly plant. (how deep to dig, how firmly to pack the dirt, etc.)

u. There was too much time between lunch and actually starting the project. They needed structured activities.
v. I really only have two concerns. 1) Our students had one hour to kill before the project started. It took them maybe 10 minutes to eat. There was too much time to try to keep them occupied. 2) I felt the catfish and his buddy were mistreated. I don't know how many times that fish hit the ground. Is that good for a fish?
w. Nothing! It was great.
x. We were in a remote part of the park, and bathrooms were pretty rustic.
y. Nothing. Everything was wonderful.
z. Everything was GREAT!
aa. We had a great day!!
bb. More information given about native/invasive species of trees, etc.

4. Would you consider attending this event again next year at this or another Illinois Department of Natural Resources site?
a. Yes, I think this was a great activity, and it is important for students to realize the importance of preserving the environment. These kinds of activities are great for reinforcing concepts taught in the classroom.
b. Definitely. A major drawback may be in funding as our school district has just been told we have a major financial shortfall for next year which will likely negate any trips.
c. Yes.
d. Yes.
e. 100% Yes! It was a rewarding experience for both teachers and students. Wonderful opportunity. They came back to school and taught other students how to plant a butterfly garden and then planted one in our school yard on 4/23.
f. Yes.
g. Yes.
h. Definitely.
i. Yes.
j. Yes.
k. I plan on attending this event if my class is selected. Hopefully, I can find a location closer to my school and the date works!
l. Definitely!
m. Yes! Please consider us again! We loved it!
n. Yes.
o. Yes.
p. Yes, we have worked at two different sites over the years, and we intend to apply next year.
q. yes, would like to go to Jubilee State Park because it is only five minutes away and a huge part of our community.
r. Yes – excellent.
s. Yes.
t. Yes!! I look forward to seeing the project's results and like to come back next year.
u. I would love to make this an annual field trip for 6th grade.
v. Yes, I thought it was great for the students. They can come back in a few years and take pride in the fact that they made that pond and planted those plants.
w. Definitely!
x. I would most definitely like to return to the park for IDNR events for my classes!
y. ABSOLUTELY!

z. Yes.
aa. Yes – this was my third year, and each year has been a great experience.
bb. Yes, absolutely.

5. How did you find out about *Earth Day in the Parks*?
a. I received an email from Beall Woods staff asking for volunteers to help with the project.
b. We have participated in *Earth Day in the Parks* in previous years. It has always been a great experience for the students.
c. E-mail list serve from IDNR (Valerie Keener)
d. From our science teacher, Mrs. Woolard.
e. Word of mouth, then I checked the IDNR Web site for info and application. I would encourage IDNR to highlight this program at the Illinois Science Education Conference Nov. 2 in Springfield. I would be willing to co-present a workshop (50 minutes) about the program if someone from IDNR would be willing as well. Please let me know. Thank you. I can handle all the paperwork. I think teachers would benefit from a session about the program.
f. Co-teacher at school
g. We participated last year.
h. E-mails
i. I am on the email from Valerie Keener.
j. The teacher who was here before me signed the students up for it.
k. Email several years ago.
l. Our principal emailed information to our 3rd grade team.
m. My colleague.
n. Website
o. Mrs. Belusko wrote and applied for a grant. She was awarded the grant.
p. This is the fifth year that we have participated so we look for the announcement each year, but I originally found out through the IDNR listserv.
q. Mr. Tom Hintz got us involved about 7-8 years ago when we started a program with him and our school.
r. Email from state park
s. Email
t. I received a mass email from the IDNR sent to various Illinois schools. I printed an application and it was accepted. Thank you so much – we appreciated the experience.
u. I received an email explaining the event.
v. From Ms. .Weatherbee, our 6th grade teacher.
w. Through email and previous experience.
x. I saw the announcement online.
y. Email.
z. Email.
aa. Gifted Conference in Chicago. Valerie Keener presented.
bb. Our building principal posted the Website link in our daily bulletin.