



2024: A Year in Review

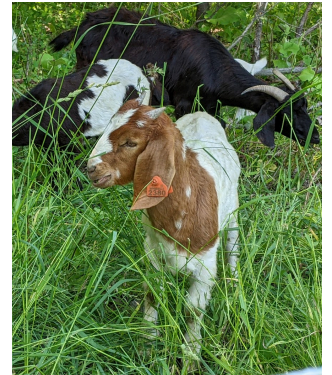
With the first year of our group drawing to a close, we want to take a look back at some of the things we've accomplished. Our sincere thanks to all of our wonderful volunteers!

6 acres under restoration
36 restoration volunteers
408 hours of restoration work
3 classes taught
2 plant surveys conducted
11 lbs of grass seed planted
~1,500 volunteer-grown plugs planted

Chatham Trails Park

A group of volunteers, working with the Public Works Department, has been clearing buckthorn from Chatham Trails for several years. Prior to this year, their efforts were focused on cutting and removing mature buckthorn trees. Chatham Trails, like other forested areas in Arden Hills, has a mature and very well-established buckthorn infestation. Buckthorn trees 15-20' tall are common. As a result of their efforts, an area of 3-4 acres east of Valentine Hills School and west of the McCracken cul-de-sac is clear of mature buckthorn. This year, volunteers started putting more effort into suppressing buckthorn regrowth in previously cleared areas and have started the slow process of establishing native vegetation.

The first attempt to suppress buckthorn regrowth was to set a flock of goats to work on eating it. Goats help with buckthorn mitigation by eating the leaves off of the plants. Done often enough, this can weaken and eventually kill the plants. In 2023, the City Council approved a proposal by the Parks, Trails and Recreation Committee to hire a herd of goats to mitigate buckthorn growth in Chatham Trails Park. The contract called for two treatments, the first in the fall of 2023 and the second in early summer 2024. Each treatment lasted approximately four weeks. Arden Hills Greening volunteers assisted the contractor mainly by checking the temporary fencing twice a day and filling a water trough as needed. We also undertook a buckthorn education campaign, delivering leaflets to all of the houses in the Chatham-McCracken neighborhood announcing the arrival of the goats and explaining their purpose. We also set up leaflet distribution boxes to provide the same information to people walking the trails.



The goats were effective in reducing the foliage between about 1' and 5' above the ground. The effect was plainly visible. However, the buckthorn recovered quickly, replacing the lost leaves. The result is that 1-2 months after they left, the area looked much the same as it did before their arrival.

The goats were an experiment. They are one of the management tools available but, in order to see faster, more cost-effective results, we feel the need for more aggressive methods. This includes the use of a foliar herbicide spray. The first application was in October, hand-sprayed by a Public Works crew to minimize damage to non-target plants (such as dogwood and wild geranium) in a 1 acre section of the park. Follow-up spraying will be required in the coming years to kill additional regrowth in that section, as well as clear other areas for planting.

A **vegetation survey** was conducted this fall, prior to weeding, spraying and planting in a part of that 1 acre section. This will hopefully help us evaluate the effectiveness of our management strategies and guide future decision making. Of the six square-meter plots surveyed, there was an average of:



- 1 cut buckthorn that had resprout,
- 7 buckthorn saplings,
- 86 buckthorn seedlings,
- 10 seedlings of desirable trees/shrubs (primarily ash, but also dogwood, hawthorn, oak, and cottonwood)
- 7 other desirable plants, such as grape and willow herb (numbers possibly skewed by the seeding of wood sedge in fall of 2023)

On Sept. 28, our Chatham crew was joined by several MN Master Naturalist volunteers, who pulled buckthorn seedlings to prepare the site for planting. Afterwards, the edges of the weeded areas were clearly delineated with marking

tape, and desirable vegetation amongst the



buckthorn seedlings was flagged to alert the city staff who came out to spray herbicide. In the following weeks, over 1,100 plugs of various shade-tolerant flowers were planted. This dense planting will serve multiple purposes: competing with any remaining buckthorn

seedlings for light and food, providing much-needed floral resources for local pollinators, attracting insects such as flower flies to feed the local bird population, and it should also serve as a source of seed for additional restoration efforts in coming years. (The planting was interrupted by knee surgery and will resume in the spring.)



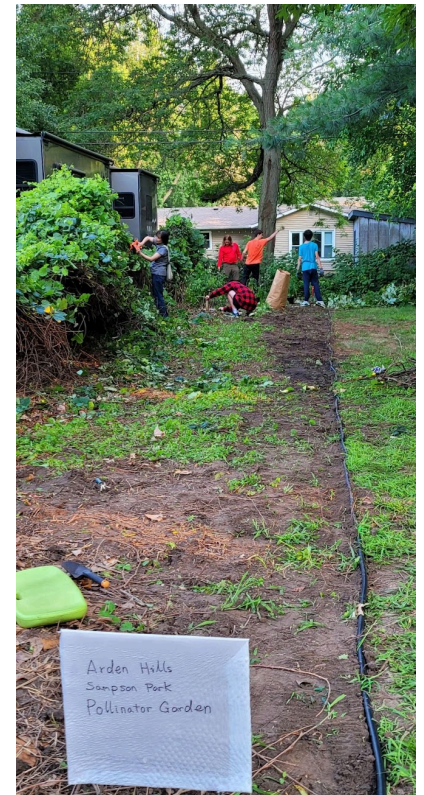
The city provided 40# of grass seed for us to plant and we have been experimenting and learning as we go. Brush cutters were used to clear buckthorn after the herbicide had done its work. In late November, when soil and air temperatures were low enough to prevent fall germination, AHG volunteers spread about 11 lbs. of Virginia Wild Rye and Bottlebrush grass seed over the area, using leaf blowers to improve seed contact with the soil. This seed will lie dormant over the winter and germinate in the spring.

Sampson Park

The new 800 square foot pollinator garden at Sampson

Park is a substantial Eagle Scout project, which was accomplished with the guidance and support of Arden Hills Greening. This new garden contains 310 native plants: 22 species ranging from tall background plants such as joe pye, figwort and grey-headed coneflower to shorter border plants such as wild columbine, Short's aster and wild strawberry.

This new planting will require maintenance, particularly weeding in the next couple years until the plants fill in and the seedbank is less weedy. (There was a lot of motherwort and crabgrass to deal with this year.) If anyone is interested in helping with this project, please email us at contact@ardenhillsgreening.org.



Education/Outreach Efforts

Three free classes were offered at City Hall early in the year. They were: Buckthorn ID & Management, Native Trees & Shrubs, and Native Flowers & Sedges. Participation was low, but perhaps there may be more interest in the future. We also created and distributed flyers relating to buckthorn management at Chatham and Crepeau.



We celebrated Pollinator Week in June with a booth full of information about bees, butterflies, moths, and flower flies. Unfortunately, it didn't attract many visitors; it was in need of a city-wide event that could draw people in. That opportunity came when we were invited to participate in the city's Penny Carnival, which draws in a lot of kids and their parents. For

50¢, the kids were able to play a pollen-collecting game, learn about the different types of nests of bumblebees, mason bees, and leaf-cutter bees, as well as pick out a native plant to support pollinators at home. The \$14 from that event is the only income we had this year.

Homegrown National Park



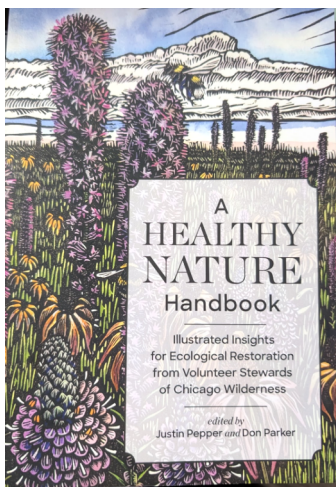
Do you have native plantings at home? If so, we encourage you to get on the HNP map. We'd like to see opportunities for possible habitat corridors in our community. (Currently, 11 sites in Arden Hills are on the map.) We also have durable yard signs available for \$20.

Please email us at contact@ardenhillsgreening.org to arrange for yours.



Looking Forward: There are so many opportunities for “greening” in our community, but we are not yet in a position to act on most of them. For the time being, we will continue to focus on the projects that we have started—in Chatham, Hazelnut, and Sampson—and try to develop a team of volunteers in the Crepeau neighborhood. We may have an opportunity to work in Cummings Park, but that is currently unclear (though there is certainly weeding that could be done if anyone is interested in leading that effort). One big upcoming change is that the city will be adding a new Parks Manager this spring, who will be responsible for Natural Resource Management (among other things), so it will take some time to find out how park management will be affected and how we can collaborate on invasive species management and habitat restoration.

We will invest less time into community education this year, at least until we feel there is more interest/demand, but we are open to mentoring homeowners with an interest in adding native plants to home landscaping. It would be beneficial to participate in the city's Penny Carnival again, but we would need more volunteers. Also, an alternative to classroom education that we are considering is a **hands-on buckthorn management workshop**, where participants could learn to identify, treat, and properly mitigate the problem, all while meeting new neighbors.



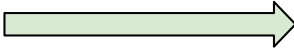
In the book *A Healthy Nature Handbook: Illustrated Insights for Ecological Restoration from Volunteer Stewards of Chicago Wilderness*, the authors discuss how a successful organization requires a group of people with a diverse set of skills. Not everyone needs to be a plant expert or skilled with a chainsaw; you also need people with organizational and communication skills – scheduling volunteer events, welcoming people at events, inspiring and overseeing volunteers, acting as a liaison with other organizations, managing social media, etc. As our group grows, we welcome more people to join us and find the roles that fit them, including leadership roles. And, of course, we will always need people willing to do the hands-on restoration work of weeding, cutting and hauling brush, and planting. Many hands make light work, and build a community of stewardship.

← If you're interested in reading this book, it is available for AHG members to borrow.

One way to get involved is to join us at one of our monthly meetings. Meet new people and share ideas. Meetings take place at Dunn Brothers Coffee on County Road E. To make things more predictable, we have

decided to meet on the last Wednesday or Sunday of each month—Wednesday afternoons on odd months and Sunday afternoons on even months, though the exact time and selection of meeting rooms may change. *(The exception is August because 1) it doesn't show up on our calendar and 2) it's Labor Day weekend.)* **Check the calendar on our website for details.**



Moving forward,

 one step at a time.

