

Sullivan Woods' Oak Savannah information

- At the time of European settlement, oak savannahs in the Midwest amounted to about 50,000,000 acres.
- Midwestern savannahs today amount to only about 30,000 acres, most of which is degraded. Most remaining individual savannahs are small, usually less than 100 acres. The rarity of oak savannahs has led to them being listed as **“globally imperiled”**.
- Prior to the area being settled, Periodic fires prevented non fire tolerant trees, (Black Cherry, Boxelder, Walnut, Maples), from establishing. Oaks are fire resistant trees.
- Following settlement, the Savannah was grazed by cattle which maintained a pure oak stand.
- Following the farm and property being sold and the neighborhood being built, the ground around the Savannah was no longer maintained by fires or grazing.
- Black Cherry trees established, along with a few Boxelder trees, Walnut trees, a couple of Silver Maples and 1 Hackberry tree.
- The non Oak trees have grown to the height of the Oaks and are starting to kill the Oaks and heavily shaded the area killing off the native grasses and forbs.
- Likewise, Buckthorn, Honeysuckle, Wild Grape Vines, Oriental Bittersweet, and Poison Ivy invaded and needed to be removed.
- Our Oak Savannah has been present for 150+ years
- Aerial images from 1939 show this area had a farm to the south of the Savannah with agricultural fields up to the southern edge of the Savannah.
- The Savannah looks to have used for grazing.
- We are currently in talks with the Local History Librarian at the Aspen Drive Library to help research the history of the property.
- Once the prairie plants are restored, storm water can be captured and used by the plants more drastically reducing run off.
- The timeline of the project will take until 2018 / 2019 when it switches from restoration to maintenance.
- The pink tape on the trees prior to the commencement of the project was part of the information gathering stage.
- Party spots with fire pits and lawn chairs were found in the back of the site along with years' worth of beer cans and various trash and items associated with illegal drug use.

Restoration Plan

- In July of 2016 (7) acres were flagged off to establish the restoration's starting point
- Money was budgeted for this fiscal year to rent a "Forestry Mower" to clear the understory and edges of Buckthorn and Honeysuckle, the machine was also capable of taking down small trees. The total amount for the equipment rental is approximately \$6,000.
- A district owns a "Brush Hog" which followed the forestry mower to chew up what was mowed down.
- For 10 days an average of 8 staff both full time and seasonal employees worked to clear the underbrush and begin to remove the Black Cherry & Boxelder trees.
- Approximately 50 small trees were removed and 10 tall non Oak trees have been removed.
- 7 of the 12 acres have been cleared of Buckthorn, Honeysuckle, and Oriental Bittersweet which are invasive species.
 - <http://www.invasive.org/illinois/SpeciesofConcern.html>
- The remaining 5 acres is currently the buffer between the path and the wetland area to the west of the path and will most likely not be touched during this project.
- The remaining non Oak trees will be taken down as time allows going into the winter
- In the Spring any non Oak trees and shrubs that pop back up will be treated with herbicide
- An inventory will be conducted this year of the surviving old growth Oaks and 3 stands of "regeneration" Oaks. Regeneration Oaks are younger Oak trees to take the place of the older growth as they climb in age. Regeneration Oaks are important as Oak trees take 100+ years to fully mature and develop.
- It is believed that there is a "seed bed" of the native prairie plants that once occupied the site lying dormant in the soil and will germinate once sun can reach the ground in the spring / summer of 2017
- Money will be budgeted for native seed mixes to be spread across the site during the winter of 2017/2018. Estimated amount to be budgeted is \$4,000
- Once enough prairie plants cover the ground, prescribed burns will be introduced into the maintenance of the Savannah
- A mulched walking path will be created through the restored savannah
- Informational signs will be installed closer to the restoration completion time
- The restoration of this will provide habitat for butterflies, bees and other insects, song birds, raptors, small mammals, and deer.

Additional information about Oak Savannahs can be found at the following web sites.

https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Neal_Smith/wildlife_and_habitat/oak_savanna.html

<http://www.oaksavannas.org/>

<http://www.oaksavannas.org/savanna-animals.html>

1961 aerial view of the savanna



Overlay of 1961 onto current



Images of restored Oak Savannahs

