



Landscape Volunteer: Restoration Project

Help protect Caponi Art Park from invasive species and restore our native landscape!

Why This Project Matters

Caponi Art Park's 60 acres are home to invasive species that are steadily crowding out the native plants that belong here. Buckthorn is the most visible offender — a fast-growing shrub that blocks sunlight, alters soil composition, and reduces biodiversity — but it's far from the only one. Non-native honeysuckle, garlic mustard, and other invasive plants are working alongside buckthorn to take over the understory, often thriving in the very shade buckthorn creates.

These species often work together against the landscape. Many spread by berries or seeds carried by birds and wind, so a single invasive shrub can seed a whole new patch of ground within a few seasons. Some create shade or altered soil conditions that make it easier for other invasive plants to move in behind them. That's part of why control efforts have to look at the whole site, not just one species — removing buckthorn alone still leaves an opening for other invasives to take its place.

Why Your Help Matters

As a landscape volunteer, you're part of a broader effort to remove invasive species across the park and contribute to the land's renewal to an oak savanna by planting native wildflowers and grasses in their place.

What Is an Oak Savanna?

An oak savanna is a rare type of landscape — not quite prairie, not quite forest. Scattered, open-grown oak trees rise above a groundlayer of native grasses and wildflowers, spaced widely enough that sunlight reaches all the way to the ground.

That sunlight matters. Oak savannas historically depended on regular fire — often set intentionally by Indigenous communities — to keep the canopy open and stop faster-growing trees and shrubs from crowding in. But oaks, with their thick, fire-resistant bark, thrived in these conditions while other species couldn't compete.

Because it blends prairie and woodland characteristics, an oak savanna supports an unusually wide range of plants and animals, including some species found in no other habitat. The red-headed woodpecker, for example, depends on this kind of open, sunlit woodland to nest and feed.

Oak savanna once covered roughly 10 percent of Minnesota, concentrated in the southern part of the state. Today, due to decades of fire suppression, agriculture, and development, less than one percent of that original habitat remains — making it one of the rarest and most endangered ecosystems in the Midwest.

The Restoration Project

Last year, the City of Eagan hired restoration contractor Resource Environmental Solutions to remove invasive buckthorn and honeysuckle shrubs in the park throughout the winter of 2025, while the park was closed to visitors.

How the Restoration Works

Clearing this dense shrub layer opens up the forest understory, giving native plants room to grow back. It also matters for the oaks themselves. Young oak seedlings need ample sunlight to survive, and an open, sunlit understory helps the next generation of oaks get established — meaning the work happening now shapes the forest for decades to come.

Landscape volunteers will extend this work beyond what the professional crew can cover alone: keeping regrowth in check, planting natives in cleared ground, and helping the site along, season after season.

What You Will Do

Landscape volunteer days are hands-on and outdoors, with tasks that shift by season and by location in the park. Volunteers will get to:

- Cut and remove buckthorn and other invasive shrubs
- Plant native wildflowers, grasses, and shrubs
- Assist the City of Eagan in reviving the existing oak savanna habitat
- Contribute to a team
- Help your community
- Spend time in nature

How to Get Involved

Visit our website and fill out the volunteer sign-up form. In the “comments or questions” text box, specify that you would like to participate as a landscape volunteer.

For further details, contact us by email or phone 651-454-9412.

We would love to work with you!