



An Evaluation of the 2005
Troy Gardens Natural Areas Management Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Completed and produced by
ZDA – Ziegler Design Associates

for Community GroundWorks at Troy Gardens



2009



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ZDA is a landscape architectural design studio that focuses on design, stewardship and planning. Based in Middleton, Wisconsin, ZDA has been the landscape architect of Troy Gardens since 1997—having led the Master Planning Process, and was recognized in 2006 by the Wisconsin Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects, for the 2005 Troy Gardens Master Plan. ZDA regularly donates consulting services to the management and planning of Troy Gardens.

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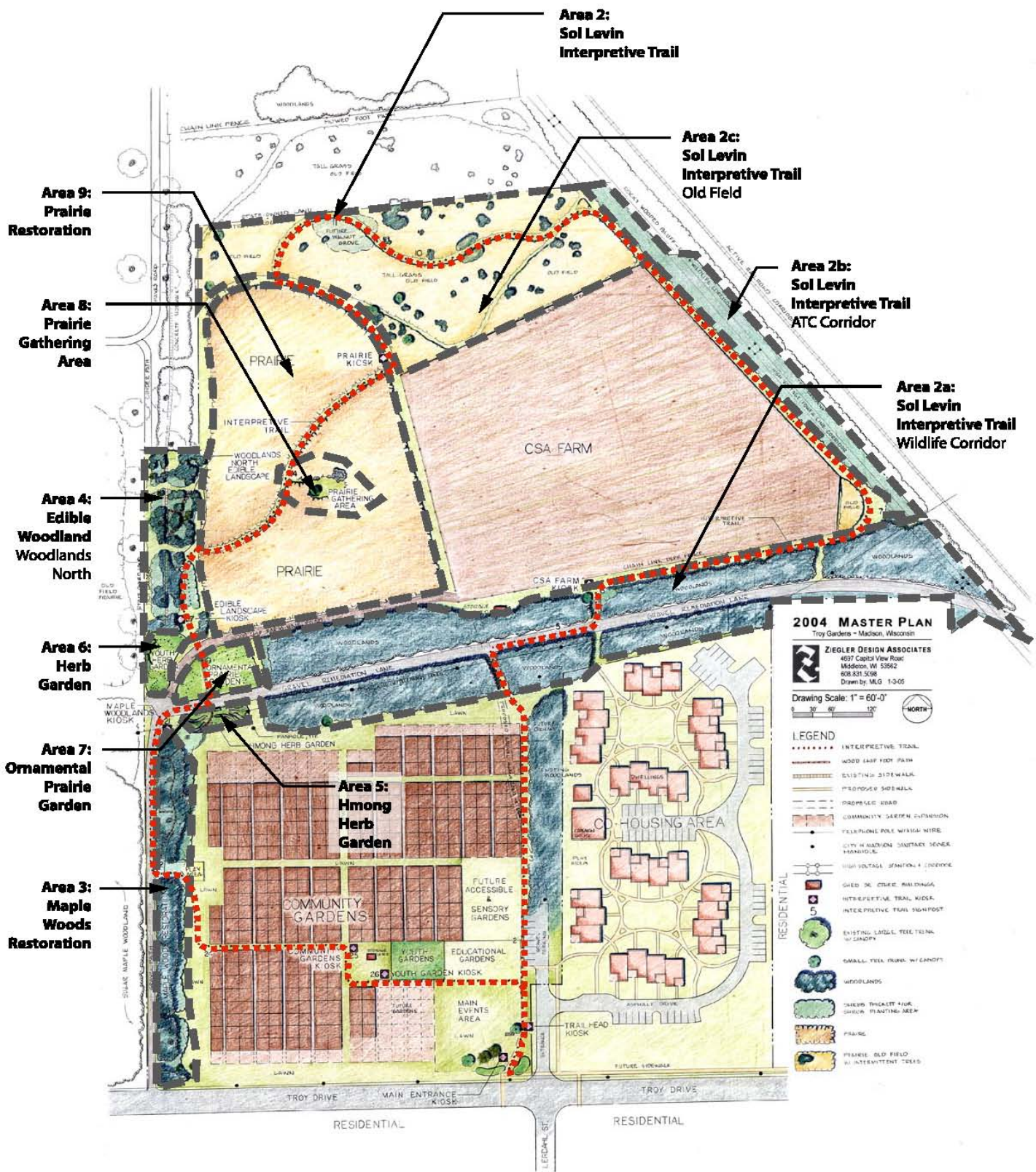


Figure 1: 2005 Troy Gardens Master Plan showing Natural Areas



Introduction & background

Five years have passed since the formal “construction” of the 2005 Troy Gardens Master Plan. During that time (2005-2010), the Friends of Troy Gardens (now, Community GroundWorks, CGW) staff focused on establishing program areas and getting anyone and everyone involved at the site. As part of this, ZDA developed a Natural Areas Management Plan to supplement the 2005 Troy Gardens Master Plan, in order to assist and guide the maintenance of the newly established natural areas, and the overall site. Troy Gardens was designed to be self-maintained and this maintenance simple enough to be carried out by whomever may fill the role over time. In this way, the community of Troy Gardens had to take on the responsibility of caring for it.

Now, five years later, because of the hard work and dedication of CGW staff, volunteers, and others committed to Troy Gardens, program areas are strong and there is a never-ending supply of interns, volunteers, stewards, and community groups looking for service opportunities. With completion of the co-housing, greenhouse, expansion of the Kids’ Garden, and other growth, Troy Gardens has undergone considerable physical and leadership change over this time period, and given CGW’s present visibility and stronghold in the community, it is imperative to now re-evaluate the management plan in order to assess what has worked on site and what has not. Keeping Troy Gardens’ site maintenance guidelines current, applicable, and containing provisions for future land use will be critical to Troy Gardens’ ability to continue functioning over time through changing leadership, changing land uses, changing environmental conditions, and ever increasing visibility and community-wide recognition.

CGW received an urban forestry grant from the State of Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Forestry Program in the spring of 2009, to evaluate the 2005 Troy Gardens Natural Areas Management Plan, developed by ZDA. The funding was used to study, evaluate, and explain what processes and protocols worked during the restoration project, what did not work, and further investigate how to create and maintain a community-based restoration project. We found several general trends, and specific information related to Troy Gardens that will be essential to updating our management plan, and beneficial to other groups that are planning community-based restoration projects.

The way in which we tackled this evaluation process was four-fold:

- We **assessed** the overall site and individual management areas, taking into consideration the intent of the designed areas and non-designed areas, the suggested maintenance practices, and the conditions of the site in August 2009;
- We **developed** evaluation templates for professionals and stewards to use to assess the health and performance of the overall site as well as individual management areas, and to provide specific comments;
- We **distributed and then tabulated** the evaluation results; and
- We **conducted** an evaluation charrette with the stewards, to review the information and develop an approach and begin dialogue towards updating the 2005 management plan.

We found several general trends:

- Performance of the overall site, as well as individual managed areas, is exceeding our expectations. The survival rate of new plantings is approximately 70-75%, and the majority of intended land uses have remained.
- Specific maintenance tasks, regardless of their importance, are likely never going to be accomplished due to lack of resources, and/or lack of staff and volunteer interest.
- Greatest maintenance success is achieved when specific tasks are matched with the strengths of specific volunteer groups. Volunteer community groups tend to excel at routine maintenance, preferring clear direction and discreet tasks; while stewards prefer learning new skills and being able to focus on a particular area, and can be relatively self-directed.
- There is a general lack of knowledge among stewards and CGW staff and administration regarding the condition of particular areas, and their relationship to the intent of the 2005 Master Plan. We believe this is due to lack of consistent site data collection to compare with historical decision-making. For example: some stewards expressed concern and confusion as to why the ATC and Wildlife Corridors contained a large amount of invasive plants and were difficult to access and cultivate. After we explained that these areas typically fell into one of three categories, stewards felt a level of understanding and agreement as to the management and approach taken in these areas. The three categories are as follows:
 - 1) Invasive species are present in an area due to lack of maintenance and/or the area is not suited to its current use (example: Ornamental Prairie Garden),
 - 2) Invasive species are present and it is difficult to cultivate because it was intentionally left undeveloped for human safety reasons (example: the Wildlife and ATC Corridors), and
 - 3) An area was **not** developed, but was allocated for future refining and development (example: the Main Entrance, Kids' Garden Area, the main Community Gathering Area, Accessible Garden, Greenhouse area, etc.).
- Better relations need to be developed between CGW and neighbors and easement holders such as Mendota Mental Health Institute, MG&E, ATC and Troy Gardens Co-Housing, so that all of Troy Gardens is managed in a comprehensive way that benefits the entire site.
- Because of CGW's success over the past 5 years, in terms of program development, increased use and visibility, and co-housing and greenhouse construction, the areas that were intentionally left undefined (but allocated for spatially) at the time of the 2005 Master Plan implementation, are now in dire need of updated design. Stormwater management has become critical, as well as the integration of current and future land uses. It will be next to impossible to effectively plan for the future accessible gardens and expansion of other program areas (e.g. Kids' Garden, CSA, community gardens) without dedicated thought to this matter, at this time.

Results of analyses

Site assessment - Management Areas

From a basic, overall standpoint, the site is functioning well in terms of intended land uses, access and circulation, and success of planted species and managed areas. However, particular natural areas in the management plan have developed problems while others have excelled. These can be summarized into three categories: **problem areas, functioning areas, and excelling areas.**

The **problem areas** represent those areas that were not fully programmed at the time of construction, whose program is no longer effective due to changing uses, or areas that are affected by easement holders. *These include: Areas 2a & 2b – Sol Levin Interpretive Trail: Wildlife Corridor and ATC Corridor, and Area 7 – the Ornamental Prairie Garden.*

The **functioning areas** are grouped as such because in their present state (August 2009) they are appreciated by the community, serve their intended purpose well, and are critical components of the natural areas. They are the backbone of CGW, and represent site access areas, areas yet to be developed, and developed areas that are in transition. *These include: Area 1 – Overall Site, Area 2 – Sol Levin Interpretive Trail, Area 2c – Sol Levin Interpretive Trail: Old Field, Area 4 – Edible Woodlands: Woodlands North, and Area 5 – Hmong Herb Garden.*

The **excelling areas** are the perceived unique features of Troy Gardens that are coveted by the community. They are divided into two distinct ecosystems—the Restored Prairie and the Sugar Maple Woodland, and two specific destination points—the Herb Garden and the Prairie Gathering Area. *These include: Area 3 – Sugar Maple Woodlands, Area 6 – Herb Garden, Area 8 – Prairie Gathering Area, and Area 9 – Restored Prairie.*

Site assessment - Water Management

The buffer systems of the natural drainage and waterways of Troy Gardens are currently over taxed and saturated due to the increasing number of land uses and users over the past five years. This increase, as well as the outward expansion of existing land uses and program areas, and the introduction of new construction, is creating problems for overall water management. The 2005 Master Plan did not specifically address water management beyond preserving the natural drainage system of the site, because the need for additional measures was not forefront in the planning process due to the capacities of the existing system. What the Master Plan did address was the way in which to preserve the existing system in order to best control and minimize the adverse impacts of stormwater, via Area 2a: the Sol Levin Interpretive Trail – Wildlife Corridor. By leaving this area undeveloped at that time, it would be ready to meet the future challenge when the time arose. That time is now.

Similar and related to the Wildlife Corridor, water issues are compromising the integrity of the CSA haul path, the Ornamental Prairie Garden, the CSA work area, and the community garden spaces to the south. Proper planning in the Wildlife Corridor area will enable us to meet and exceed water management expectations, as well as planning for the scrub woodland in between the co-housing and community gardens.

In order for existing land uses to continue functioning as intended, for people to be able to circulate comfortably and safely around Troy Gardens on foot, by bicycle, or by limited vehicular access, and for future land uses to have a chance to find a place to settle, ***the water management system needs serious attention in this next stage of planning.*** Taking time to address this opportunity now will prevent multiple and related problems in the future.

Site assessment - *Adjacent Land Use Compatibility*

The physical land use changes that Troy Gardens has experienced through development in the last five years is now challenging the compatibility of adjacent land uses within Troy Gardens, and with Troy Gardens neighbors and easement holders. One of the beautiful things about public and semi-public open spaces like Troy Gardens is that they provide a place for people to gather and share experiences and ideas in a space that promotes togetherness. However, without clear and consistent delineation of boundaries between adjacent land uses within Troy Gardens, people “creep” across perceived boundaries, and this can work against the community of trust and cohesiveness of the site as a whole. The 2005 Master Plan carefully constructed the location and boundaries between the various land uses at Troy, and ZDA insisted that each program area receive “a little more” space than was originally requested. Now, however, several of these spaces are being exceeded, and it is time to re-evaluate the functioning land uses and boundaries between them, in order to avoid environmental and social problems, and to provide cohesive opportunities for the expansion of existing program areas while allowing for the addition of new ones. In addition, CGW needs to develop an open and ongoing dialogue with its neighbors—Mendota Mental Health Institute and Troy Gardens Co-Housing, and with its easement holders—MG&E and ATC, especially regarding the topic of maintaining shared spaces.

Site assessment - *Invasive species*

As management areas have been developed and the site more universally used, the non-managed wild areas (Wildlife Corridor, ATC Corridor, Old Field), are coming under closer scrutiny and the “invasive” species in these areas are being viewed as problematic. When one considers that prior to its development, Troy Gardens was surplus State Lands comprised of woodlands, pioneer successional species, old field, and wooded rail corridor, it could be argued that since the implementation of the 2005 Master Plan, the presence of invasive species has been considerably reduced, and will continue to decrease with further management and development. At this point, we do not see the presence of some invasive species in the *managed* areas as problematic; in fact, the continued implementation of the maintenance plan will serve to strengthen the desired species in this area. As far as the *unmanaged* areas of Troy Gardens, it is time to re-evaluate those areas in terms of their current state and desired future land use, as part of a comprehensive planning process. **Any** land use change at Troy Gardens must honor the intent of the Master Plan, so that all interests are at the table, and Troy Gardens can continue to function as a cohesive community resource.

Evaluations

We developed professional and steward evaluation templates to be used to ascertain both qualitative and quantitative data on the site. In order to do this, we developed evaluation sheets for each area outlined in the 2005 Natural Areas Management Plan, with numerical scoring for each maintenance action item, as well as a place for evaluators to provide additional written comments & feedback. The action items were listed as either tasks to be accomplished or visual measurements to make (species count, presence of invasives, maintenance of path edges, etc) and evaluators were asked to rank these on a scale of 0-4 as follows:

0 = unacceptable, 1 = poor, 2 = satisfactory, 3 = very good, and 4 = excellent.

Talking points were provided at the bottom of each evaluation section to help solicit additional feedback. The talking points include:

- a) Overall condition & present state of management practices,
- b) Anticipated future problems & suggested management changes,
- c) Evaluation of ‘Best Use’ of Program for areas & suggestions for alternatives, and
- d) Other.

The professional and steward evaluations are provided in the Appendix of this report, and a sample evaluation follows this description.

Area 3: Maple Woods

	Steward Evaluations								AVG
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Maintenance of Sugar maple canopy, or success	3	4	4	3		4	3	3	3.4
Maintenance of shrub border, or success	2	4	3	3		4	2	2	2.9
Maintenance of spring ephemerals, or success	2	4	3	3			2	2	2.7
Eradication of garlic mustard	1	3	2	3		3	2	2	2.3
Weeding of shrub beds, removal of invasives	1	3	3	3		4	1	2	2.4
Condition of gravel path	3	3	1	2		4	2	1	2.3
Maintenance of footpaths and picnic play area	3	4	3	3		4	2	3	3.1
Overall condition	2	4	3	3			2	3	2.7
Is this the best use of this area?	3		3	3			4	4	3.4

	Professional Evaluations			
	1	2	3	AVG
Replenish wood chip mulch to maintain 4-6" thick for shrub beds and paths as necessary		2	3	2.5
Maintenance gravel path	0	1		0.5
Maintenance of play area		2	2	2
Maintain sugar maple canopy dominance		3	3	3
Prune & thin sugar maples		2	2	2
Remove Ash and other trees impacted by EAB		1	2	1.5
Prevent canopy edge from extending beyond into eastern shrub border		2	2	2
Prune out and remove invasive mid-story plants (honeysuckle, buckthorn, boxelder, elm, wild grape)		3	2	2.5
Prune & weed shrub bed plants		2	2	2
Fertilize shrub bed plants as per 2005 maintenance schedule			0	0
Success of shrub bed plantings		3	3	3
Weeding of Shrub beds		2	1	1.5
Remove Garlic Mustard (bag & remove) by June		3	3	3
Remove other invasive species (reed canary, burdock, etc) via hand pulling or weed whipping throughout growing season		2	2	2
Mow lawn edge and trim borders as per overall site maintenance		2	2	2
Replenish planted ephemeral and wildflower areas as needed. Species should be kept to Southern Mesic Forest list as found in "The Vegetation of Wisconsin" by John T. Curtis, © 1959.		3	3	3
Do not allow disturbance of woodland ground layer for any other reason than the above listed maintenance procedures. Especially do not allow the removal or disturbance of organic matter		3	4	3.5
Success of ephemeral plantings		3	3	3
Best water management practices			2	2
Overall appearance		4		3.5

Figure 2: Sample Evaluation Tabulation

There is general concern among stewards regarding the number of dedicated volunteers in relation to the amount of work needing to be done, as well as questions as to how to get more people involved and interested. Stewards indicate an overall need for better signage on the site for purposes of education and way-finding. It seems too that there are certain areas of the land that are generally unnoticed until some dramatic change occurs. All of this indicates the need for consistent methods of communication in regards to site maintenance and land use, and we strongly suggest formal training and guidance to stewards, staff and administration of community-based restoration projects. A critical aspect of effective communication—and the future success of the maintenance plan--will be the development of a record keeping system for the purposes of tracking present uses and historical data.

Summary of Evaluation Results

We tabulated the numerical ranking factors, and summarized the qualitative comments, and those summaries are included in the Appendix section. A summary of the overall comments is as follows.

Area 1 – Overall Site: evaluators perceive that the site is working well, people like it, and that there are more people (and dogs!) visiting every year.

Area 2 – Sol Levin Interpretive Trail: at present, people like the trail and it works well. Significant issues to be addressed are potholes, the inconsistent presence and datedness of the Interpretive Guide and signposts, and the question of whether or not to officially incorporate the Trail (and Interpretive Guide) into the Natural Areas Management Plan. The Sol Levin Interpretive Trail was laid out with a 4-7 year timeframe—in anticipation of changing needs and land uses, and was intended to be revised and reviewed at that point in time. The seven main information kiosks were designed to have interchangeable information panels. These necessary tasks have not been completed at this point in time.

Areas 2a & 2b – Sol Levin Interpretive Trail: Wildlife Corridor & ATC Corridor: these areas are confusing to evaluators. Why does it look this way, and are the invasive species increasing? Evaluators feel that this area separates Troy, and though it is nice to walk the trail, and it does provide access to the front and rear of the site, it is not perceived as an enjoyable place to occupy. These areas also have effectively dealt with water management up to this point, but should be revised to address present water and easement-holder issues.

Area 2c – Sol Levin Interpretive Trail: Old Field: this area is generally appreciated and enjoyed. There are suggestions/questions about bringing this area into more active management (e.g. managing the mulberry areas so that they are accessible since people like to use them). Memorial plantings have been added, and this is the only area left at Troy Gardens for the public to freely wander, undirected by formal trails or paths.

Area 3 – Sugar Maple Woodlands: this area is generally appreciated and much loved, and has become a destination point and jewel of Troy Gardens. The main questions/issues in this area are:

- What should be done about the gravel road?
- Could there be additions to the management plan?
- And what about Emerald Ash Borer?

Area 4 – Edible Woodlands: this area is generally enjoyed in terms of what it will become, its potential. Maintenance in this area has not been kept up. Questions are:

- Is this area worth keeping as intended, or should it be modified?
- How could a management strategy for this area be improved?

Area 5 – Hmong Herb Garden: this area is generally enjoyed but many people have no idea what is going on there (plant ID tags are missing, there is no signage regarding educational opportunities, or demonstrations) it seems to have become an extension of individual's garden areas rather than a community demonstration area. This is a lovely garden setting in a critical space. Questions are:

- Are there opportunities for interaction with the Hmong (demonstrations, information, signage)?
- Can we develop better communication pathways with Hmong gardeners to re-institute the original intent of this area, or revise it?
- Is this really the best use of this part of the central gathering area?

Area 6 – Herb Garden: generally much loved and used, needs regular watering. This area is individually cared for by particular stewards, and is universally successful.

Area 7 – Ornamental Prairie Garden: generally a love/hate relationship – there are discrepancies among evaluations. This area requires a considerable amount of maintenance and is not adequately designed to cooperate with the existing drainage patterns of the site. Questions are:

- Is this the best use of this area?
- What are the tradeoffs/benefits of its high maintenance requirements (how much of the maintenance budget/hours does it require in its current condition)?
- Could this area be reevaluated, or stabilized until further design decisions can be made?

Area 8 – Prairie Gathering Area: Much loved and used. This area has developed into a “sacred” space at Troy Gardens for not only the agricultural uses but also for the community as a whole. Main issues are:

- The path to, and the perimeter of the gathering area have been widened and modified through adverse mowing practices.
- There have been cases of non-approved fire in this area (other than prescribed burns). This is dangerous and puts the future of the Grotto at risk. Consider City, County, State regulations on open fires in public parks?

Area 9 – Prairie Restoration: Much loved area. Prescribed burning is a great attractor (think marketing). Main issues are:

- The perimeter lawn edge has not been mowed according to the maintenance guidelines. It has moved from a planned 10-20' edge, to a 40-60' edge.
- Adverse mowing has increased the prescribed 6' wide pedestrian footpath through the prairie to a 15-20' wide “path”, thereby encouraging vehicular traffic through this hidden prairie path.

Service Work at Troy Gardens

The evolution of service-work at Troy Gardens serves as further proof of the far-reaching environmental, economic and social benefits of community-based restoration projects. The Natural Areas Management of Troy Gardens has evolved from a plea-based system, to one that is first come, first served. Where the majority of the Natural Areas Coordinator's time was previously spent soliciting any groups and all individuals to assist with the site work, now there are waiting lists and regular groups requesting to work at Troy Gardens. These groups can most easily be described in one of two ways: **voluntary and required community service**. While there are numerous volumes of work published regarding the social implications of voluntary and required community service, it does serve this evaluation process well to at least mention the implications of such a complex system. It speaks volumes about the spirit and management of a place that it can provide opportunities for people to contribute, and become a part of a community effort whether voluntary or required.

There are three types of **volunteer involvement** at Troy Gardens outside of management (e.g. Board, Advisory Committee, etc): Interns, Stewards, Community and/or Professional groups.

Interns come from all disciplines, and are often comprised of current students, recent graduates or those individuals looking to build experience in a particular field of work. There is an abundance of interns in landscape architecture, the social sciences and related disciplines. Interns are assigned to CGW staff based on their area of interest, and staff needs at the time. Interns generally assist with pilot projects, regular program areas, and special projects, and some interns continue for multiple years.

Stewards are drawn to Troy Gardens with a desire to learn a new skill, or become active beyond individual gardening or visiting the site. Some “work” repeatedly throughout the year, others participate only once, and several have been stewards since Troy Gardens’ inception. There is a feeling of camaraderie among the stewards; however there is often confusion regarding leadership – specifically when stewards have questions about management areas, or maintenance tasks. Stewards indicate interest in skill building workshops, and the freedom to take care of specific areas that they choose. The talents and energies of stewards are best used for skilled and specific work such as pruning, weeding, gardening, plant identification, etc.

Community groups regularly contact CGW looking for service opportunities. These groups include but are not limited to, professional organizations, educational facilities and non-profit groups such as: United Way, HumanaOne, American Family Insurance, Youth Services of Southern Wisconsin, Mendota Mental Health Institute, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Edgewood College, Madison Metropolitan School District, Madison School & Community Recreation, Monona Grove Alternative School, University High School – Chicago, WISPIRG, Future Farmers of America and AmeriCorps. These groups set up a specific workday, and send between 5-30 individuals—some of which have never been to Troy Gardens. Typically, these groups are capable of performing non-skilled labor maintenance tasks, and those requiring intensive work. It has been helpful to the Natural Areas Coordinator to be able to schedule these groups to take care of the more mundane, but necessary tasks at Troy Gardens, such as weed-whacking, brush clearing, mulching, etc.

Two groups of individuals perform required **community service** at Troy Gardens: those currently undergoing incarceration, and those in a probationary status. In both situations service can be voluntary as well as required, and the both groups contribute a great deal to the maintenance of Troy Gardens.

Incarcerated individuals

Troy Gardens has provided opportunities for individuals of various correctional facilities to participate in a larger community effort, as part of their rehabilitation. One example of this was the plant propagation and supply for the Kids’ Garden, as undertaken by a group of men in the horticulture vocational program at the Oakhill correctional facility. Cultivating and supplying plant materials for the Kids’ Garden provided a necessary service to Troy Gardens, and allowed the individuals involved at Oakhill to participate and connect to the larger community they hoped to rejoin.

Community service requirements

Over the past three years, Troy Gardens has been a desired place for youth being performing community service for infractions committed. When given a choice between community service options, youth often choose work at Troy Gardens where they can be outside. Though their initial attraction to service work at Troy Gardens might be because of an opportunity to weed-whack trail edges for hours on end on a Saturday afternoon, or haul and dump heaping piles of bark mulch around newly planted native shrubs—no doubt their experience interacting with the natural world in a community setting like Troy Gardens, has a larger positive impact on their life.

Recommendations

Community-based planning and restoration efforts are a wild and wooly animal. Fed by the energy, creativity and resources of nearly anyone and everyone, these efforts surge and recess with each change in volunteers and leadership. The success of Troy Gardens' installed Natural Areas over the past five years is due in part to the tincture of time: it simply takes time for biological and human patterns to establish. But the success is due to three other components: 1) the implementation of strong Master Plan, 2) the consistent leadership provided by the Natural Areas Coordinator, and 3) the service work provided over the past three years. Consistency and broad vision within and beyond the physical boundaries of Troy Gardens are what makes for successful management of the natural (programmed and non-programmed) areas. The maintenance activities cannot rely solely on the work of volunteers, or stewards, or CGW staff—it is the successful *coordination* of these groups, based on their individual strengths, that ensures success of the maintenance plan.

With that in mind, *we recommend developing a plan for the next five years that provides clear direction for coordination of overall site management, land stewardship and site modification.* This plan will serve to accomplish this through two primary areas of focus:

- 1) Site maintenance
- 2) Future design and planning.

The Site Maintenance Plan should provide clear direction for:

- **Regular, repeated tasks** that can be scheduled weekly, bi-weekly, or monthly for un-skilled worker groups that can be scheduled in advance, or relatively quickly as opportunities arise. The key to the successful coordination and output of work for these types of groups is carefully matching the group strengths (timeframe, number of individuals, ages and motivations to be at Troy Gardens, etc.) to particular tasks.
- **Special activities & seasonal demonstrations** such as new skill workshops, and demonstration days for groups and individuals wanting to develop skills in specific areas. These can be viewed as skills that can be learned and passed on to new volunteers and stewards.
- **Record keeping** which will be essential for monitoring the health of individual areas, the presence/anticipation of invasive pests and plants such as EAB, and data collection to inform future land use decision-making. Good records will also assist transitions in leadership and management.

Future design/planning should provide clear direction for:

- **Updating the 2005 Master Plan**, taking into consideration existing land use changes and the refining of specific area allocations. Recent existing land use changes have included the need for more Kids' Garden space, need for more CSA storage, a new greenhouse, completed co-housing construction, the need for a dry, all-season farm haul path, and the addition of a City sidewalk along Troy Drive. The refining of area allocations should include those areas not fully designed, but left for future design on 2005 Master Plan such as the front entrance events area, greenhouse, universal garden area (enabling garden).
- **Moving “Beyond BMP’s^{ZDA}”** so that we can do better than suggested best management practices for the social, cultural and environmental health and welfare of Troy Gardens, a well-known and respected educational and community resource. Why not practice better than conventional management practices here? Increased development of the site, and increased population of visitors makes it a critical time to evaluate the water management practices, and land use compatibility, as well as anticipation of invasive species. In a place such as Troy Gardens, there is a unique opportunity to test and practice new strategies for improving the health of the restored areas and community spaces.

- **In-house vs. out-of-house assistance.** CGW attracts a large variety of interested individuals each year, with fresh ideas, new perspective, and varying levels of professional expertise. While this is a valuable resource indeed, it can also increase confusion and difficulties in coordination and management. To make the most of this resource, it will be important for management to be able to clearly decipher which activities and planning exercises can be appropriately handled in-house through CGW staff or volunteers, and which activities will require the assistance of outside professionals.

Future stewardship/planning goals

Portions of the 2005 Master Plan need to be updated to reflect the changing land use patterns, and the pressure of increased development such as the co-housing and greenhouse. It will be essential to develop these portions of the Master Plan in tandem with any updates of the Natural Areas Management Plan in order to provide clear and comprehensive direction for the future.

The idea of developing regular methods of communication and training in order to guide stewards, staff and administration of community-based restoration projects is a difficult idea to develop – because part of the beauty of Troy Gardens is people’s perception of it as a totally community-based free-for-all landscape, and there is resistance to directional leadership among some volunteers, administration and staff. What few remember, and fewer even know, however, is that the success of Troy Gardens is in large part a result of a strong master plan, carefully crafted out of a community based process where individuals and groups were regularly brought to the table to be included in the land-use decision-making process.

Troy Gardens is now grown up and has legs of its own, and creative and resourceful individuals lead the program areas. Improving communication between staff, stewards and administration, and providing clear guidelines to follow in terms of land use and development will minimize confusion among those who care for and utilize Troy Gardens. The future will bring more land use decisions that require a municipal approval process, and this experience can be relatively seamless if a team is formed at the outset, to dedicate the necessary time and provide skills and expertise to make the project a success. Centering all land use changes on the Master Plan will eliminate confusion about why things are changing, who can assist with design and approvals, and how to go about making changes. This inclusive, team approach towards managing and stewarding Troy Gardens will encourage people to come together, work together, and make decisions that are respectful of all interests, and responsive to the whole of Troy Gardens.

Given this, it will be essential to develop a plan for the next five years that provides clear direction for coordination of overall site management, land stewardship and site modification. This plan, coupled with leadership in specific program areas, will provide a wide platform with which to create a sound, cohesive site management perspective that guides and leads all of Troy Gardens into a prosperous and inclusive future—one that maintains the integrity of current land uses, and provides opportunities for future ones.

Appendix – Evaluation Results

Area 1: Overall Site											
	Steward Evaluations										
	A	B	C	D	E	F	H	I	J	K	AVG
General appearance of Troy Garden's public open spaces	2	4	4	2		4	2	3	3	2	2.9
Mowing of lawn and trail areas	3	3	4	2		4	3	3	2	3	3.0
Trimming and pruning of edges	2	3	4	2		4	2	2	2	2	2.6
Separation between programmed areas (e.g. community gardens, children's garden, CSA farm, co-housing, etc.)	2	4	3	3		3	3	3	4	2	3.0
Overall appearance	3	4	4	3		3	2	3	3	3	3.1
Is this the best use of this area?	3		4	3		3	2	3	3	3	3.0
Professional Evaluations											
	AA	BB	CC	DD	AVG						
Mowing of trails and lawn care		3	2		2.5						
Weeding and trimming of lawn edges, signposts, rocks, gardens, fences, etc.		2	1		1.5						
Keep lawn areas free from obstructions including garden debris, compost piles, rocks, sticks, temporary storage structures, etc		2	3		2.5						
Fertilize lawn areas annually, either spring or fall		2	0		1						
Pruning, tree care, woodland appearance		2	1		1.5						
Programmed area separation and access, such as community gardens, C.S.A., prairie, woodlands, etc		2	3		2.5						
Interface with co-housing		2	0		1						
Water management and erosional issues		2	1		1.5						
Overall appearance		2	2.5		2.25						

Area 2: Sol Levin Trail											
Steward Evaluations											
	A	B	C	D	E	F	H	I	J	K	AVG
Mowing and trimming of trail	3	4	4	2		4	3	3	2	3	3.1
Maintenance of trail (e.g. re-seeding, filling in potholes, minimizing erosion, etc.)	2	3	2	2		4	2	2	1	2	2.2
Maintenance of Interpretive Trail Guide	3	4	4	2		4	2	2	2	3	2.9
Overall appearance	3	4	3	2		3	2	2	2	3	2.7
Is this the best use of this area?	3		4	2			3	3	2	3	2.9
Professional Evaluations											
	AA	BB	CC	DD	AVG						
Mow, trim & weed as per overall site maintenance		2	2		2						
Fertilize lawn areas annually		2	0		1						
Lawn & Trail Appearance		2	2		2						
Prune shrubs and trees that are growing into trail as needed		2	2		2						
Maintain & update Troy Gardens Interpretive Guide		2	1		1.5						
Monitor 26 numbered sign posts & 7 kiosks for damage & weathering, repair as necessary		2	1		1.5						
Available Self-Guided Trail brochures at trailhead		2	1		1.5						
Continued trail maintenance, and upgrading to include evening of trail surface by grading, filling in potholes, adding topsoil, seeding & mulching, add gravel to gravel areas as necessary.		2	1		1.5						
Water management & erosional issues		2	1		1.5						
Overall appearance		2	1.5		1.75						

Area 2a: Wildlife Corridor											
Steward Evaluations											
	A	B	C	D	E	F	H	I	J	K	AVG
Maintenance of trail	3	4	3	2			3	2	3	3	2.9
Maintenance of woodlands	1	3	4	2			4	2	1	1	2.3
Maintenance & appearance of MG&E corridor	2	2	4	2			4		1	2	2.8
Interface with Co-housing	2	2	3	2			3	3	2	2	2.4
Interface with C.S.A.	2	2	3	2			4	3	3	2	2.6
Overall condition	2	3	3	2			2	2	2	2	2.3
Is this the best use of this area	2		4	2			1	4	2	2	2.4
Professional Evaluations											
					AA	BB	CC	DD	AVG		
Interpretive Trail condition						2	2		2		
Railroad Remediation Corridor						3	2		2.5		
Prune shrubs and trees that are growing into trail as needed						2	3		2.5		
MG&E Corridor management						2	3		2.5		
Vegetation management of wildlife corridor – GENERAL						1	2		1.5		
Interface with co-housing						2	1		1.5		
Interface with C.S.A.						2	1		1.5		
Water management and erosional issues						2	1		1.5		
Overall appearance						2	2		2		

Area 2b: ATC Corridor											
Steward Evaluations											
	A	B	C	D	E	F	H	I	J	K	AVG
Maintenance of trail	3	3	4	2			1	2	2	3	2.5
Maintenance and appearance of ATC corridor	2	2	1	2			1	1	1	2	1.5
Overall condition	2	2	3	2			0	2	1	2	1.8
Is this the best use of this area?	2		2	2			2	1	1	2	1.7
Professional Evaluations											
	AA	BB	CC	DD	AVG						
Mowing of trails and lawn care		2	2		2						
Farm fence weeds kept under control		2	4		3						
Debris / leveling of surface		1	1		1						
Prune shrubs and trees that are growing into trail as needed			2		2						
Impact by ATC maintenance practices		1	0		0.5						
Aesthetics of ATC maintenance practices		1	0		0.5						
Water management & erosional issues		2	1		1.5						
Overall appearance		1	0		0.5						

Area 2c: Old Field											
Steward Evaluations											
	A	B	C	D	E	F	H	I	J	K	AVG
Maintenance of trail	3	4	4	2			3	3	3	3	3.1
Care of planted trees	3	3	3	2			3		2	3	2.8
Maintenance of old field grasslands & shrubs	3	3	3	2			4	2	3	3	2.9
Overall condition	3	3	3	2			2	2	3	3	2.6
Is this the best use of this area?	3		4	2			2	3	3	3	2.9
Professional Evaluations											
	AA	BB	CC	DD	AVG						
Mowing of trails and lawn care		2	2.5		2.25						
Maintenance of trail signage		2	2		2						
Prune shrubs and trees that are growing into trail as needed		2	3		2.5						
Care of planted species		2	1.5		1.75						
Development of Old Field groundcover		2	2		2						
Water management & erosional issues		3	2		2.5						
Overall appearance		2	3.5		2.75						

Area 3: Maple Woods											
Steward Evaluations											
	A	B	C	D	E	F	H	I	J	K	AVG
Maintenance of Sugar maple canopy, or success	3	4	4	3		4	3	3	2	3	3.2
Maintenance of shrub border, or success	2	4	3	3		4	2	2	3	2	2.8
Maintenance of spring ephemerals, or success	2	4	3	3			2	2	2	2	2.5
Eradication of garlic mustard	1	3	2	3		3	2	2	3	1	2.2
Weeding of shrub beds, removal of invasives	1	3	3	3		4	1	2	3	1	2.3
Condition of gravel path	3	3	1	2		4	2	1	1	3	2.2
Maintenance of footpaths and picnic play area	3	4	3	3		4	2	3	3	3	3.1
Overall condition	2	3.5	3	3			2	2.5	3	2	2.6
Is this the best use of this area?	3		3	3			4	4	4	3	3.4
Professional Evaluations											
	AA	BB	CC	DD	AVG						
Replenish wood chip mulch to maintain 4-6" thick for shrub beds and paths as necessary		2	3		2.5						
Maintenance gravel path		0	1		0.5						
Maintenance of play area		2	2		2						
Maintain sugar maple canopy dominance		3	3		3						
Prune & thin sugar maples		2	2		2						
Remove Ash and other trees impacted by EAB		1	2		1.5						
Prevent canopy edge from extending beyond into eastern shrub border		2	2		2						
Prune out and remove invasive mid-story plants (honeysuckle, buckthorn, boxelder, elm, wild grape)		3	2		2.5						
Prune & weed shrub bed plants		2	2		2						
Fertilize shrub bed plants as per 2005 maint schedule			0		0						
Success of shrub bed plantings		3	3		3						
Weeding of Shrub beds		2	1		1.5						
Remove Garlic Mustard (bag & remove) by June		3	3		3						
Remove other invasive species (reed canary, burdock, etc) via hand pulling or weed whipping throughout growing season		2	2		2						

Mow lawn edge and trim borders as per overall site maintenance		2	2		2
Replenish planted ephemeral and wildflower areas as needed. Species should be kept to Southern Mesic Forest list as found in "The Vegetation of Wisconsin" by John T. Curtis, © 1959.		3	3		3
Do not allow disturbance of woodland ground layer for any other reason than the above listed maintenance procedures. Especially do not allow the removal or disturbance of organic matter		3	4		3.5
Success of ephemeral plantings		3	3		3
Best water management practices			2		2
Overall appearance			3.5		3.5

Area 4: Edible Woods												
Steward Evaluations												
	A	B	C	D	E	F	H	I	J	K	AVG	
Mowing and maintenance of paths and edges	3	4	4	2			3	2	3	3	3.0	
Maintenance of picnic areas	3	4	4						2	3	3.7	
Survival rate and health of planted trees & shrubs	2	3	4	2			2	1.5	2	2	2.3	
Maintenance of ground cover layer (No-mow fescue, bark mulch, etc.)	3	4	3	3			2	2		3	2.8	
Success of edible plants “edibility factor” (e.g. are people eating the edible plants?)	2		4	3			2		2	2	2.8	
Overall condition	2	3	4	3			2	2	3	2	2.6	
Is this the best use of this area?	3		4	2			4	4	4	3	3.4	
Professional Evaluations												
	AA	BB	CC	DD								AVG
Mowing of paths and open areas and edge weed trimming as per plan		3	1.5									2.25
Mowing & maintenance of lawn picnic areas		2	1									1.5
Bark trail & concrete sidewalk maintenance and upkeep as per plan		3	2									2.5
Ground cover maintenance, weeding and maintenance of fescue cover crop		3	1									2
Grub out/remove invasives		2	1.5									1.75
Survival rate of planted shrubs & trees		2	1.5									1.75
Edibility of planted trees & shrubs (success of)		2	2									2
Mulch & fertilize fruit trees		2	1									1.5
Prune dead branches from shrubs and trees as necessary		2	1									1.5
Fertilize all planted material			0									0
Water management & erosional issues		3	0									1.5
Overall appearance		2	1.5									1.75

Area 5: Hmong Herb Garden											
Steward Evaluations											
	A	B	C	D	E	F	H	I	J	K	AVG
Mowing and maintenance of trail	3	4	4	4			3	3	3	3	3.4
Planting and overall care	2	4	4	4			3	2	3	2	3.0
Overall condition	2	4	4	4			3	3	3	2	3.1
Is this the best use of this area?	3		4	4			4	4	4	3	3.7
Professional Evaluations											
	AA	BB	CC	DD	AVG						
Mow & trim edges of lawn according to overall site maintenance, Apr-Oct		3	2		2.5						
Maintenance of trails & paths		2	1		1.5						
Maintenance of signage		0	2		1						
Garden tended by Hmong community gardeners		3	1		2						
Water management & erosional issues		2	2		2						
Overall appearance		2	2		2						

Area 6: Herb Garden											
Steward Evaluations											
	A	B	C	D	E	F	H	I	J	K	AVG
Maintenance of gathering areas and trail	3	4	4	3		3	4	4	3	3	3.4
Mowing of edges	3	4	4	2		4	3	3	3	3	3.2
Condition and health of planted herbs	3		4	3		2	4	3	3	3	3.1
Overall condition	3	4	4	3		3	3	3	3	3	3.2
Is this the best use of this area?	3		4	3		4	4	4	4	3	3.6
Professional Evaluations											
	AA	BB	CC	DD	AVG						
Maintain clean interface with lawn edges by regular mowing and weed whipping		3	2		2.5						
Re-mulch wood chip paths and gathering areas 3-4" thick, as needed as per plan		3	3		3						
Maintenance of herb plantings		3	4		3.5						
Replant & divide annual herbs		2	4		3						
Weed, fertilize, mulch		3	3		3						
Survival rate of planted herbs		3	3		3						
Water management & erosional issues		3	2		2.5						
Overall appearance		2	4		3						

Area 7: Prairie Garden

Steward Evaluations

	A	B	C	D	E	F	H	I	J	K	AVG
Maintenance of trails	3	4	3	3		2	2	3	1	3	2.7
Maintenance of drainage areas	3	4	1			3	1	2	1	3	2.3
Condition of plantings	2	3	2	3	1	3	1	3	2	2	2.2
Overall condition	3	3	1	3	1	2	1	4	1	3	2.2
Is this the best use of this area?	3		3	2	1		4	2	1	3	2.4

Professional Evaluations

	AA	BB	CC	DD	AVG
Maintenance of gravel path "Interpretive Trail"		1	0.5		0.75
Weed whip edges of garden area, and mow perimeter lawn path as required in overall site maintenance and to separate wildlife corridor		2	2		2
Maintenance of wood chip paths		3	2		2.5
Condition of plants		2	2		2
Hand pull/cultivate weeds throughout the growing season		2	2		2
Re-mulch garden area with shredded bark mulch		1	2		1.5
Water management & erosional issues		1	0.5		0.75
Overall appearance		2	1		1.5

Area 8: Prairie Gathering Area											
Steward Evaluations											
	A	B	C	D	E	F	H	I	J	K	AVG
Mowing and lawn care	3	4	2			4	3	3	2	3	3.0
Maintenance and success of stone grotto	2	4	4			4	4	3.5	3	2	3.3
Maintenance of immediate prairie area	3	4	4			4	3	3	4	3	3.5
Overall condition	2	4	4			4	4	3	4	2	3.4
Maintenance of furniture (benches, resting platform)	2	4	4			4	4	3	3	2	3.3
Is this the best use of this area?	2		4				4	4	4	2	3.5
Professional Evaluations											
	AA	BB	CC	DD	AVG						
Mow lawn gathering area, and trim edge as per overall site maintenance		3	1.5		2.25						
Remove debris from gravel area, in grotto & top dress gravel as needed		2	3		2.5						
Plant cracks between rocks for erosion prevention as needed. (suggested plant species: Sedums & small prairie plants)		3	0		1.5						
Monitor and repair benches & resting platform from weathering		3	1		2						
Water Oak tree as needed for establishment for up to 6 years after planting (~2011)		1	3		2						
Hand weed planted prairie adjacent to grotto area		2	1		1.5						
Water management & erosional issues		3	2		2.5						
Overall appearance		3	2		2.5						

Area 9: Prairie Restoration

Steward Evaluations

	A	B	C	D	E	F	H	I	J	K	AVG
Maintenance of path and edges		3	2	2			4	3	1		2.5
Annual burns & weeding	3	4	3	2			3	3	4	3	3.1
Recording/documentation of maintenance activities	3	4	3				3			3	3.3
Diversity of planted species	3	3	4	3			4		4	3	3.4
Abundance of planted species	2	4	4	3			3		4	2	3.2
Presence of invasives	2	1.5	2	2				3	2	2	2.1
Overall condition	3	3	3	3			3	3	3	3	3.0
Is this the best use of this area?	3		4	3			4	4	4	3	3.6

Professional Evaluations

	AA	BB	CC	DD	AVG
Mow & maintain prairie path & grotto interface	3	2			2.5
Maintenance of signage	4	2			3
Annual burns & weeding	3	2			2.5
Recording/documentation of maintenance activities		1			1
Diversity of planted species	4	2			3
Abundance of planted species	4	2			3
Presence of invasives	3	2			2.5
Water management & erosion issues	4	4			4
Overall appearance	3	3			3

Appendix – Summary of Comments from Professional and Steward Evaluations

Area 1: Overall Site

a. Overall condition & present state of management practices

There were multiple comments that present practices seem to be adequate for the site and that the site seems in good shape; CGW is doing well for the site on a limited budget. Commenters also wrote, “Program areas are well delineated,” “Public access is adequate within the site,” and “I think that in general it is fairly clear about which areas are public and private.”

There were several criticisms about the current conditions or practices, however: A strong suggestion was made for better pedestrian access from Troy Drive; someone had a feeling that some areas seem vast and unprogrammed; others see areas that are in need of maintenance; and signage may be lacking. Additionally, there were several comments on the challenge of organizing the volunteer workforce that provides the majority of Troy Gardens’ upkeep. Also, someone made the point that the interface with the co-housing is “non-existent and problematic.” One steward was concerned that dog owners are not notified of where it is proper to have their dogs off leash; dogs should be well controlled especially in the entire southern half of the property, including the Wildlife Corridor.

There is potential for further development and/or renovation of areas of the property.

b. Anticipated future problems & suggested management changes

A Steward suggested that the site needs to be more unified and to have more continuity between programmed areas and to have more intimate spacing; also to have added focal points, which could be used as easy-to-find meeting places. Another steward suggested an entrance from along Troy Drive, possibly with a sign. Related to that, Steve Ziegler made the point that there should be re-grading done along the sidewalk to make Troy Gardens more accessible to pedestrians, but the City of Madison should be made to pay for it, since it was their contractor who made the problematic slope that exists now.

It is clear that continuation and improvement of land maintenance practice is important to Stewards. One Steward floated an “area adoption program” for land maintenance. On another topic, someone suggested that better water management is important to address.

c. Evaluation of “Best Use” of Program for areas & suggestions for alternatives

The site is good as it is used, however there is room for improvement. As one idea to increase the number of users, one Steward suggests “somehow utilizing the living stage and music area for adult programming.” Another wonders what the “shared goals for the open areas are.”

Area 2: Sol Levin Interpretive Trail

a. Overall condition & present state of management practices

Most stewards commented that the trail seems to be well designed and in good shape. The trail is well used and enjoyed. Steve Ziegler pointed out some technical problems and need for upkeep, however: “The heavy use is starting to wear on the mowed lawn part of the trail. Turf is starting to wear down, the trail is becoming more uneven, and erosion issues are starting to show.”

Many people also commented that aspects of the walking tour set-up—the trail guide pamphlet, the numbered signposts and the kiosks—are in need of maintenance or updates (but are generally appreciated).

A few planning or reprogramming suggestions were made: “The trail along the ATC corridor & interaction with the CSA Farm needs to be re-evaluated for possible changes,” we “need a plan for the area between the co-housing and the greenhouse,” and the front entrance needs to be updated. Someone suggested that the trail itself may be too wide, “10’ feels like a road, not a trail.”

b. Anticipated future problems & suggested management changes

It is important that the trail itself and its interpretive aspect be maintained and kept up to date so that degradation of use or land does not occur. Future maintenance should include turf care (aeration, fertilization, and leveling).

It was suggested that the entrance plantings be updated. Stewards questioned how the Enabling Garden might impact the trail entrance. Someone pointed out that accessibility and way finding may come up as issues. Someone else requested that the trail offer more different experiences, being shadier/more open or narrower/wider, for example. Another suggestion: “Some type of native planting to have a visual barrier from power lines would be great.”

c. Evaluation of “Best Use” of Program for areas & suggestions for alternatives

This is the best use; “it is the backbone for the public use of Troy.”

Area 2a: Sol Levin Interpretive Trail, Wildlife Corridor

a. Overall condition & present state of management practices

There was some feeling that the corridor is acceptable, but other feeling that it needs quite a bit of improvement—especially in ecological terms. Someone was unclear on whether this area is supposed to be managed as a native ecosystem. The impression is given in the comments that most stewards would like to see a restored or improved ecosystem here. There is concern about the quantity of invasive species in this area. There is a notion that we ought to improve bird habitat. We need to figure out what species are being attracted to the area as it is and what species we would like to make the corridor more attractive to.

“The wildlife corridor seems disconnected from the rest of Troy Gardens” and is not noticed as much as other areas (by visitors or those who maintain the land), even though the trail itself is well used. One steward suggests, “doing some type of restoration there might make it more user-friendly.” We also need to think about and control how the corridor interacts with the co-housing and the farm, both in terms of land use and in terms of land management (including stormwater and erosion).

b. Anticipated future problems & suggested management changes

There was concern that if this area is not managed in some way, “adjacent human uses will continue to infringe upon each other.” More than one comment pointed to the relationship between corridor and farm or co-housing and farm. Also, one steward posited that the area might continue to be underutilized if nothing is done. There was concern that invasive species would remain in the area.

Management change suggestions were varied. Some were general, “area is slowly changed to add diversity and functions;” speaking to the need for a set of goals and a plan for the area, “Is this going to be a native corridor? Edible corridor?” and “succession of tree species.” More specific suggestions were to discourage car travel on the railroad cap, label trees and other important species, and create an infiltration system in the corridor. It was also suggested that we should connect this area to the Maple Woods or other wildlife corridors or make it an edible landscape.

c. Evaluation of “Best Use” of Program for areas & suggestions for alternatives

Generally, commenter’s tended toward seeing current management of the Corridor as not the best use for this area. There were several mentions of ecological restoration and better water management. Steve Ziegler made a strong point that “The opportunity to address water management with wildlife and woodland habitat in this area is the most critical management and design component facing Troy Gardens at this time.”

Another point was that any plan for changing the use of this area needs to work co-operatively with the co-housing and the farm.

Area 2b: Sol Levin Interpretive Trail, ATC Corridor

a. Overall condition & present state of management practices

Overwhelmingly, the comments focused on dissatisfaction with the mowing down of the area by ATC's contractor. Points were made that the practice caused the landscape to be messy and unattractive, as well as barren to wildlife and host to invasive species. One person pointed out that invasive species threaten the farm, as well as the natural areas. Most comments on the trail itself were positive, however one steward thought it "poorly kept." There were a couple stewards who were unfamiliar with the area or its purpose.

b. Anticipated future problems & suggested management changes

At least some of the comments related a fear that if we do nothing here, ATC will take complete control of the area, making it unusable for Troy Gardens. There were many suggestions for CGW planting and maintaining some sort of landscape in this area. Edible or native species were suggested. A few people mentioned a desire for a visual barrier here. It was also implied that we should mow this area if we can, so that ATC doesn't have to come in. Along with such simple maintenance, the ground should be leveled and cleared of debris so that it could be mowed safely.

c. Evaluation of "Best Use" of Program for areas and suggestions for alternatives

Best use of this area should be a collaborative decision process involving CGW and ATC. "Future use, if any, hinges on dialogue with ATC," as one steward put it. Someone suggested, "CGW should evaluate use of interpretive trail through this area." The program for this area should require minimal maintenance, while achieving CGW's and ATC's goals.

Area 2c: Sol Levin Interpretive Trail, Old Field

a. Overall condition & present state of management practices

Comments ranged from very happy with the current relaxed state to feeling that the area is underutilized or disconnected, to concern that the landscape is lacking in diversity and is host to invasive species. There was disagreement about the trail system, as well, with some feeling that it is too wide and uninteresting, and others feeling that the paths are inviting and accessible.

b. Anticipated future problems & suggested management changes

The area needs to be promoted or otherwise linked into the rest of the Natural Areas. There were suggestions of a lookout tower or educational signage. It was implied that the Kids' Garden programs should continue to use this area or use it more. Concern was raised that the area might be left as a realm of invasive species (especially reed canary grass) with low biological diversity. Selected removal of undesirable species and planting of desirable ones was suggested. There were suggestions to plant more trees or extend the prairie into this area. It was also pointed out by more than one person that keeping this area well trimmed and paths in good shape is important to its success.

c. Evaluation of "Best Use" of Program for areas & suggestions for alternatives

There seemed a general acceptance of the current passive 'old field' management of this area and its use as an unscripted, frontier-like area. However, it was implied that the best use for this area is yet to be determined. The area could be developed in a number of ways, possibly providing "more varied experiences, more trail types (narrow, hidden "short cuts" like in the arboretum)." "An unanticipated use that has developed is the 'Oak Memorial Garden' in the northwest corner," – we could further develop this concept, as Steve Ziegler comments.

Area 3: Maple Woods Restoration

a. Overall condition & present state of management practices

Comments on this area were quite positive. Stewards appreciate the quality of the woods—species diversity, “desired species starting to dominate”—and enjoy the intimate paths and seating areas. There was also praise for the amount of effort that has gone into this area, both in planning and organizing, and in the labor of volunteers.

There were also several comments on the continued need for weeding and pruning to keep the area up. One person was not familiar with the area’s management.

b. Anticipated future problems & suggested management changes

Many comments in this area centered on the need for improvement of the gravel path. Someone pointed out that we should “to consider who needs access to the lane, farm road and wildlife corridor in the winter and consider locking the gate.”

Another frequent comment was that we need to manage the tree canopy—decide on what we want it to be and start thinning some trees. There was some concern of a lack of volunteers to keep the area weeded and the struggle to keep garlic mustard and buckthorn under control. One steward suggested that species in this area be labeled.

c. Evaluation of “Best Use” of Program for areas & suggestions for alternatives

“This area is well maintained, well used and well loved at this point.”

Area 4: Edible Woodland – Woodlands North

a. Overall condition & present state of management practices

Comments again were mixed. Several people mentioned that the area is in need of more regular maintenance or looks untidy. Also there was a feeling that this area is not well enough known or used—“It has not developed into a destination point yet.” Conversely, there were comments that the area looks good and has a great concept. The Edible Wood has a lot of potential as a gathering area.

b. Anticipated future problems & suggested management changes

Quite a few comments were made about the need for better maintenance—meaning restructuring how or when or by whom it is done, and making sure basic tasks are completed. There were also comments that some of the plants that died out should be replanted or replaced with something else. It was mentioned that new plantings such as these need to be carefully looked after (especially watered) for a time after they are planted. Another common thread was the suggestion that this area be connected to the areas around it and to the rest of Troy Gardens. A suggestion was made for trees and other material to be labeled.

c. Evaluation of “Best Use” of Program for areas & suggestions for alternatives

There was a lot of uncertainty that the goal of ‘edibility’ was being accomplished. However, it would seem that stewards agree that an edible landscape is a good use of the area. Some points were made as to re-evaluating the species composition to make the area more self-sustaining as a woodland (rather than garden-like).

d. Other

“Some volunteers/ co-housing people have been rude to others experiencing the edible area. It should be noted that this area is for the larger community, not some select group.”

Area 5: Hmong Herb Garden

a. Overall condition & present state of management practices

While some stewards were not familiar with this area, most comments were positive about the upkeep of this garden and its idea. There was much praise for the dedication and effort of the Hmong stewards who have taken care of this area. Main criticisms of this area center on a lack of signage to explain what is being grown in the garden.

b. Anticipated future problems & suggested management changes

Anticipated problems revolve around a lack of management of the garden. There was a fear that if the folks who take care of the area now were to leave, that the garden would fall into disrepair. The implication is that there needs to be a more organized system of stewardship for this area, where it would be easily possible for new volunteers to get involved. This would involve better record keeping and communication, as a couple people mentioned. It was also suggested that we find unique ways to highlight what is being grown in the garden.

c. Evaluation of “Best Use” of Program for areas & suggestions for alternatives

Stewards expressed a desire to have this area used, as it is, as a cultural garden. “There is a wonderful opportunity to re-introduce the “Hmong Herb Garden”, but will need commitment from the Troy Gardens community.”

Area 6: Herb Garden

a. Overall condition & present state of management practices

This area is well liked and seems to be in good shape. There were numerous suggestions to make the area even better, however. There was some uncertainty that the garden is used by visitors as much as it could be. An appreciation of the plant labels was expressed.

b. Anticipated future problems & suggested management changes

Nancy Sills, who has been one of the main caretakers of the Herb Garden, writes that she is “uncertain how to keep the volunteers who don’t stick with it interested – we had a lot of events that they liked but they did not show up throughout the season en mass for weekly work times like they did at the start of the season. Should I be emailing them biweekly?” Other Stewards expressed concern about getting new volunteers involved, with the fear that the garden may go untended without people like Nancy.

There were a few housekeeping suggestions or questions about some of the herb species, the brush piles and edging tidiness. There were also the ideas that we might add a water spigot near this garden, move the portable toilet to a more discrete location, and add signage that explains the purpose of the garden (that anyone can share the herbs).

c. Evaluation of “Best Use” of Program for areas & suggestions for alternatives

“Great to have an herb garden,” one steward writes. It seems pretty clear that the use of this area as an herb garden is well established and enjoyed. Someone did point out that the garden seems isolated and perhaps could be expanded physically or programmatically.

Area 7: Ornamental Prairie Garden

a. Overall condition & present state of management practices

Several people wrote that the area is troubled by weeds, looks overgrown and is hard to maintain. There was also praise for the efforts this past season to try and regain some control of the garden. It was mentioned that this area has had less care given it than other areas in terms of volunteer time (at least up until recently) and will need more dedication in the future. One steward did say that the garden looks good.

b. Anticipated future problems & suggested management changes

There were many suggestions for change in various aspects of management of this area. Changing the species composition—planting more tall species, converting to a meadow—came up a few times. Someone even suggested, “Maybe it is too difficult to reign in those prairie plants and make them seem ornamental.”

Future problems, imagined here, closely mirror the current problems of the Prairie Garden: “Ongoing struggle to recruit, train and retain natural area volunteers,” problems with invasive species, more and more of the garden converted to lawn, drainage issues, and the “deletion of the interpretive trail.”

c. Evaluation of “Best Use” of Program for areas & suggestions for alternatives

The comments showed a definite lean in the direction of changing the use of this area. However, there were a few comments in favor of keeping the garden going because it “works as a nice compliment to herb garden” or “is a nice transition from the [community] gardens.”

The ideas for a change in program were based on the concern that the area as it is requires too much maintenance, it may not be well used, and there is such great potential to do other (more desirable) things in this area. Examples of other programs are “a visually appealing area for people to meet and gather,” “an outdoor classroom,” and an area for water management. It was pointed out that any new use “would require funding and dedicated volunteers.”

Area 8: Prairie Gathering Area

a. Overall condition & present state of management practices

Nearly everyone who commented either feels really good about the area, or had not been familiar with it. It would seem that the “area is in good shape, well used, and well loved.” There were a couple mentions of the portable fire pit that has shown up in this area recently, with concern that fire on the property should be discouraged or controlled. Someone also mentioned that mowing and weeding could be better in this area.

b. Anticipated future problems & suggested management changes

Again, mowing and the fire pit came up the most. Someone suggested removal of fire equipment when found and possibly creating a sanctioned fire area elsewhere on the land. There was concern that too much area is being mowed, especially along the path. The burr oak that is planted in this gathering area needs better care. Someone suggested that we plant more trees.

A couple people thought that the Prairie Gathering Area management is fine as is and that the area is fairly self-sustaining. Another comment was that “scheduling some type of programming in this area would be helpful” to draw visitors.

c. Evaluation of “Best Use” of Program for areas & suggestions for alternatives

“This is one of the most effective areas in the Natural Areas—it is beautiful and much loved.”

Area 9: Prairie Restoration

a. Overall condition & present state of management practices

Comments on the prairie were fairly positive. It was said to be attractive and ecologically healthy, with good signage. The prairie “seems well used by the public.” There was some concern about the path through the prairie getting wider, allowing invasive species to creep in along the edges. Mike Anderson mentioned this aspect and that the poor quality of the farm path, south of the prairie, makes it less attractive to pedestrian traffic going to the north parts of the property.

b. Anticipated future problems & suggested management changes

Most of the anticipated problems center on invasive species and the difficulty of their removal from the prairie, especially without chemicals. Two specific suggestions were made: “Reduce the width of mowed path through the prairie,” and “Maybe add breaker rock beneath the bark mulch in the driving path at the south end of the prairie to prevent rutting.”

c. Evaluation of “Best Use” of Program for areas & suggestions for alternatives

“I think it’s good as is and therefore don’t have any suggestions for improvement or alternatives.”—Mike Anderson