

HERMITAGE

Wild, wonderful

Officials explore potential of Stull property

By Joe Pinchot
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Stepping around puddles and black mud, Mark Bodamer uttered what seems to be obvious. "This whole site is a wetland," Bodamer, a forester with the state Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, said of the 40-acre Stull farm on Sample Road in Hermitage. "The water table is less than 18 inches." He noted the marsh marigolds, skunk cabbage and certain species of oaks that he has seen thrive in these conditions.

Bodamer took a walk with members of the committee planning the use of Stull Farm to help identify the natural resources of the site, and generate ideas to present information on those resources to visitors once the property is opened to public use. The committee members plan to return in May and June to further inventory plant life.

"Here, in another month, more things should really be coming out," Bodamer said, adding that he would expect to see species such as trillium and jack-in-the-pulpit. The committee already has a map of the site, but took global positioning satellite readings for more precise locations of certain features.



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Forester Mark Bodamer points to a natural feature of the Stull farm property in Hermitage to members of a committee that is studying the use of the property. Other committee members shown are Tina Hughes, left, Nancy Bires, right, and Nathan Zampogna, facing away from Bodamer. Also shown is Justin Kepple, a senior at Commodore Perry High School, in the white jacket, who came with Bodamer.



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Several ribbons such as this one delineate wetlands on the Stull farm in Hermitage. A committee wants to build a trail on the site to highlight the natural characteristics of the property, which was bequeathed to the city by former commissioner Sylvia A. Stull.

The property, bequeathed to the city by former Commissioner Sylvia A. Stull, is a mix of field and forest, and the wildlife found at the site is typical of both. The committee members saw a barred owl, deer tracks and raccoon scat on their walk. Red-winged blackbirds gave voice to scraping clicks, songbirds called in repeated twills, and woodpeckers hammered away at dead trees.

Unfortunately, the committee members also found a collection of broken glass, rusted metal and garbage. "We didn't know we had a dump," said Marcia A. Hirschmann, the city's director of planning and development. "That will have to be cleaned up."

The committee has been looking at many possible uses for the property, but its priority is to outline a walking trail system. As part of the trail plan, committee members want walkers to be able to identify the plant life,

either by way of signs or some sort of written material that they can peruse. The committee members believe they can create the trail this year, rather cheaply, especially if they have volunteer help.

Nancy Bires, Hermitage School District’s environmental coordinator, said she can muster students, and believes Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts would be willing to help. Committee members also discussed installing benches, bird boxes and bat houses, and planting a wildflower garden. Bodamer added that the committee members could easily supplement the existing vegetation by planting native species, such as cardinal flowers. “Lots of things to do,” Bodamer said. “It’s getting the time, the money and the people to do it.” Mrs. Hirschmann said she expects use of the farm property to constantly evolve as committee members explore and implement different options.

As an example, officials would like part of the property to be farmed, possibly as a community garden, an organic vegetable garden, or by a caretaker farmer. The Stull farmhouse is available to live in for someone who would like to farm or care for the site. Officials considered the farmhouse for community use, but it would need extensive renovations to make it handicapped requirements and open up the rooms to be large enough, Mrs. Hirschmann said. If the committee members want to have a community building, it would be best to build a separate building specifically for that purpose, she said.

Unlike many parks, which generally have one or two uses, the Stull farm could be a multiuse park, Mrs. Hirschmann said. It could be used for recreation, education, agriculture, conservation and history. “There’s always going to be something to do out here,” she said.



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Stull farm committee members discovered a small garbage dump on the site that will have to be cleaned up before the property can be opened to public use.



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Marsh marigolds, top, and spring beauties, left, are some of the early spring wildflowers that grow on the Stull farm. An inventory of flowers and other natural resources on the property is being conducted throughout the spring.