



PHOTO BY JOHN BOIAKAS, SECOR

The Southern Gateway Nature Park blooms with native wildflowers during the summer, transforming this former Superfund site into a community haven.

A Second Chance for Community Greenspaces and Business

By Marcia Maslonek

Strolling along a winding path at the Southern Gateway Nature Park along the Tuscarawas River in Ohio, one can easily forget the site's history and status as a former Superfund site. Virginia bluebells dot the riverbanks in spring, milkweeds attract pollinators in summer and switchgrass waves tall and golden in the fall, challenging the notion that brownfields must always remain brown—and challenging the notion that commercial value is found only with development. Through projects such as this, the Wildlife Habitat Council (WHC) encourages new visions for remediated sites, visions that encompass economic, social and ecological health and prove that brownfields are a tangible testing ground for the triple bottom line.

The Southern Gateway Nature Park has seen dramatic transformation in recent years. The former Alcoso Aluminum Manufacturing site included a warehouse, deteriorating lot, floodplain, and a National Priorities List site in Gnadenuhthen, Ohio. Atlantic Richfield (a BP-affiliated company) then inherited the liability. But imagination and a commitment to both community and environment allowed a new future to emerge. BP invit-

ed WHC and the village of Gnadenuhthen to assist with their vision for the site in 2000. Moving forward from that meeting, the partners weaved a harmonious blend of greenspace restoration and economic development into this small town in rural, south central Tuscarawas County, Ohio.

Walt Hufford, business portfolio manager with Atlantic Richfield, has been the project's champion from the start.

"The greenspace component adds value in several ways, including a buffer zone for storm water management issues, potential cost savings in energy consumption from shade trees, and even tax benefits in certain locales," says Hufford. "The property also now has visual appeal to the workers and serves as a place for breaks to enhance productivity."

Adding value to the floodplain portion of the site was accomplished through creation of a small park, which incorporates a trail, over 1,600 native tree plantings, 5,000 plus wildflowers, nesting structures, and a gazebo. In 2004, the park was certified through WHC's Corporate Wildlife Habitat Certification/ International

Accreditation Program, which provides international recognition for habitat efforts. Currently, the park is one of 408 Wildlife at WorkSM programs certified with WHC.

In May 2006, the park was donated to the Tuscarawas County Port Authority (TCPA), which in turn partnered with the Indian Valley School District in stewardship of the site. Together, they have developed plans for student-designed plantings, a native plant nursery and more. WHC facilitated the partnership in order to foster ownership of the park by the local community and by generations to come. The values of an easy-to-access outdoor learning lab for children and a passive recreational area for residents are hard to quantify, but undoubtedly increase the value for nearby homeowners, the school district and even future companies that may consider locating within the area.

Immediately adjacent to the park is the Southern Gateway Business Park, a vacant warehouse undergoing renovation. TCPA recognized the potential for a revival of both industry and nature and used this approach to market the business park. Plymouth Foam, headquartered in Plymouth, Wisconsin, will soon occupy 100,000 square feet of the building and begin operations in September 2007.

BP's Wood River facility in Illinois is another example of integrating greenspace into a commercial project. The former BP Amoco refinery features direct railroad access, Mississippi River frontage, access to major highways, and dual feeds for electrical supply reliability. In concert with the highly beneficial commercial aspect of the site, BP created a 30-acre habitat enhancement area on the southeast corner of the property called Deer Park.

The community and wildlife alike enjoy the waterfall, frog pond, snags for cavity-nesting birds, brush piles, and various native plantings. A local high school biology class designed and planted a native garden in order to study pollinators. Wood River has been a WHC certified Wildlife at WorkSM program since 2001.

"It is hard to place a dollar figure on the intrinsic value that such projects provide, but a strong benefit is realized by demonstrating BP's commitment through on-the-ground efforts," says Tom Tunnicliff, environmental business manager for Wood River.

The Southern Gateway Nature Park and Wood River's Deer Park are just a few examples of how greenspace can successfully add commercial value to a brownfield. WHC shares these success stories to encourage industry and regulators to consider ecological approaches.

But first, barriers to further innovation and implementation must be understood and addressed.

Because holistic remediation projects integrate the needs of community and environment, as well as human health and safety, stakeholders must negotiate key issues that range from environmental justice and wet-

lands and coastal concerns to the long-term stewardship of managing site liability and institutional controls.

Through its Land Restoration program, Restoring Greenspace conference series, and various remediation projects and case studies, WHC helps stakeholders strategize the necessary problem-solving steps involved in making ecological enhancements a reality.

Through their participation with WHC, stakeholders also learn about the emerging topic of ecosystem services—e.g., flood control, carbon sequestration, open space, and wildlife habitat—and how to apply it to brownfield redevelopments in a manner that creates value in the marketplace.

In a time when greening and sustainability are becoming an integral part of the language of brownfields, it only makes sense that commercial and environmental principles merge to create redevelopments that are both economically and aesthetically viable for today and the future. **BFN**

Marcia Maslonek is the vice president of programs for the non-profit organization Wildlife Habitat Council in Silver Spring, Maryland. WHC will host the 2007 Restoring Greenspace conference in EPA Region 4, Atlanta, Georgia, on May 22-23, 2007. Visit WHC online for the detailed agenda and online registration at <http://www.wildlifehc.org/events/restoringgreenspace.cfm>

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