

Park Focus: Dolph Park

by Deb Paxton

While driving on the west side of Ann Arbor, along Wagner Rd. or Jackson Rd., few people realize that they are near one of Ann Arbor's most beautiful parks: Dolph Park. Besides housing the only natural lakes in Ann Arbor, Dolph Park is a Nature Preserve and a local hot spot for birdwatching. The marshes, and lakes found in Dolph Park are ideal habitats for many wetland birds such as: Great Blue Herons, Green Herons, and Marsh Wrens. The trails running through Dolph Park are situated to offer fantastic views for birdwatching without disturbing the wildlife. On any misty summer morning, a stroll through the park will offer stunning colors and wildlife, accented by echoing birdsong.

Also to be seen on misty mornings are fishermen, busily casting off from either a dock or boats carried to the lake from an access street. The lakes in Dolph Park, the First and Second Sister Lakes, are home to freshwater fish such as: bluegill, largemouth bass, yellow perch, and black crappie. While the fish may not be prize-winning size, fishing at Dolph Park is a peaceful and worthwhile way to spend an afternoon. Some diehard fishermen have been known to ice fish in the winter.

First and Second Sister Lakes are the crowning jewels of Dolph Park. These lakes are "kettle lakes"; they were formed from huge chunks of ice left behind when the Wisconsin Glacier receded thousands of years ago. The ice chunks were subsequently covered by soil and melted to become lakes. The lakes contribute to the uniqueness of Dolph Park. Without the lakes and their surrounding marshes, the fish, birds, and other wetland dependent wildlife would not be there.

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Fading Embers

by David Mindell

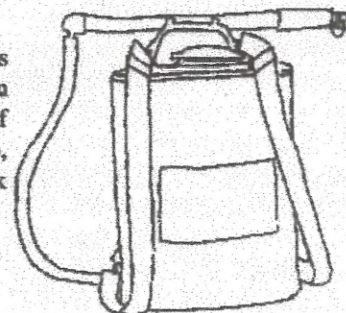
After two glowing months of igniting and extinguishing fires throughout Ann Arbor, the Natural Area Preservation Division's prescribed burn season has come to a close. Between March 18th and May 14th, we were able to complete 17 burns in 15 days, burning more than 110 acres of prairies, savannas, and woodlands.

The season was a great learning experience for all involved, as we continually improved our procedure for public notification, weather data collection, and burn crew briefing. While all those who participated in the burns were trained at the start of the season, there was no substitute for "flame on" experience in learning how best to work together and how best to complete the needed tasks. Early in the season our day of burn preparations took a long time, but we eventually streamlined our procedures and equipment and became a well-oiled machine.

With each burn we also gained a greater understanding of how humidity, fuel moisture, and wind speed affect the intensity of the burns within the varying ecosystem types. Follow-up evaluation at many of the burn sites has shown significant success in reaching our objectives. For example, on April 11th we conducted a burn at Barton Park. This was a 75 degree, 30% humidity day. The fire was extremely hot and complete (we burned virtually 100% of the intended area). One month after the burn, we see extensive top-kill of all types of shrubs in the burned area. It is clear that we are well on our way to pushing back the encroaching shrubs, and setting the stage for an open prairie community. While most other burns were not as intense as Barton, there was a significant reduction in the shrub coverage and excellent blackening of the ground to stimulate wildflower or prairie-type grass growth.

We received invaluable assistance from many volunteers, all of whom were able to come to our burn sites in the middle of the day, with very little notice. Leading the way, and the recipient of our Statue of Liberty ("a torch in the hand is worth two fires in the bush") award was Jan Wolter who became an honorary NAP staff member by attending all but three of the burns. Hardhats off to Jan! Thanks to the assistance of all our Burn Crew volunteers; Karen Lombard, Barbara Powell, Jacqueline Courteau, Rick Witten, Chris Lehr, Lisa Brush and David Fox. Staff members from The Nature Conservancy also assisted us at one of the burns. The Ann Arbor City and Township Fire Departments and Conrail staff were all extremely helpful in coordinating the burns with us. Finally, the program's success was made possible with assistance and equipment from many in Park and Recreation's Forestry Division. Many thanks to all.

While the fires are over for this season, we plan to continue burns again this fall (though not as many). And of course, there's always next spring. So, every time you see smoke, be sure to think of your friends at NAP.



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Dolph Park

Unfortunately, these wildlife refuges are in trouble. First Sister Lake, whose watershed is more developed than that of Second Sister Lake, is being contaminated by road salt, pesticides, and nutrients from lawn fertilizers. These pollutants are washed from lawns and roads by rain and carried to the lake through storm sewers. Also contributing to the nutrient levels in the lake is a nuisance Canada Goose population. These geese stay year-round at the lakes and are in such numbers that their waste is a source of pollution.

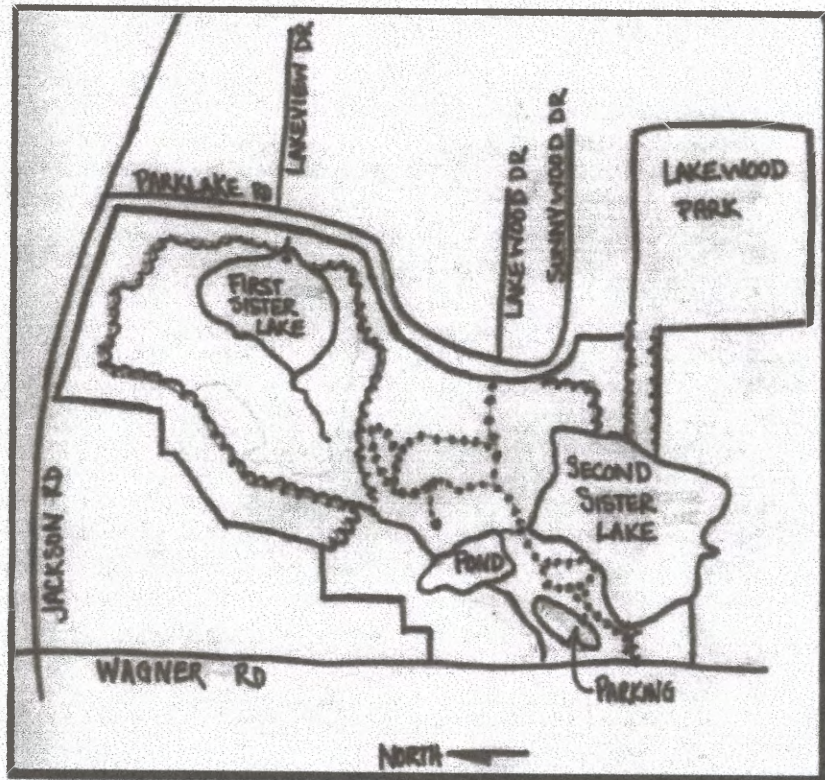
The higher levels of nutrients in the lake results in lowered oxygen levels and more plant life. The lower oxygen levels threaten fish populations, while the increased plant life is slowly filling in the lake and turning it into a marsh. Lawn fertilizers affect unwanted water plants the same way they affect lawns: they stimulate growth. With all the nutrients in First Sister Lake, the lake is becoming so clogged with plants that it's becoming a marsh.

In 1994, the City of Ann Arbor Parks and Recreation Department was awarded a grant from the US EPA. That grant was geared for the restoration and preservation of the Sister Lakes. It consisted of contracting with an environmental consulting firm to study the condition of the lakes and propose measures to clean and restore them. Proposed measures include: retrofitting a stormwater basin draining into the lakes to reduce nutrient runoff, treating the First Sister Lake with alum to reduce the levels of nutrients already in the lake, and redirecting the storm drain which flows directly into the lake.

The City of Ann Arbor has applied to the US EPA for a follow-up grant to actually implement some of the measures. Meanwhile, an interim action plan is in effect to reduce the amount of pollutants entering the lakes. Crucial to this plan is citizen cooperation, the Sister Lakes Association, a neighborhood group that has been active in the subdivisions around Dolph Park for over 20 years, has formed a Watershed Task Force. This group is developing an impressive plan for locally curtailing new pollution. Their plan involves petitioning for more frequent street sweeping within the watershed in order to reduce the amount of debris washed into the lakes, monitoring construction sites within the watershed to make sure the companies are complying with anti-pollution standards, and educating families and businesses within the watershed about how human activities affect the lakes.

Of all the components in the Watershed Task Force's plan, the education of watershed residents will be the most important and difficult. Residents must be informed of their impact on the lakes and taught how they can alter their behavior to preserve the Sister Lakes.

Hopefully, with the City, private businesses, and citizens all involved and working to preserve the Sister Lakes, the lakes can continue to be a refuge for birds, birdwatchers and stressed-out anglers.



Neighbors want to protect their Sisters

By KATHY ANN MOILANEN
Missouri Mirror

Eyeing a bear can some feet off the woodland trail, Pete Jessup scurries himself, fights the uncertainty and retrieves the trash. He even stops to pick up cigarette butts along the path from his house to the only natural lakes in Ann Arbor.

It's obvious Jessup is more than a casual friend to these lakes and the surrounding woods. But he is only one of several neighbors who volunteered to help with a study of First Sister and Second Sister lakes in Delph Park on the city's far west side. It's a neighborhood where people care.



"This is a neighborhood to fall in love with," explains Jessup, who moved to the Lakeview Subdivision in the late 1970s. "It's not pretentious, but has a lot of nice features."

Jessup's white truck is mixed in with multi-level homes overlooking the lakes and more modest ranches, all within 10 minutes' walk of Delph Park Nature Area. The city park is complete with wood trails and two kettle lakes, formed by slabs of ice that splintered from retreating glaciers thousands of years ago. It's a place to jog, hike and even fish. But the lakes, neighbors fear, are fading fast.

Long time locals point out that the water isn't as clear as it used to be, and green algae has become commonplace. They worry about salt, sand and oil runoff from local roads.

They're concerned about an overabundance of goose droppings, about Killins Gravel Co. depleting the lakes of groundwater and about Geiman Sciences Inc. across the road, with its 14-drawane pollution problem in local groundwater.

Kris Kraft, who lives on the west side of First Sister Lake, no longer fishes in the lakes because he is afraid. On his side of the lake, the houses have wells and septic systems rather than city water and sewers, only adding to Kraft's fears.

This is a neighborhood to fall in love with. It's not pretentious, but has a lot of nice features.
— Pete Jessup

ring in there?"

Kraft and about 40 other neighbors — including some school-age children who no longer want to swim in the lakes — attended a meeting this fall to hear about the status of the lakes and about an ongoing study, funded by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Geiman Sciences and the city of Ann Arbor.

The 18-month study, to be wrapped up by September 1996, will evaluate the water quality of the



NEWS PHOTO: TERRY E. WRIGHT

Chris Ciecick, a water quality technician with Limno-Tech Inc., is adding his expertise to the effort by volunteers to measure the health of the Sister Lakes.

Lakes, identify possible pollutants and recommend solutions to any problems found. Implementing these solutions, however, would have to be part of a second grant.

At the most recent public meeting, a representative from the local testing firm explained the process and shared some preliminary findings.

"Maybe \$40,000 sounds like a lot of money, but when you're doing lab analysis and having technicians out in the field for more than a year, it's a

light budget," said Dean Mericus of Ann Arbor-based Limno-Tech Inc.

Limno-Tech is running a battery of tests on the lake water. The tests look for levels of sediment, nutrients such as phosphorus and nitrogen, nitrates, 1,4-dioxane, aquatic plants such as algae, dissolved oxygen, pH levels, chlorophyll and bacteria (mostly fecal).

As Mericus told of the early results, a scientist in the back of the room from the state Department of Natural Resources was relaying how those readings compared to other lakes around the state. For example, Ann Arbor's lakes show higher than average chlorophyll and phosphorus readings, which indicate high algae counts.

"It just confirmed our worst fears," Marjorie Reade says of the preliminary results. "I've lived here since the early 1920s, and we've watched the lake deteriorate."

"It's just filling in. It's going to be a swamp instead of a lake shortly."

Reade sees fewer frogs, turtles and snakes. Some people still fish the lakes, but they don't dare eat the fish, which include blue gill, pike and bass, she says.

"Our collective impact in the last few years has been horrendous," agrees Lawrence Deplin, part of the family that gave 28 acres to the city in 1892.

The entire Delph Park Nature Area covers 44 acres. The four-acre First Sister Lake is 23 feet deep at its deepest. It is in the last stage of the lake aging process, meaning it is filling in with lots of plant growth and has less of cattails and sediments around its perimeter. The younger Second Sister Lake, on the other hand, is a acres across.

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