

Floriferous!... Wildflowers Galore

by Paul Rothrock

When is a flower garden not a flower garden? When it is the backyard [or front yard as we say in lake country] of a recreational vehicle park. Incredibly, at



Photo by: Barb Baus

Sedge meadow hikers marvel at the flower diversity at Collins

Barton Lake in Steuben County an attractively maintained 60-unit RV park owned by Kevin Herber looks out over an expanse of colorful, wet meadow. The site is studded with yellow wetland sunflowers and black-eyed Susans, blue Kalm's lobelias, low growing shrubby cinquefoil, a diversity of curiously shaped sedges, and even a few poison sumac shrubs thrown in for good measure. Only a few years before, much of this area was overgrown with weeds and invasive shrubs, choking its natural beauty. Kevin wanted to develop the land, but to do so in a way that reflects his family's long relationship with the lake and land. Working with Kevin, Blue Heron Ministries had a unique stewardship opportunity. Could a single management plan preserve a piece of God's creation, even restore it to a condition closer to its original glory, and at the same time allow access for lake activities?

On August 8, a field trip to Collins Bay RV Community confirmed that the answer was a resounding "yes". A dozen of us experienced the unique melding of natural flower garden, wetland restoration, and active lake shore. We followed one of three boardwalks through the wet meadow that leads residents

down to the dock and lake shore. As we wound our way along the shore and through the expansive meadow we were introduced to dozens of unfamiliar and beautiful wildflowers... most growing to just above knee high. Some of us snapped pictures; others struggled to learn the names of the many unfamiliar species; while still others simply marveled at the colors, shapes, and patterns. To our amazement we viewed photos from only a few years earlier that demonstrated that the density of meadow flowers had actually increased in spite of the proximity to an active human community. One secret of this success was to restore carefully timed, controlled, dormant-season fire to the meadow. The fire reduced cover of high growing shrubs that overtopped and shaded out wildflowers. These same fires released tied-up nutrients that stimulated the growth of the flowers.

Reading and meditating on Psalm 103 was a fitting conclusion to our wetland tour. The climax of the Psalm notes how weak and frail we are as humans, which like wildflowers, bloom and soon are gone as though we had never been. "But the love of the Lord remains forever." And living in the light of that steadfast love, we should listen to his commands. "Praise the Lord, everything he has created." Together, while in the beauty of an RV park, we did just that.

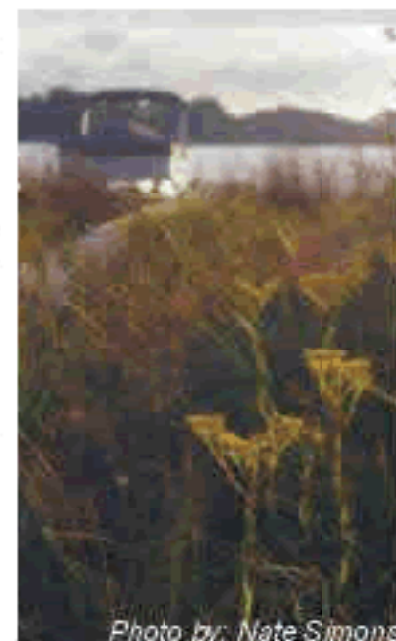


Photo by: Nate Simons

The flat-topped, Oleo Goldenrod is a wonderful component of a lakeside front yard "flower garden."