

Restoring Nature to Urban and Industrial Habitats

The Challenge

One hundred years of industrial development amidst outstanding natural areas defines the urban-industrial landscape of Gary, Indiana. This region is unique because it contains both rich and biologically diverse natural communities, as well as opportunities for ecological restoration of degraded urban and industrial habitats.

The challenge is to demonstrate that restoration of black oak savanna is possible in active industrial sites as well as on urban brownfields. Partners are developing creative options that engage schools and environmental job training programs in the ecological restoration process.

The Solution

The USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program has partnered with the U.S. Steel Corporation, the Indiana DNR Forestry Division, the City of Gary, the Wildlife Habitat Council, and local non-government organizations to conduct forest restoration training, and initiate ecosystem rehabilitation and restoration of the area. Once disparate, efforts by industry, agencies, and non-governmental organizations, are now collaborative, working partnerships with the common goal of restoring nature to industrial and urbanized sites. The program provides support for the restoration of oak savannas and slag areas at the U.S. Steel Gary Works site and the Gary Ivanhoe Elementary School oak savanna.

Resulting Benefits

- The heavily-industrialized and urbanized area of Gary, Indiana, is receiving a much needed face-lift and at the same time unique ecosystems are being restored and enhanced.
- Site restoration plans have been developed for two

These corporate and community sites are being used for education and training of participating groups including the Ivanhoe Elementary School, Mighty Acorns, Gary Brownfields Job Training Program, and local high school students.



Local high school students working on-site.

degraded oak savannas and site restoration of the Ivanhoe Elementary School and the U.S. Steel Gary Works facility is nearing completion.

- Expanded opportunities exist for youth training and employment in ecosystem restoration, urban forestry, and the green industry.

Sharing Success

The Wildlife Habitat Council has created a web site: <http://www.wildlifehc.org/indiana/programs/education.cfm> to share information about the project with others.

Since 2004, numerous presentations and site visits have been conducted to share the success of ecological restoration and mitigation in a heavily industrialized environment.

The City of Gary Department of Environmental Management Brownfields Program uses the area for job training on trail maintenance, pruning, and invasive species removal.

The Environmental Protection Agency has designated this site for rehabilitation under the Resource Conservation Restoration Act.

In 2006, the National Park Service Groundworks Program and Americorps will work on the Ivanhoe School site restoring the area through seeding, planting, pruning and other ecological restoration activities.



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