

Conservation Update: Serpentine Grassland Restoration at Lake Roland



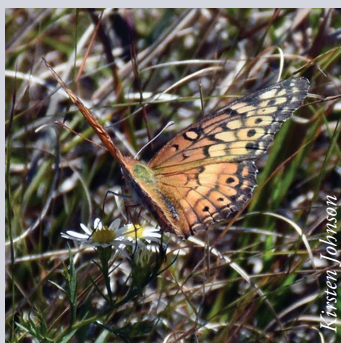
Serpentine grassland restoration area, showing the surrounding Virginia pines. Stands of Chinese silvergrass are just visible on the right.

The Bare Hills serpentine area of Lake Roland Park hosts rare grassland comprising about 84 acres. Once maintained by fire, Bare Hills is no longer bare. Virginia pines (*Pinus virginiana*) have been steadily taking hold, to the point where only patches of the original grassland remain among the pines. And unfortunately a new threat has recently appeared: Chinese silvergrass (*Miscanthus sinensis*). MNPS has contributed funds to the Lake Roland Nature Council for an ongoing project to restore the grassland, still home to a number of rare and uncommon species. The project currently involves gradually expanding an open patch of grassland.

We have spotted in the restoration area essentially all of the plant species known to exist in the Bare Hills serpentine: Fameflower (*Phemeranthus teretifolius*) (S2), little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*), Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) and other grasses, forked fimbry (*Fimbristylis annua*) (S3), purple gerardia (*Agalinis purpurea*), whorled milkweed (*Asclepias verticillata*) (S3), small-flowered snake-root (*Ageratina aromatica*), lyre-leaved rockcress (*Salvia lyrata*), rosepink (*Sabatia angularis*), Small's ragwort, (*Packera anomyma*)... the list goes on.

The Nature Council is also addressing the most recent threat. Stands of Chinese silvergrass have been proliferating throughout the grassland, apparently spreading from landscaping at nearby businesses on Falls Road. A major effort to apply herbicide to the silver grass has begun. Most of it has been treated and the treated plants appear to be dead. There are still a few pockets left to be treated next year. In addition, it is assumed that more will sprout next summer from the existing seed bank, and so the eradication effort will need to continue.

~ Kirsten and Dwight Johnson



Right: Variegated fritillary, *Euptoieta claudia*, on white heath aster, *Symphotrichum ericoides*.

Left: Small-flowered snakeroot, *Ageratina aromatica*

On winter workdays, volunteers have labored mightily to cut down and remove pines and greenbrier, gradually expanding the restoration area. (There's no waste; trees are mulched and used in the dog park along the lake.) The restoration area is now about an acre. The question always was—What plant species will move in? Is removal of the pines and greenbrier enough? Visits on beautiful days in July and September told the answer—the restoration is a success so far.



February 2017 Work Day