

Volunteers team up to conserve space along Mississippi River

By Rosemount Newsroom on Oct 22, 2016



On Saturday, Oct. 15, more than 60 volunteers from Flint Hills Resources, Friends of the Mississippi River, and Great River Greening teamed up to remove invasive species such as buckthorn from the Pine Bend Bluffs, one of the largest natural areas in the Twin Cities.

The annual tradition is part of a 16-year partnership between the three groups, resulting in the award-winning Pine Bend Bluffs Restoration Project.

"Our goal is to restore the bluffs as close to pre-settlement conditions as possible," said Tom Lewanski, conservation director for Friends of the Mississippi River. "Restoring this beautiful natural area has been a priority for Flint Hills 16 years running. We appreciate their commitment to this important undertaking year in and year out."

Comprised of natural prairie, savanna and oak woodlands, the Pine Bend Bluffs provide critical wildlife habitat in the middle of the Mississippi Flyway, a migration corridor for millions of songbirds and 40 percent of North America's waterfowl and shorebirds. A primary goal of the restoration project is to protect the environment for both resident and migratory animals. In addition, the Pine Bend Bluffs are used to educate local students about the environment, and the importance of restoring and preserving natural habitats.

"It's exciting to see such extremely noticeable improvements, looking back to when this wonderful partnership began in 2000," said Don Kern, engineering and facilities manager at Flint Hills Resources. "We have an exceptional group of volunteers that does everything from removing invasive species on sand-gravel prairies to stacking pre-cut buckthorn brush, to planting native grasses, monitoring vegetation, and managing the original oak savanna habitat. It's a terrific project."

In addition to work being done at the Pine Bend Bluffs, Flint Hills volunteers planted a five-acre native prairie near the refinery's new administration building, and constructed several ponds and wetlands with native wetland vegetation to benefit waterfowl. From April through August each year, the group carefully maintains nest boxes for bluebirds. The volunteers monitor the nest boxes, keep track of the number of eggs laid and hatched, and report the data to the Minnesota Bluebird Recovery Program. On average, more than 50 bluebirds fledge each year from the artificial nesting structures at Pine Bend.

For more information on the Pine Bend Bluffs visit fmr.org/pine-bend-bluffs-scientific-and-natural-area.