



Interpretive Trail to Help Visitors Understand the Treasures of Local Wild Lands

Vicki Pellar Price

The history of our local wild lands includes a visit, over a century ago, from Henry David Thoreau. He jotted down his observations from the deck of a steamboat, just below steep bluffs in what is now Eden Prairie, Minnesota.

Literary scholars have said his notes were intended for a book he was going to write, maybe another Walden Pond. Instead Thoreau died a year later and his notes were published as Thoreau's Notes on his Journey West. Only nine years before, the writer, Elizabeth Fries Ellet journeyed on the river past the same area describing it as a "Garden of Eden." When she arrived back in St Paul she told officials about what she had seen and they named the area Eden Prairie.

What Thoreau observed when he visited is but a sketch of the wilderness panorama of the 19th century. Today, big box retail squares city blocks instead of the oak savannas and prairies that rounded his view from the Franklin Steele as it steamed up the Minnesota River. To live in a place resembling Thoreau's steamboat view, where wildness is valued, restored and conserved, is the choice of western suburbanites in Eden Prairie. Drawn to natural systems, trails, indigenous biomes, as well as 15 lakes, 513 wetlands, and 3 creek systems, most who choose to live here care deeply about the city's patchwork of old and new landscapes. Valued by residents—kept safe for our descendants through the city's leadership — living and thriving for generations, the wild open land holds a place in our

future still...

Thoreau wrote in his introduction to Wild Fruits: "I think each town should have a park, or rather a primitive forest, or five hundred acres, either on one body, or several"

Both writers came to Minnesota to explore its wild natural beauty. In the spirit of their exploration an interpretive trail will be installed this summer at the Richard T. Anderson Conservation Area adjacent to the Minnesota River. It will serve as a guide to the neighborhoods and neighbors of Big Woods, Sedge Meadow, Oak Savanna, Prairie, Bottomland Forest and Minnesota River communities.

The trail's interactive web site rebuild will facilitate exploration of the area's six biomes. The web site will allow visitors to contribute to a plant database by submitting their own photos of different species of flora. The trail signage and interactive web site will provide enough information to be used as a curriculum in schools.

This year we've developed programs that will become part of the trail experience:

June 23- Saturday- 10 to 12Noon -Yako Myers, Ojibwa Herbalist -Plant Uses of the Native Indians: Workshop and Excursion- Yako teaches at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. \$15.00 Twenty Person Max

September, 9th Sunday- 1 to 3PM - Nature's Seed Mechanism: Fruits and Seeds -Types of fruits, dry and fleshy; dispersal methods; flower structure /MN

Landscape Arboretum Instructor, Shirley Mah Kooyman - \$20.00 Twenty Person Max

October 6th, Saturday, 2007- 8 to 12 noon- Local Wilderness Writing Workshop- Don Scheese- Mountains of Memory, Author, Professor Gustavus Adolphus (This event will be coordinated with Barnes & Noble Booksellers) \$30.00 Ten Person Max

You can sign up for these programs by sending a check to:

Writers Rising Up
16526 West 78th St #163
Eden Prairie, MN 55346

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A 501 (c) (3) Eden Prairie based non-profit. In the Company of Places: Writing about World, Community, Environment cosponsored by the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum
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Elizabeth Fries Ellet Interpretive Trail at the Richard T. Anderson Conservation Area
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