

## SITE MANAGEMENT SCHEDULE FOR AN ILLINOIS NATURE PRESERVE

**SITE NAME:** O'Hara Woods  
**LANDOWNER:** The Village of Romeoville  
**ACRES:** 84.5 Total (76.4 Preserve, 8.1 Buffer)  
**CUSTODIAN:** The Conservation Foundation  
**PREPARED BY:** Sam Kilgore

**PRESERVE NUMBER:**  
**COUNTY:** Will  
**DATE:** May 2021  
**MANAGER:** Sam Kilgore

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**OBJECTIVES FOR ESTABLISHING PRESERVE:** This preserve was established to help preserve the natural character of the diverse and ecologically isolated woodland located in developed Romeoville, to protect in perpetuity, and provide ongoing stewardship of the biologically significant woodland and stream systems, including various T&E species found on site and diverse assemblage of spring ephemerals.

**STATUS OR CONDITION OF NATURAL FEATURES PRESENT:** The majority of O'Hara Woods Preserve is classified as mesic upland forest, with approximately 56.48 acres of it deemed grade A and an additional 2.94 acres deemed grade C. These sections are characterized by their showy and diverse spring ephemeral blooms and old second growth canopy, as well as populations of the state threatened Blue-Eyed Mary (*Collinsia verna*) and Weak-stemmed wood sedge (*Carex laxiculmis*). Additionally, 2.84 acres of grade B wet-mesic floodplain forest, 6.11 acres of grade C wet-mesic upland forest, 0.52 acres of grade C flatwoods, and 7.56 acres of grade D marsh are found on site. All areas in the nature preserve have been impacted by a history of fire suppression, which has resulted in a dense canopy, a sparse understory during the summer and fall, and an unnaturally dense community assemblage of fire-intolerant species such as sugar maple, blue ash, and cherry. During the summer, much of the understory is bare due to oppressive shade levels throughout the woods. The nature preserve buffer comprises 8.02 acres of mowed turf under large white oak and shagbark hickory trees.

**TYPES AND EXTENT OF DEGRADATION; POTENTIAL FOR RESTORATION:** Past land use of the site include logging, grazing, clearing, and minor development, specifically of 4-5 bunkers built by the US army to store dynamite, of which now only their concrete bases remain. Despite these past uses, restoration potential is high, as the majority of habitat in the woodland is of high quality. The bunker structures present the possibility of a threat of long-term disturbance and may be hot spots for invasive/exotic species establishment. Invasive/exotic species such as multiflora rose, buckthorn, honeysuckle, garlic mustard, bitter wintercress, and reed canary grass occur sparsely throughout the site and mostly on the periphery. Continued threat of new invasive species establishment is moderate due to its proximity to early successional (on the north) and suburban (east) sides of the preserve.

The major disturbing factor stems from the history of fire suppression at the site, which has resulted in an unnaturally dense canopy and an overabundance of several native, fire-sensitive species including sugar maple and blue ash. In healthy and managed

ecosystems, sporadic fire greatly decreases the establishment of these fire-intolerant species, resulting in a predominantly oak/hickory canopy. The currently unnaturally closed canopy threatens the persistence of understory plant populations, as many native species are not adapted to such oppressive shade throughout the summer and fall. Additionally, a sprawling network of unauthorized trails and footpaths wind through the woods, which increase habitat fragmentation and threaten sensitive plant populations. These trails were created unintentionally by people walking paths through the woods during the summer when there is little understory. These paths break up otherwise continuous habitat and increase the amount of edge habitat, which can be both beneficial for invasive species establishment and harmful to native plant populations and oak regeneration from increased browsing pressure from deer and raccoons and trampling from Preserve visitors. There is light to moderate erosion observed on the southeastern edge of the creek system that runs throughout, likely a result of increased flow volume from the high density of impermeable surfaces on this edge of the preserve. Erosion progression is slow, but potentially something that needs to be addressed using contouring and/or check dams.

**AMOUNTS OF CURRENT/POTENTIAL VISITOR USE, AS RELATED TO MANAGEMENT ISSUES:** Likely due to its location in suburban Romeoville, O'Hara Woods preserve experiences moderate to heavy use, as this site has been embraced by citizens of neighboring communities. Visitors primarily walk the hiking paths throughout the preserve. Hiking, ecological management, inventorying, and birding are among the most common activities on site.

**POTENTIAL LINKAGE WITH NEARBY LANDS:** The western boundary of O'Hara Woods Preserve is directly adjacent and connected to O'Hara Woods Forest Preserve owned by the Will County Forest Preserve District. There is the potential to have this land dedicated as nature preserve buffer sometime in the future if deemed appropriate by the Forest Preserve District. The land directly north of O'Hara Woods comprises approximately 215 acres of a naturally vegetated detention basin and early stage recreated prairie/ restored old field complex. The east side of the preserve is bordered by subdivisions and the south by the Village of Romeoville public works building, tennis courts, and baseball fields. Continuing northwest, Lily cache slough and more detention basins can be found directly adjacent to the recreated prairie/old field. There is the potential to expand the preserve into these areas as well, however this land is heavily disturbed and would require substantial restoration efforts.

**THREATS TO INTEGRITY OF PRESERVE:** One of the primary threats to O'Hara Woods Preserve is the network of unsanctioned foot paths throughout the site. These foot paths are unintentionally created during the summer and fall where there is little vegetation and it can be difficult to know whether you are on the trail or not. This is exacerbated by infrequent but impactful unsanctioned ATV and bike use and the creation of bike paths/jumps. The introduction of non-native species and fire suppression are also threats to the site since it is so integrated into the surrounding communities, however, we have had no issues to date in regards to the use of fire on site. Additionally, poaching of woodland species including wild leeks and other

desirable flowering species is an ongoing concern. These plant species are located directly along the trail and are highly visible. Lastly, the high volume of Preserve visitors has led to a light but consistent input of trash into the site along the trails.

**OVERALL MANAGEMENT GOALS:** Management goals include the maintenance and restoration of natural communities, maintenance and improvement of community structure specifically in terms of canopy thinning and returning a regular fire regime to the site, management of aggressive/invasive species such as garlic mustard, buckthorn, honeysuckle, and others, maintaining the sites boundaries, preventing illegal dumping, mitigating and remediating the network of unsanctioned trails, inventorying the flora and fauna of the site, and monitoring ecological changes.

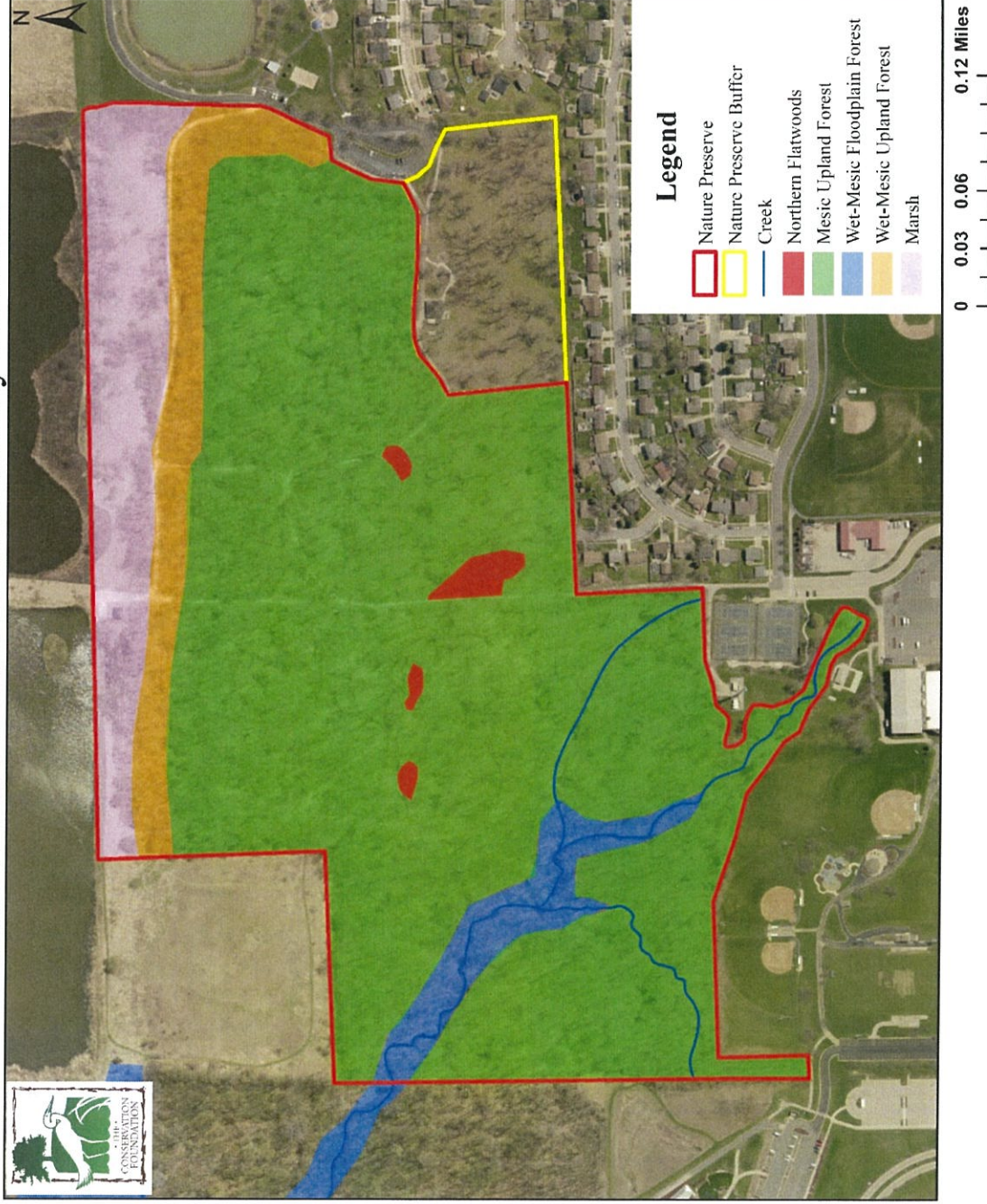
**ALLOWABLE USES:** Allowable uses include hiking, nature observation, compatible research, maintenance of existing foot trails, installation of signs, erecting fencing/bollards as needed, and seed collection and redistribution within for the purpose of restoration.

**PROHIBITED ACTIVITIES:** Except for facilities and reserved rights discussed above, activities and uses which are expressly prohibited at O'Hara Woods Preserve include mining, clear-cut timber harvest, the construction of buildings, planting of non-native species, creation of new roads and rights-of-way, the installation of billboards and lighting, and new utilities. Active recreation such as horseback riding, biking, soccer, baseball, paintball, and frisbee golf are prohibited. Also prohibited are dog parks, zip lines, model airplane fields, and public use of snowmobiles and all-terrain vehicles. Motorized vehicles, except in designated parking areas and those used for approved management purposes, are also prohibited.

## **GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR MANAGING NATURE PRESERVES**

- Preservation of the high-quality natural features for which the site was dedicated is the highest priority. Other compatible uses and activities within a nature preserve may be considered but are secondary to the long-term preservation and sustainability of its natural features.
- Invasive species control should be prioritized in and adjacent to high-quality areas. But managers should be alert to newly established populations of especially-dangerous invaders (such as *Phragmites*). Problem species are easiest to control when initially discovered, before long-term establishment.
- For most invasive species, eradication is ideal, but not always realistic. Species that have not been established for long may be eradicated more readily than species that have persisted for decades. Keeping their populations controlled, and out of the highest quality portions of the preserve may be the best approach.
- Natural communities are dynamic living entities, and natural areas management is a relatively new practice. Nature preserve managers need to adopt an integrative management approach by continually evaluating ecological responses to stewardship activities. Site-specific management plans should be updated every 5 years or sooner if needed

# O'Hara Woods Preserve Community Division



Management Goal	Action	Date	Lead
Maintain/defend boundaries	Identify, post, and maintain boundary markers and Preserve signs as needed.	May 2021 – May 2026	TCF INPC
Identify ecological changes, management concerns, and compliance with registration agreement	Conduct regular surveillance of the Preserve; at least twice per year.	May 2021 – May 2026	TCF INPC IDNR
Control occurrences of invasive/exotic woody species such as <i>Rosa multiflora</i> , <i>Lonicera</i> spp. and <i>Rhamnus cathartica</i> .	Treat cut stumps of <i>Rosa multiflora</i> , and <i>Rhamnus</i> with Triclopyr solution 20% and hand pull or treat cut stumps of <i>Lonicera</i> spp. with a 50% glyphosate solution or 20% triclopyr solution.	January 2021 – January 2026	TCF INPC
Thin native canopy as appropriate to habitat feature including, but not limited to <i>Fraxinus</i> spp., <i>Acer</i> spp., <i>Prunus serotina</i> , <i>Celtis occidentalis</i> , <i>Ulmus</i> spp., and <i>Quercus</i> spp.	Fell and burn/chip target species. Treat cut stumps with a 50% glyphosate solution or 20% triclopyr solution. Thin canopy by as much as 50% in select areas.	January 2021 – January 2026	TCF INPC
Control garlic mustard ( <i>Allaria petiolata</i> )	Hand pull or spray rosettes with 2% solution of glyphosate (RoundUp, Rodeo)	April-June 2021-2026	TCF Volunteers
Eradicate reed canary grass ( <i>Phalaris arundinacea</i> )	Spray with 3-5% glyphosate solution. Cut, bag, and dispose of seed heads to prevent further spread. Monitor for recruits.	April-October 2021-2026	TCF Contractor
Eradicate bitter wintercress ( <i>Barbarea vulgaris</i> )	Hand pull/ weed whip large populations and monitor for new recruits.	April-July 2021-2026	TCF Volunteers
Prep for prescribed burning	Install fire breaks using mower and/or brush cutter.	September-November 2021-2026	TCF INPC

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INPC=IL Nature Preserves Commission

IDNR=IL Department of Natural Resources

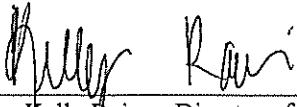
<b>Management Goal</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Lead</b>
Maintain community structure	Conduct prescribed burns as weather permits. Burning on sloped areas and floodplain should be done in the spring.	November-April, 2021-2026	TCF IDNR INPC Contractor
Remove trash and litter	Collect and properly dispose of trash and litter along paths and waterways	January 2021-January 2026	TCF Volunteers
Monitor for and deconstruct unsanctioned structures in woods	Identify structures such as bike paths/jumps, unsanctioned footpaths, and other human made site disturbances, and remove and remediate.	January 2021-January 2026	TCF INPC
Collect, propagate, and distribute native seed collected on site throughout the site	Collection, propagation, and distribution of native seed collected on site throughout the year will be performed to aid in the establishment of habitat in both the woods (primarily after invasive species clearing).	May- November, 2021 - 2026	TCF

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This management plan and schedule has been reviewed and approved by:



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Kelly Rajzer, Director of Parks and Recreation  
The Village of Romeoville

5/25/21

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Date

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Kelly Neal, Stewardship Project Manager  
Illinois Nature Preserves Commission

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Date





May 2021

This letter is an acknowledgement that The Conservation Foundation is submitting a grant application to the Illinois DNR Illinois Natural Areas Stewardship Grant for stewardship activities at O'Hara Woods Nature Preserve, which is owned by the Village of Romeoville. The Conservation Foundation will work with the Village of Romeoville to prioritize stewardship activities which will be guided by INPC approved 2021-2026 O'Hara Woods Nature Preserve Management Plan.

*Kelly Rajzer*

*5/25/21*

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Kelly Rajzer  
Village of Romeoville

Date

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Brook McDonald  
The Conservation Foundation

Date