

Black Oak Savannah Restoration



By Sharon Lovett, June 13, 2013

For more information and photos of plants and wildlife in High Park see www.highparknature.org

Park history: In 1873 the Howards deeded their property (165 acres purchased in 1836) to the city under the condition that it must be left in its natural state as far as possible, must remain free in perpetuity to Toronto citizens and must always be called High Park. With additional property added it is now 399 acres. Recreation facilities were added in the 1960's, accelerating the decline of the natural preserve envisioned by the Howards.

Restoration: In 1976 after noticing the decline of the natural areas and the lack of regeneration of Black Oak trees in this significantly rare habitat, the MNR began doing botanical inventories and prepared a restoration plan. In addition to plants that were not threatened they found 99 significant species with 86 locally, 9 regionally and 44 provincially rare species. It is a nationally rare vegetation community and a host to 260 species of migratory birds, 48 species of breeding birds, 2 species of provincially rare birds, 19 mammal, 8 reptile and amphibian species and many species of butterfly.

In 1989, 131 acres were declared ANSI (Area of Natural and Scientific Interest) including 65 acres of Black Oak Savannah. Less than 1% of tallgrass ecosystems remain in North America. In the early 1990's native plant propagation began in the High Park Greenhouses.

The Oak Savannah consists of open parkland containing scattered trees and shrubs surrounded by grasses and wildflowers adapted to the sandy soil and hot and dry conditions. (prairies contain fewer than 2.2 trees per acre).

Common species of Black Oak Savannah plants

TREES

Black Oak
Sassafras

SHRUBS

Bush Honeysuckle
Northern Dewberry
Smooth Rose*

GRASSES

Big Bluestem
Bottlebrush Grass
Canada Wild Rye
Indian Grass
Little Bluestem
Pennsylvania Sedge
Sand Dropseed
Switch Grass
Wood Rush

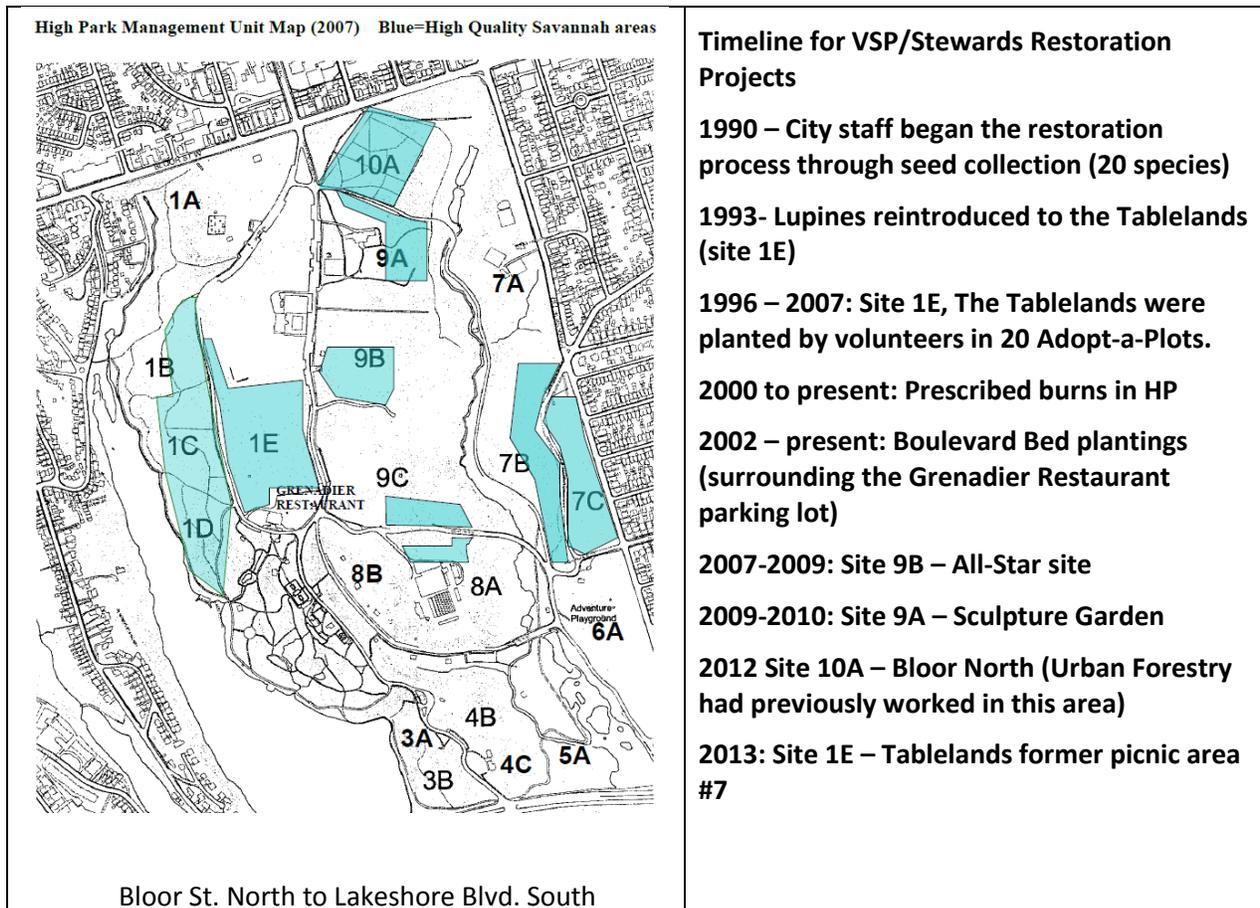
*May be in bloom in mid-June

FORBS/WILDFLOWERS

Blazing Star
Blue Harebell
Brown Eyed Susan*
Butterfly Weed*
Cup Plant
Early Goldenrod
Gray Goldenrod
Hairy Beardtongue*
Hoary Vervain
New Jersey Tea
New England Aster
Showy Tick-Trefoil
Shrubby St. John's*
Sky Blue Aster
Spreading Dogbane
Upland White Aster
Wild Bergamot
Wild Columbine*
Wild Geranium*
Wild Lupine*

Stewardship: The Volunteer Stewardship Program was created in 1996 to assist the City of Toronto Parks, Forestry and Recreation staff in restoring High Park's natural areas. In practical terms we plant, collect seeds, remove invasive species, participate in community discussions on issues relating to the natural environment of the park, increase biodiversity in the area through our native plant sale and provide educational sessions during the winter. We also are involved in maintaining a website www.highparknature.org where we provide a wide range of information on plants, wildlife and conservation activities.

Restoration Sites



Additional info: There is an excellent plant data base on the North American Native Plant Society's website: <http://www.nanps.org/index.php/gardening/plant-catalogue-databse>