



Local Habitat Strike Team Receives External Grants to Restore Habitat for Wildlife and Provide Lewis and Clark Student Training

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EAST ALTON – The National Great Rivers Research and Education Center's (NGRREC?) Habitat Strike Team recently received funding totaling \$353,632 from both the Illinois Department of Natural Resources' (IDNR) Habitat Fund and the Division of Natural Heritage to continue and expand their management capacity in the confluence region of Illinois.

“Our affiliation with NGRREC goes far deeper than the administrative construct of the college, and they are a true partner in conservation, education and workforce development,” said Scott Moss, Restoration Ecology program coordinator at Lewis and Clark Community College. “This project continues to illustrate the college’s commitment to ecological restoration, conservation and sustainability by giving our students relevant experience leading to the development of professional career paths.”

Moss works closely with Habitat Strike Team Coordinator Cody Berry, who is a graduate of the Restoration Ecology program and has worked his way up the ranks within the team to reach his lead position.

“The funding received through the IDNR’s Habitat Fund and Division of Natural Heritage is an excellent new opportunity to expand the scope of the Strike Team’s work while continuing to employ proper management practices and simultaneously engaging the public through outreach and Lewis and Clark students through training opportunities,” Berry said. “Due to our multifaceted approach, our team positively affects local ecological health, maintaining quality recreational access on many public natural areas and private sites enrolled in the Illinois Recreational Access Program.”

The inception of NGRREC’s Habitat Strike Team started with an agreement with IDNR’s Illinois Recreational Access Program (IRAP) in 2016, which funded a three-person strike team to help implement habitat management on private lands enrolled in IRAP. Since then, the Habitat Strike Team has managed or assisted with management of approximately 8,000 acres across 23 counties.

“The newest iteration of NGRREC’s Habitat Strike Team not only continues our important work on IRAP properties but also expands our restoration reach by working with multiple regional partners to put more habitat management on publicly accessible lands within the Lewis and Clark Community College district,” said NGRREC’s Conservation Program Manager Justin Shew, PhD. “Such properties include Pere Marquette State Park and Copperhead Hollow Wildlife Management Area. We are especially excited to be providing paid student internship opportunities through the college’s Restoration Ecology program.”

Additional partners included with this next phase of the Habitat Strike Team include IDNR Division of Natural Heritage, Illinois Nature Preserves Commission, The Nature Institute and the Great Rivers Land Trust.

“The Illinois Nature Preserve Commission (INPC) oversees protection and stewardship of our state’s highest-quality natural areas in southwestern Illinois. However, this Metro region presents many challenges for keeping all wild lands, including INPC sites, ecologically healthy,” said IDNR Natural Areas Preservation Specialist Debbie Newman. “A dedicated restoration team that focuses solely on stewardship in southwest Illinois provides an opportunity to significantly improve the health of these lands.”

Among the 70 sites that Newman oversees from the Calhoun to Randolph County area is the Palisades Nature Preserve in Jersey County. This 430-acre preserve sits on a conservation easement owned by the Lewis and Clark Community College Foundation and is perched on scenic bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River near Grafton, Illinois.

The Habitat Strike Team will spend considerable time at this site to improve habitat for threatened and endangered plants and animals. In the future, NGRREC’s education and conservation team hope to lead guided hikes to showcase this property’s beauty to the public.

Aside from habitat management, the Habitat Strike Team also assists NGRREC with education and outreach initiatives. These include public open house events such as Neighbor Nights and the recent Brewers and Biologists collaboration, as well as NGRREC’s college intern program and the annual Water Festival, both of which target the next generation of environmental stewards.

“These are great opportunities to educate both the public, and specifically students, on topics regarding ecological restoration and habitat management for wildlife, which can also benefit water quality,” Shew said.

Conservationists focus on discussing the tools and techniques used in restoration such as prescribed fire, timber stand improvement, and invasive species removal methods, as well as programs available to private-land owners, such as IRAP.

“The Habitat Strike Team has been a huge supporter of NGRREC’s education and outreach programs,” said NGRREC Environmental Educator Allison Rhanor. “Our programs give the team more varied ways in which to reach the public and educate students, and in turn, our programs directly benefit from their participation and added expertise. It’s been a seamless partnership, and I’m excited for what’s to come as both programs continue to grow.”

For more information or questions regarding NGRREC's Habitat Strike Team, contact Shew at jshew@lc.edu. For questions regarding the Restoration Ecology Program at L&C, contact Moss at jkmoss@lc.edu.

Hunters, outdoor enthusiasts and landowners wanting to learn more about IDNR's Illinois Recreational Access Program can contact Albert at Ross.Albert@illinois.gov.

National Great Rivers Research and Education Center (NGRREC?)

Founded in 2002 as a collaborative partnership between the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Lewis and Clark Community College, NGRREC is dedicated to the study of great river systems and the communities that use them. The center aspires to be a leader in scholarly research, education, and outreach related to the interconnectedness of large rivers, their floodplains, watersheds, and their associated communities. To learn more about NGRREC, visit www.ngrrec.org.