

Refinery will assist in additional restoration of Pine Bend Bluffs

by *John Sucansky*
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Nearly 100 volunteers will be working to restore seven 1/2 acres of oak savanna in the Pine Bend Bluffs Oct. 25.

The restoration is part of an ongoing project spearheaded by Flint Hills Resources (the property owner), Friends of the Mississippi and Great River Greening. Volunteers will be removing invasive buckthorn from the site in preparation for native seeding next spring.

With the Oct. 25 event, more than 500 volunteers and Flint Hills employees will have pulled buckthorn, cut honeysuckle, collected and sown prairie seeds and planted native species, according to a release from the refinery.

The project area is part of a 1,300-acre parcel known as the Pine Bend Bluffs that line the Mississippi River and have been left undisturbed from the pre-settler era. The area includes oak forest, oak

savanna, black ash swamp and rare sand-gravel prairie plant communities. It's also home to two rare plant species according to the press release. This area is also an annual migration corridor for millions of songbirds and 40 percent of North America's waterfowl and shorebirds. The area was identified as a site of statewide biological significance by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources County Biological Survey in 1999. Ecologists consider the area to be one of the largest and most diverse natural areas left in the seven-county metro region.

John Hofland, a spokesperson for Flint Hills, said the volunteers have a tough job ahead of them. Removing buckthorn, "isn't sexy by any means," he laughed. The invasive plant is sharp and requires gloves and caution when dragging away after it's been cut down. Hofland will be one of the volunteers assisting in the

clearing project, along with other Flint Hills employees, and members of the Friends and Great River Greening.

The volunteers will be on site from 8:30 a.m. to noon Saturday and will participate in what Hofland described as "pretty tiring, hard work." The job has been made easier by waiting until the last of fall. Buckthorn is one of the last plants to lose its leaves, many of which are still green, mak-

ing it easier to identify for cutting.

During the past four years, Hofland said Flint Hills has contributed approximately \$200,000 to the Friends of the Mississippi and countless volunteer hours from employees both during and after work hours, to assist in the restoration of this corridor.

The refinery has concentrated predominantly on a 78-acre parcel of prairie, savanna

and wood owned by the company within the Pine Bend Bluffs. "Restoration of a natural area like this is a long-term undertaking requiring a comprehensive vegetation inventory and management plan as well as maintenance and monitoring," stated the release.

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