

Flint Creek Savanna

by Patsy Mortimer

Flint Creek Savanna (FCS) is Citizens for Conservation's largest and most diverse preserve with savanna, creek, wetland and prairie restorations. FCS is the only property that CFC has purchased rather than received by donation from a developer or landowner. The initial thirty-three acres acquired in 1988 have grown to 109 acres with the latest six-acre acquisition in 2005. CFC members have donated all of the \$1.4 million dollars that this property cost, an extraordinary accomplishment in light of current reliance on government funding.

FCS is the linchpin in CFC's vision of a greenway, a protected corridor of natural areas, along Flint Creek from Barrington Hills in the south to the Fox River in the north. The greenway has grown over the past twenty-two years with major acquisitions by the Lake County Forest Preserve District. The Village of Lake Barrington has also added to the greenway (see Winter, 2010 *CFC News*.)



Map courtesy of Dave Holman at Liberty Prairie Conservancy.

and hickories including the largest white oak in Lake County. There were open areas for wetland and prairie restorations and a mile of Flint Creek.

Flint Creek Savanna
109 acres in Lake Barrington
Entrances: CFC office 459 W. Hwy. 22
or W. Brookside Way



Sandhill cranes at Flint Creek Savanna wetlands. Photo by Patsy Mortimer.

CFC has received funding for restoration, and FCS is all about restoration. The property presented challenges and opportunities. The land was ecologically degraded when CFC bought it. The open areas had been farmed, and cattle had grazed the oak-hickory savannas eating all the native wildflowers. After the cattle left, brush moved in. The creek meandered through floodplains full of reed canary grass, and silt washed downstream from farms and construction in Lake Barrington, Barrington Hills and Barrington. However, the basics of the property were there: majestic 100- to 200-year-old oaks

CFC has been busy restoring the ecosystems. Volunteers cleared brush out of the savannas and planted rescued wildflowers; they collected prairie seed from remnants along the railroad tracks and spread it in the open areas. Developers funded creation of two new wetlands to mitigate for wetlands they destroyed. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Urban



Forb rescue workday at Flint Creek Savanna. Photo by Patsy Mortimer.

Resources Partnership, Cuba Township, The Garden Club of Barrington and Donnelley Foundation have all funded restoration along Flint Creek including the planting of native plant plugs in critical areas in the floodplain, savanna, and prairie.

CFC built two gravel hill prairies on top of the concrete debris from the old barn foundation, expanded the pond near its office to create fish habitat, and created additional filter marshes to cleanse stormwater runoff. Volunteers installed floating islands to improve water quality. Oberweiler Foundation helped fund summer interns who have weeded, sprayed, planted plugs, collected and spread native seed and monitored water quality. CFC linked trails by placing a rock bridge across the creek while scouts built wetland bridges, and L.L.Bean through Chicago Wilderness has funded trail improvements slated for completion in 2010.

The results are spectacular. There are over 200 species of grasses, sedges and wildflowers; three nesting birds are on the Illinois list of “species in greatest need of conservation”: savannah sparrow, sedge wren, and sandhill crane. The savannas are brush-free, full of wildflowers and alive with bluebirds, indigo buntings and kingbirds. The creek and reed canary grass floodplains still need work, but native sedges and wildflowers like swamp milkweed line the banks. Chorus frogs sing among the bulrushes and lily pads in the wetlands. The prairie is an ever-changing palette of colors from hoary puccoon and violet wood sorrel in the spring, orange butterfly weed and purple prairie clover in the summer to blue asters, goldenrods and the strawberry-hued blades of little bluestem in the fall. Colorful monarch, fritillary, and swallowtail butterflies crown the equally colorful forbs.



Eastern tiger swallowtail at Flint Creek Savanna. Photo by Donna Bolzman.



Flint Creek Savanna in summer. Photo by Donna Bolzman.

CFC Preserves

	<u># acres</u>
Barrington Bog	45
Farm Trails North	18
Flint Creek Savanna	109
Grigsby Prairie	42
Hawley Lake Marsh	17
Heron Marsh	49
River's Bend	9
Steyermark Woods	1
Twin Ponds	23
Wagner Fen	<u>42</u>
Total	355

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DEDICATED TO WAID R. VANDERPOEL

Inscription on boulder overlooking pond:

This preserve was created as a result of Waid's determination and commitment spanning 15 years. In 1988 the east half of the preserve was purchased after he spearheaded complicated negotiations. He then immediately began a 12-year effort to obtain the west half, which was realized in October of 2000. Flint Creek Savanna provides a natural habitat that will last into the distant future, and for this, CFC honors Waid's achievement. May 18, 2002