

# EcoLogic planning native plant nursery on west side: www.heraldtimesonline.com

Concept an expansion of EcoLogic's business

By Dawn Hewitt  
331-4377 | [dhewitt@heraldt.com](mailto:dhewitt@heraldt.com)  
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A native plant nursery will grow in what is now a corn and soybean field at the corner of Vernal Pike and Ind. 48, starting next year.

Eventually, it will have a retail component, so homeowners and landscapers will be able to buy native plants directly from the local grower.

Spencer Goehl, co-owner of EcoLogic, a Bloomington-based ecological restoration company, envisions fields of prairie plants producing seeds, bioswales, and demonstration rain gardens in both sunny spots and in shade, butterfly gardens, greenhouses for plant propagation, and woodlots of native trees.

The Monroe County Council granted a 10-year tax abatement to the company to encourage the project on the 38-acre site.

Expansion of EcoLogic from natural area restoration to include propagation of the plants it uses will add eight full-time employees to the company's current labor force of 12.

Goehl said EcoLogic plans to sign a conservation easement, to be held by Sycamore Land Trust, to ensure that the property remains as green space in perpetuity.

For many decades, the land has been used to grow row crops.

"We'll turn the fields into a seed nursery," growing plants that evolved in southern Indiana, Goehl said.

"Sycamore Land Trust is trying to preserve natural landscapes, and we're preserving the genetics of local plants," he said.

Phase 1 of the nursery includes driveways, company headquarters, greenhouses, an equipment barn and growing pads and is expected to cost \$500,000. The project is expected to be built in spring 2013, which is when the growing spaces will be heavily planted. Phase 2 will include demonstration areas and a retail area, and is planned for 2015.

"We've spent money on the master plan to have an overall vision, so every step is in the right direction," Goehl said.

EcoLogic's current headquarters off of Curry Pike houses office space and room for equipment storage, but has no room to propagate or grow plants, or to expand.

The company purchases the native plants it uses in its restoration projects. But not for much longer. And they'll sell what they grow, too.

"We want to be able to supply local landscapers with native plant materials," Goehl said.

When EcoLogic's Phase 2 is complete, homeowners will be able to purchase plants with ancient local roots.

He said educating buyers and the public about how to landscape with native plants will be an essential component.

The growing areas will allow customers to see how a mature plant looks in the context of a natural setting before they buy the seeds or plant start.

"We want to make it easy for people to have success. Native plants are a little bit of a mystery to most home gardeners," Goehl said.

He said the buildings and the entire facility will be "green."

"We want to be one of the most sustainable places in the state," Goehl said.

Goehl started EcoLogic in 1999, attempting to provide an organic lawn care company. But he soon realized that grass is too high-maintenance, and that there's really nothing natural about a mowed lawn. So the company began focusing on native plants, and restoring disturbed areas to ecosystems found in Indiana before Europeans arrived.

Business boomed.

The company has installed natural areas in Bryan Park and on the Indiana University campus. It has won contracts with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources to restore numerous nature preserves. It installed a wetlands at Marian University's EcoLab, and restored wetlands, woodlands and savannah at Oak Ridge Prairie in Lake County.

"It's been an amazing journey," Goehl said, with an exciting new venture just down the road.

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