

December 22, 2013

The Honorable Mayor and City Council  
City of Portage  
City Hall  
7900 S. Westnedge Ave.  
Portage, MI 49002

Dear Mayor and Council:

Following is a report of the Environmental Board's progress toward our 2014-2015 goals. We continue our priorities of removing and controlling invasive plants that are becoming more of a challenge to all areas of the City, restoring Eliason Reserve, and educating the public about environmental issues. We are also looking into issues related to waste disposal and recycling.

- Establish a program to control selected invasive plants (garlic mustard, purple loosestrife (PLS), and phragmites) on city-owned property including parks by 2016. This coming year, continue to improve the city's management of invasive plant species by performing at least 6-8 PLS beetle releases, conducting preliminary mapping of garlic mustard in one park, increasing volunteer base and hours, and facilitating burning of the phragmites in the Consolidated Drain.
  - Four invasive plant pulls were conducted in West Lake Nature Preserve, Schrier Park, and Eliason Reserve. An extensive campaign to recruit volunteers was conducted beforehand which included an article in the *Portager*, signs in public places (e.g. the Portage District Library), working with groups such as the Kalamazoo County Master Gardeners, and directing people to the EB page on the City Web site. There were roughly 30 volunteers at the pulls. Since there wasn't as much garlic mustard as expected, the focus of the pulls was on other invasives such as non-native honeysuckle and oriental bittersweet.
  - An e-mail list of volunteers for pulling invasives in City parks has been established.
  - EB volunteers released 8 containers of PLS beetles at 8 sites including Mandigo Marsh, the Consolidated Drain, Lakeview Park, and Millenium Park. The EB also facilitated release of an additional 2 containers each for West Lake (purchased by the West Lake Improvement Association) and Austin Lake (purchased by the Austin Lake Riparian Association).
  - Informal surveys of the parks continued with an emphasis on garlic mustard, PLS, and phragmites. An invasion of oriental bittersweet was found at Schrier Park. (An extensive invasion of oriental bittersweet already exists at West Lake Nature Preserve.) A clump of phragmites was located on Long Lake on city-owned property. (The Parks Department was notified.) Although the PLS biocontrol program appears to be working (the density in affected areas is lower and beetles were present

even before the current year release), it continues to spread to new areas within the City.

- A meeting was held with the City Fire Marshall and work begun to do a prescribed burn of the phragmites clump in the Consolidated Drain that had been sprayed last year. Unfortunately, the group hired to do the burn was unable to do it. We are now working with another group to conduct the burn next spring.
  - Potential projects involving invasive plants in the City's parks were discussed with a Boy Scout looking for an Eagle Scout project. He selected one that included providing information and supplies for pulling garlic mustard at West Lake Nature Preserve.
- 
- Enable the restoration of the Eliason Reserve by facilitating a baseline plant species survey and mapping of invasive species, to be completed by 2016. Identify and pursue potential funding sources and personnel to perform the baseline survey this coming year.
    - EB members met with Bill Deming to discuss coordination of efforts with the Parks Department. He is supportive of plans to do a baseline survey.
    - Dr. Binney Girdler at Kalamazoo College is interested in finding a student and funding to do a baseline plant survey in the area where invasive buckthorn is taking over.
    - Funding opportunities are reviewed as they become available. We haven't yet found one appropriate for this project.
- 
- Review the City's options for recycling including single stream recycling.
    - The EB reviewed a bid for the City's recycling.
    - The potential for single stream recycling for the City is under discussion.
- 
- Continue to work with the city to monitor and control the invasive thistle and weeds in the wet prairie restoration at the Celery Flats Water Treatment Plant.
    - EB members monitored the native plantings at the Water Treatment Plant. Conditions continue to deteriorate.
    - Efforts to find a contractor to maintain the native plantings at the Water Treatment Plant were unsuccessful. Discussions continue how best to address this problem.
    - The EB worked with Chris Barnes' office to design informational signs on the efforts to establish native plantings at the Water Treatment Plant.
- 
- Conduct an initial evaluation of environmental concerns for the City of Portage and report the results to the City Council.
    - The EB is reviewing the recently released Comprehensive Plan, and is identifying ways it can have more impact.

- Educate those living around city parks about invasive plants and how to control them. Start this coming year by handing out educational pamphlets at invasive plant pulls.
  - A pamphlet was produced by the EB with information on how to identify and control garlic mustard, PLS, and phragmites. Pamphlets were handed out at invasive plant pulls and made available through selected City sites.
  - During this summer's Green-A-Thon and Fishing Fair, EB members had a display titled "The Waters Edge" that showed how to create a healthy shoreline habitat to improve water quality for fish and wildlife. Also, brochures about native plants used to restore shorelines and invasive plants to avoid were distributed.
  - A display board is maintained at Lakeview Park.

Please let me know if you have any questions, or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Ruth Caputo, Chair  
Environmental Board