

Valpo Plants 50+ Acres of Natural Habitat for Birds and Pollinators

Valpo Parks and the Valparaiso Redevelopment Commission have partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and others to restore more than 50 acres of diverse native prairie that will provide valuable wildlife habitat on Valpo Parks properties, announced Mayor Jon Costas. “Preserving the ecology of our community makes excellent sense for all of us,” said Costas. “Valparaiso has long demonstrated a respect for our environment, and we’re pleased to showcase these native habitats with nearby trails, allowing us to both preserve and connect with nature,” he said. These habitats provide an essential ecological function and benefit a variety of migratory birds and native pollinators, many of which are considered focal species by the USFWS Indiana Partners for Fish & Wildlife program and are indicative of high-quality habitat conditions.

The two properties hosting habitats include acreage at Creekside on the city’s south side and the new parkland selected for the Valpo Sports & Recreation campus on the city’s east side. The habitats will benefit many migratory and grassland nesting bird species, such as grasshopper sparrows, red-headed woodpeckers, Eastern meadowlarks, bobwhite quail, and wild turkey by providing improved nesting and brood rearing cover. The native prairie will also provide increased habitat resources available to monarch butterflies, native bees, and many other pollinators throughout the growing season.

“The future of the nation’s fish and wildlife depends on private landowners as more than 90% of land in the Midwest is in private ownership. Providing high-quality habitat not only helps wildlife by contributing to a healthy landscape, but also creates a conservation legacy to pass on to future generations,” according to Jared O’Brien, Private Lands Biologist with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Both Valpo Parks and the Valparaiso Redevelopment Commission were active in advancing the partnership to establish habitat. In addition to the USFWS Partners Program, other project partners include the National Wild Turkey Federation, Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the Pheasants/Quail Forever local chapter (Region Ringnecks). The native prairie seed was planted this winter and includes a diverse mix of grasses, sedges and wildflowers. The seeds will begin growing this year but will become most eye-catching a few years down the road, according to O’Brien.

O’Brien shares that residents themselves can help assist native pollinators and migratory birds by landscaping with native plants, controlling invasive species, avoiding or limiting pesticide use, and allowing leaf litter and plant stems to remain in place to provide nesting and over-wintering areas.

The City of Valparaiso has long been an advocate for fostering nature and sustainability, including the creation of Butterfly Meadows & Caterpillar Crossing, a monarch migration area and themed playground with educational signage. The City of Valparaiso was the first “Monarch City” to be recognized in the State of Indiana, continues to advocate for rain gardens and was recently chosen as “Green Project of the Year” for adding 772 solar panels to five City facilities.

To learn more about environmental efforts and Parks facilities, visit valpo.us.

Photo caption:

Valpo Parks and the Valparaiso Redevelopment Commission have partnered with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and others to restore more than 50 acres of diverse native prairie that will provide valuable wildlife habitat on Valpo Parks properties. Pictured here are (left to right) Valpo Parks Horticulture Superintendent Steve Martinson, Valpo Parks Horticulturist April Anderson, Private Lands Biologist for USFWS Jared O’Brien, Valpo Parks Director Kevin Nupnau.