A KY EXCEL SPOTLIGHT

AMERICAN SYNTHETIC RUBBER

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A closed landfill in an industrial area of Louisville was transformed into a natural area for wildlife, providing habitat for deer, fox, coyotes, turkeys, pollinators and more.

American Synthetic Rubber Company's Campground Natural Area

American Synthetic Rubber Company (ASRC), a division of Michelin North America, Inc., is located on a 60.5-acre site in the southwest section of Jefferson County, Kentucky, within the industrial area known as Rubbertown. Manufacturing operations are conducted on a seven-day continuous basis, with nearly 360 employees working rotating shifts. Product lines include synthetic rubber, which is utilized primarily in the manufacturing of automobile tires and another line is used as a component in the manufacturing of solid rocket propellants.

Across from the manufacturing facility, ASRC also owns approximately 60 acres of a closed landfill, now known as the Campground Natural Area (CNA).

The goal was to restore the area with native prairie grasses and provide a migratory pathway for larger animals. Work on this project began in 2007, and ASRC received certification of the CNA in 2009, and has been recertified every three years.

The initial cleanup really was the specially timed herbicide application to remove nonnative species year after year. Herbicide was applied in a grid format so that wildlife could take refuge. When looking at maps of the CNA, there are "A" and "B" areas. One area would be treated one year and the other area would be treated the following year. After a diverse number of plant species was chosen to benefit wildlife, a company was hired to seed drill native plant species. Physical removal of Japanese honeysuckle and white mulberry, among other nonnative and invasive species of plants, is an ongoing process. The transformation from an open field of grass and weeds to prairie land has been dramatic.

Key to Success

Change takes time and effort. Have patience and keep your goals clearly in mind.

"There is a specific way of mowing the acreage to provide enough habitat and still establish prairie grasses," said Cindy Ems, ASRC's environmental engineer. "There's been a dramatic improvement in recent years to eliminate nonnative grasses, such as Johnson grass. Wildflowers are abundant. Continued maintenance to eliminate nonnative plants is ongoing. ASRC hosts a volunteer wildflower planting almost annually. Typically, 30 to 35 employees volunteer to weed and mulch our wildflower areas, plant wildflowers, build brush piles, etc."

In 2010, ASRC installed its first European honeybee hives and have been maintaining these hives since then, adding more as needed. Six additional bee hives are being purchased to help them recover from losses of a few years ago. Many employees have been recruited to help with the honeybees and one was inspired to purchase bees for his home.

Pollinators are critical to continuing our food supply and creating and maintaining habitats and ecosystems for animals. More than 1,300 types of plants are grown around the world for food, beverages, medicines, condiments, spices and fabric. About 80 percent of plants are pollinated by animals, such as bees, birds, bats, beetles, butterflies and flies, 19.6 percent by wind and 0.4 percent by water.

"Someone may look at the area and think it's a bunch of weeds, but it is a habitat for an animal, bug, bird or pollinator, in addition to the diverse number of plant species," said Ems.

This wildlife habitat area has won awards, including the Resource Caretaker Award for Environmental Excellence in 2014, from the Kentucky Department for Environmental Protection. The next goal is to apply for a certification as a Monarch Waystation as part of the Wildlife Habitat Council.

There is overwhelming community support for this project. They have had visits from University of Louisville professors, middle school students, members of a bird club, area residents and representatives from the Louisville Metro Air Pollution Control District. ASRC hosted the Rubbertown Community Advisory Council at the CNA and gave a presentation on honeybee activities.

"It has put a face on ASRC instead of people looking at us as just a chemical company," said Ems.

Weeding and mulching around the wildflowers

Completed pollinator hotel