



2025: A Year in Review

Wrapping up Year 2, let's take a look back at some of the things we've accomplished and think about how to move forward. Thanks again to all of our wonderful volunteers!

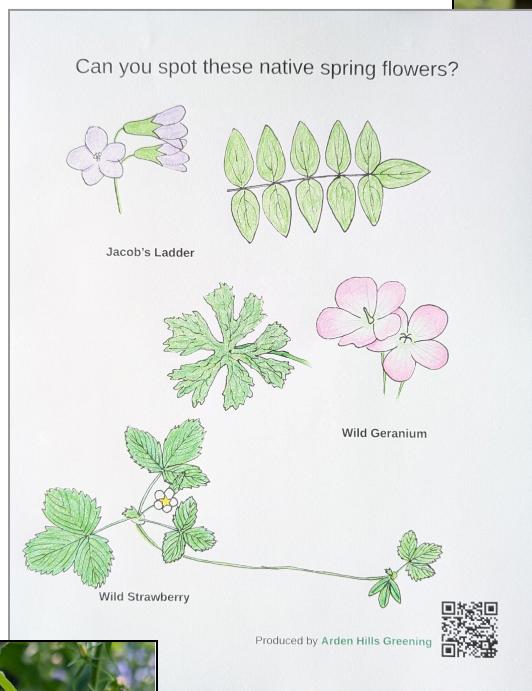
6 acres under restoration
51 restoration volunteers
416 hours of restoration work

1.4 acres planted
? lbs of grass seed planted
?? volunteer-grown plugs planted

Sampson Park

The 800 square foot pollinator garden at Sampson Park started filling in this year. Many of the flowers started blooming for the first time, attracting a variety of insects. (The black-eyed Susans also fed the bunnies.)

Sampson and Hazelnut Parks also sported some educational signage during the spring and early summer, helping curious park-users identify what was blooming at the time.



↑
hyssop

← dwarf bush
honeysuckle

Chatham Trails Park

The cottonwood grove is seeing improvements: dense swaths of grass seedlings germinated this year (where they were seeded in fall of 2024) and some flowers became established, despite the deer browsing.

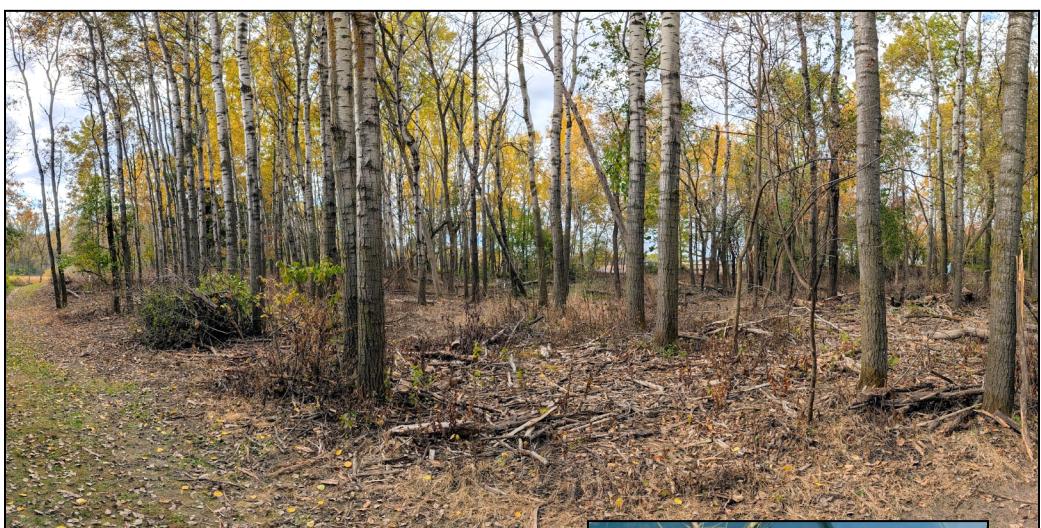
There were also big changes this year in the aspen grove, just east of the Valentine Hills Elementary school. After 2 years, nearly all the mature buckthorn has been removed from this 1.5 acre section!

And, after the city sprayed and volunteers brush-cut the area, most of the buckthorn seedlings have also been killed. (Some areas will need to be sprayed again next year.) With it mostly clear, we started re-planting and seeding the area this fall. So... we can expect to see masses of flowers in the summer of 2027.

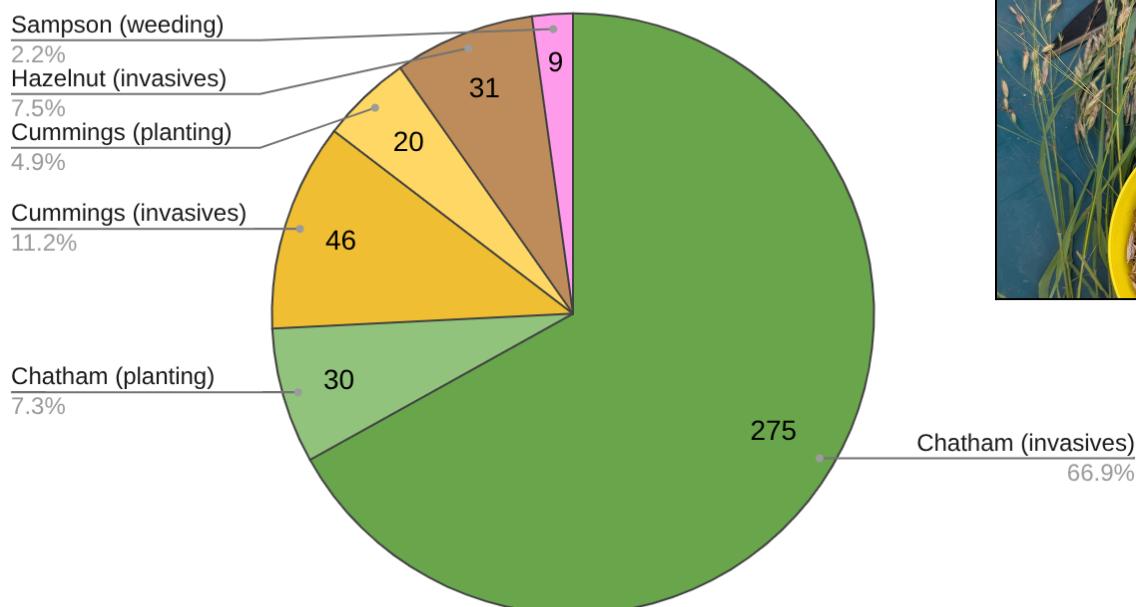


grass seedlings in the cottonwood grove ↗

↖ buckthorn removal in the aspen grove



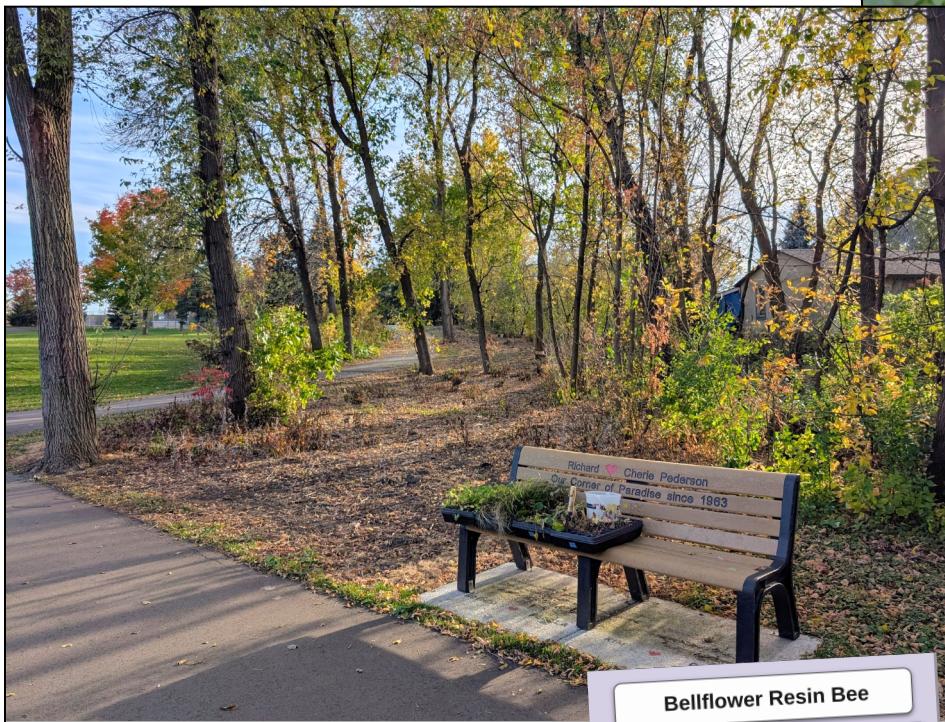
Hours by Park



Cummings Park

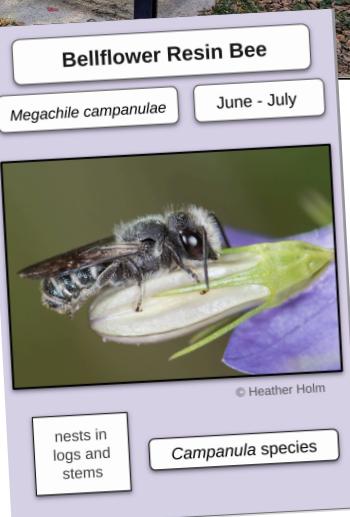
We received permission this summer to begin working on habitat restoration on the northwestern edge of Cummings Park. A team from Boston Scientific worked in the heat and rain to dig most of the burdock before it could bloom, city staff did an initial spraying of weeds, lots of buckthorn was cut (though follow-up will be required) and volunteers helped with an initial round of planting. Winter seeding has now started, as well.

This site is going to take some work. There are still large patches of invasive groundcovers that will need to be removed (vinca, creeping Charlie, lamium)... either by spraying or hand-digging. And there will be other weeds to deal with (burdock, garlic mustard, motherwort, etc.), especially while waiting for the native vegetation to get established. We could also use volunteers to either strip buckthorn regrowth or re-cut and apply herbicide (with provided, city-approved daubers).



Finances

We received \$100 from the Arden Hills Foundation this spring to help cover our seed expenses. With that money, we finally opened a checking account. We now also have a Venmo account to accept donations. In November, a GoFundMe campaign brought in \$140 (-fees) to go towards ordering more seeds.



Education/Outreach Efforts

Due to a lack of interest, the buckthorn management workshop was cancelled. We had booths at two community events, but there was little interaction (except when Kristine was there to grab attention)



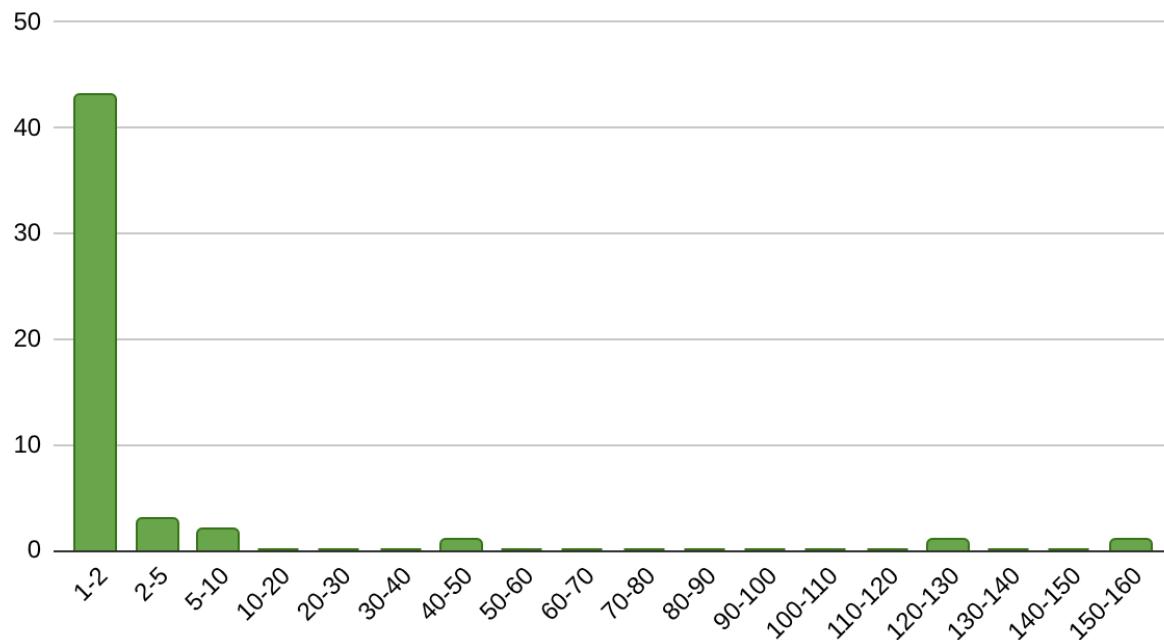
← bee card from a display on keystone plant species and pollen specialist bees

Volunteer Hours

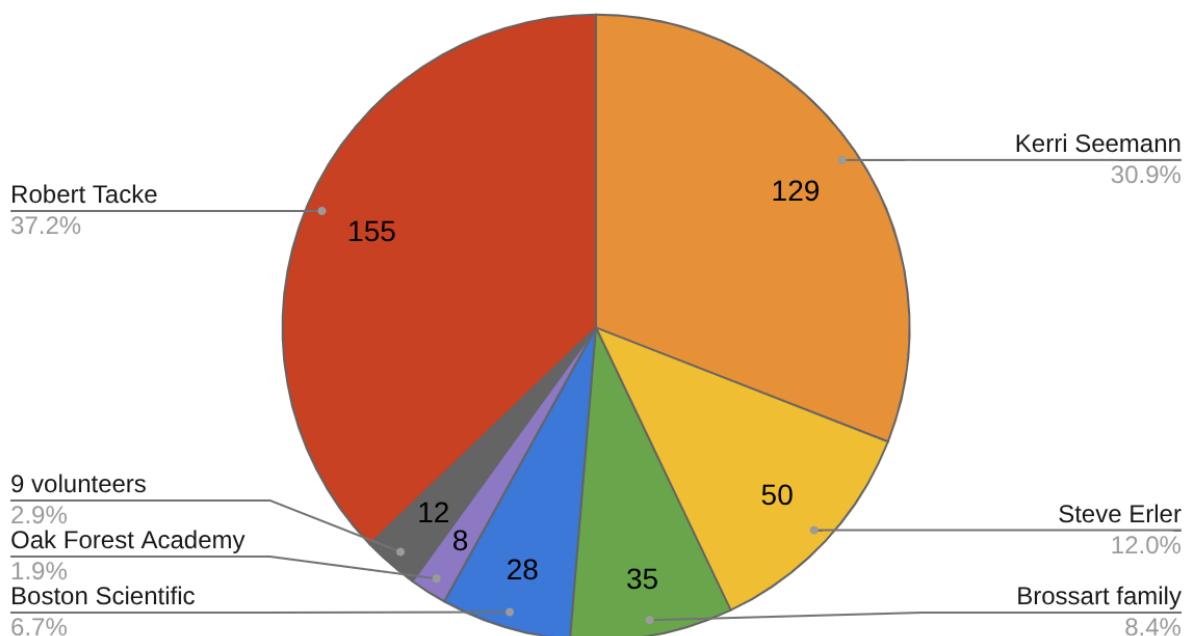
Spreadsheets and graphs... yay! What can we learn from them?

1. We have more volunteers this year, especially with the addition of the group from Boston Scientific and the students from Oak Forest Academy.
2. Most of the work in the parks is being done by a small group.
3. I haven't figured out how to label the axes. The y-axis (below) is the number of volunteers.

2025 Volunteer Hours



2025 Volunteer Hours



Looking Forward:

The big questions are:

- How can we get more volunteers from the **1-2 hour** category to the **2-5 hour** category?
- How can we improve the volunteer experience?
- Would people be interested in lessons on invasive species, native plants or pollinators?
- If so, should it be this winter or in the spring?

Also, how can we raise more awareness of the group and the projects we're working on? How can we recruit more volunteers or raise more money to support our work?

If you have feedback, PLEASE reach out; we'd love to hear from you! If you have time, come share your thoughts at one of our meetings. (The next is Sunday, Dec. 28th from 1-3pm.)

Attendance at the monthly meetings has been low, so we're switching the timing to once **EVERY OTHER** month, on Sunday afternoons. If you have not yet attended a meeting, they are fairly informal and open to everyone. There may be some business to discuss, but it's also a chance to socialize and get to know other members. Join us at Dunn Brothers Coffee on County Road E, typically in the first-floor meeting room. **Check the calendar on our website for details.**

