



Riverwoods Preservation Council

A group of resident volunteers

dedicated to preserving the ecological heritage of the community.

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Presentation by Laurie Bretkopf on behalf of the RPC
to Board of Trustees October 29, 2009

1. Speaking on behalf of RPC
2. We are here to summarize the findings of the WHS commissioned by RPC and to propose recs. A copy of the WHS and data was provided to you on 10/5
3. First, I'd like to thank BOT for sharing cost of WHS. As we stated when we requested funding from the Village, we planned a two-phase study.

Phase 1 was to conduct an assessment of the status of the woodland envt, to provide a baseline understanding of woodland health in RWds

Phase 2 was to meet with professional arborists and ecologists to evaluate factors changing the character of woodlands and to design mgmt practices that will improve these factors

We would like to present the findings of the assessment and initial proposals for mgmt practices

4. WHS conducted by Applied Ecological Services, a well-known firm specializing in ecological science, restoration, management and research

14 sample plots selected on 8 public and private properties, including the Village Hall

Properties were selected to be representative of Rwds woodlands

6 prop south of Drfld Rd and 2 north of Drfld Rd

Some properties were fenced to exclude deer

Should note that WHS interested many Rwds residents, who offered more than 100 acres for sampling plots

5. Assessment conducted in Fall 2008 and Spring 2009, to study fall and spring vegetation
6. Each plot was assessed based on **number and abundance of plant species** found and **compared** to similar woodlands in Ryerson Woods. Ryerson has been studied as part of the Illinois Natural Area Inventory, and is considered one of the finest deciduous woodlands in the Chgo region.

7. A healthy woodland consists of four layers: canopy (tallest trees), subcanopy (lower layer of trees), shrubs and understory. The WHS revealed a stressed and disturbed woodland ecosystem on the sample plots. **The study found, among other conclusions:**

- (a) Conspicuous absence of oak subcanopy trees, oak shrubs and oak saplings to replace the oak canopy, likely due to deer browse and shading from closed tree canopy.
- (b) Low density of shrubs at all study plots except Fire Station, which had a significant amount of buckthorn.
- (c) Low # species diversity and low # sensitive species (e.g., spring ephemerals) in understory, likely due to deer browse and shading from the closed canopy.
- (d) The understory is rated in poor or fair condition in all studied plots except Lot 1 on the river (which was rated "good").
- (e) Majority of plots exhibit between 60-90% bare ground. A high quality ecosystem has no more than 15% bare ground.
- (f) Majority of plots exhibit 10-30% understory cover. A high quality woodland has greater than 80% understory cover.
- (g) Most of the plots exhibit less than 10% sun penetration. Light levels below 20% significantly reduce growth and species composition in a woodland understory. A healthy woodland has light levels between 20-50%

8. **Why do we care whether our woodlands are healthy?** The Village's WPO adopted by the BOT in 2005 summarizes the importance of a healthy woodland envt, by stating that "the maintenance of a healthy woodland envt provides the following benefits":

- reduction of stormwater runoff
- lessened severity of local flooding
- shade and cooling
- erosion control
- filtering of water pollutants
- recharging of aquifers for drinking water
- replenishment of the groundwater table
- maintenance of water flow
- cleansing of the air
- mitigation of global warming by absorbing greenhouse gases

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promotion of a biologically diverse community of micro-organisms, plants and animals, and
promotion of higher property values for woodland areas in the Village

The Woodland Protection Ordinance is a very sound policy. But it's an incomplete answer, since the Board necessarily tried to minimize regulatory interference with residents' use of their properties.

Many Riverwoods residents, in managing their own properties, have gone beyond the limited requirements of the Woodland Protection Ordinance. They sought to do more. They see themselves as stewards of the woodlands, and look beyond their own inhabitation of the properties. They feel that they are rehabilitating the woodlands for the benefit of the community, their neighbors and future generations.

Given present conditions, the woodlands must be actively managed to restore their health so they can offer the benefits listed in the WPO.

9. **Where do we go from here?** Based on our consultant's recommendations, RPC proposes that the Village do the following:

- (a) Educate residents about carefully prescribed burn management programs and encourage such programs on private and Village properties, to prevent invasive shrubs; maintain native shrubs, understory plants and oak saplings; and return valuable nutrients to the soil.
- (b) Educate residents about and encourage thinning of maple and ash shrubs/small trees and possibly other, larger trees to allow more light into the woodlands.
- (c) Make Village reforestation and invasives removal programs more user-friendly and expand the programs to include more native trees and native understory plants. For example, simplify the application process and increase publicity of the programs, via Village Voice, website, Village workshops, and other methods.
- (d) Control deer populations to the extent needed to allow understory and shrub layer plants to mature and to allow oak saplings to regenerate and mature.
 - (i) We realize this is a very controversial proposal.
 - (ii) RPC members love wildlife, including deer. But we also believe in the balance of nature and recognize the value of a wide variety of wildlife and vegetation in our woodlands. Nature is out of balance, and one of the most significant imbalances is the overpopulation of deer. Deer are being given preference over all other living things. Deer control is essential if the woodlands are to thrive. Concentrating on deer "hotspots" in the Village, as many other local municipalities do, is a reasonable approach.
 - (iii) A few words about deer and deer fences, which are now being discussed before the PC and will be heard by you shortly: There would be no deer fence issue in Rwds but for the deer

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overpopulation problem. Taking down deer fences or reducing them to an ineffective height is inconsistent with the goals of the WPO and the ecology goals of the Comprehensive Plan. Most residents installed the fences because they were trying to protect or restore the woodlands. It was neither a whimsical nor an inexpensive act.

- (iv) I'll also add that the issue of deer control has become much more prominent among residents now that the Village is considering a deer fence ordinance.
- (e) Create an Integrated Woodland Health Plan by February 1st of next year that addresses the woodlands as a whole, including the proposals made here.
- (f) Retain a consultant ecologist to work with Chuck Stewart to address woodlands issues. Chuck is a tree specialist; an ecologist specializes in the entire woodland ecosystem. The ecologist would assist with the Integrated Woodland Health Plan, and answer residents' questions as they work to restore their properties.
- (g) Finally, use public properties for woodland health pilot programs. We applaud the Village for its current pilot programs of rain gardens and the native garden at the Village Hall. The Village could add programs on its properties such as conducting controlled burns, studying deer fenced areas, thinning the canopy, and further removing invasives, under supervision by the ecologist and forester.

The information from these programs would be used to educate the residents about steps they can take on their own properties. One idea is to sponsor a few Village environmental workshops each year for adults and children – the events could be called “Woodland Health Days.”

10. There has been a lot of discussion of the problems of the woodlands for many years in Rwds. As far back as 1996, Urban Forest Management performed a deer study on Village Hall property. They concluded that deer were having a serious negative impact on the vegetation, and stated that the deer population had grown dramatically in the Village. It is 13 years later and the situation has gotten worse.

I know each of you cares about the woodlands and are taking steps on your own properties. There are steps the BOT can take to encourage the restoration of the woodlands in the broader Rwds community, for the benefit of current and future generations.

The woodland envt is complicated and subtle. Village Govt is in a unique position to make available to residents the technical guidance to assist them in restoring their portion of the woodlands.

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11. RPC is willing and eager to work with the Village Bd, and its Environmental and Forestry Committees to assist w/ woodland protection programs.

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