Edgewood finds relief to wrap up regular season

SPORTS, 1B

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The recent work includes site preparation, tree planting and scraping off unwanted vegetation and digging shallow ponds for the wetland areas. Fox explained the workers carved out "little pockets of land and made little dams" to create areas that will fill with water and become new wetlands.

Construction work to scrape and dig shallow ditches in fields at the Sam Shine Foundation Preserve that will become wetlands in the nature preserve in northwest Monroe County.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY JOHN LAWRENCE

Sycamore Land Trust builds 3 wetland areas

Carol Kugler The Herald-Times | USA TODAY NETWORK

More than 36,000 trees and almost 10,000 native plants are being planted at a nature preserve in northwest Monroe County as part of a restoration effort along Bean Blossom Creek in the 630-acre Sam Shine Foundation Preserve. The goal is to provide wetland habitat for many animal species in what was once farmland. ● Agricultural fields of the past are being converted into three shallow wetland areas where frogs, toads, salamanders and other wildlife can find the moist earth and marshy areas they need to thrive. The fields are near Beanblossom Creek and at one time had field tiles installed to help water drain out of the area.

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The morning light shines on native plants in the grassland restoration area at the Sam Shine Foundation Preserve in northwest Monroe County. PHOTO PROVIDED BY NATE ENGBRECHT WITH INDIANA DNR

What's next for Bloomington's monolith?

Boris Ladwig
The Herald-Times
USA TODAY NETWORK

Bloomington's proposed gateway monolith appears to be experiencing some dysfunction.

For the third time, the Bloomington Board of Public Works on Tuesday failed to give a local contractor permission to use public property to prepare the site for the the 40-foot-tall spire.

The project's fate is unclear.

A parks department leader said Wednesday morning that officials would have some "internal discussions" before they determine how to proceed.

The city announced in early September that it planned to bring a "monolith-style gateway" to the north end of Miller-Showers Park to celebrate Bloomington's bicentennial. Bloomington celebrated 200 years as an entity in 2018, and this installation has been in the planning stage on and off the past five years.

Mayor John Hamilton last month described the proposed monument as a "nod to our past and a gift to the future," but the project has elicited significant public backlash and has been ridiculed online as, among other things, a "knobelisk."

Charlotte Zietlow, the grande dame of Bloomington politics, on Tuesday referred to the monolith as "that thing that's proposed" and a "phallic symbol."

The decision before the board of works on Tuesday evening seemed rather dull: Should the board allow Bloomington contractor Reed and Sons Construction access to the public right of way for site work and improvements to prepare for the tower's installation?

Before the decision, nearly 20 people — about half via Zoom messages — urged the three-member board to reject the project.

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This is the 40-foot-tall monolith structure the city plans to install at Miller-Showers Park to mark Bloomington's entryway.
PHOTO PROVIDED BY CITY OF BLOOMINGTON

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Wetland

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"This has been a long time coming to actually start the work," said Chris Fox, land stewardship director at Sycamore Land Trust, adding the process — from planning and securing funding to implementation — has taken about five years.

The recent work includes site preparation, tree planting and scraping off unwanted vegetation and digging shallow ponds for the wetland areas. Fox explained the workers carved out "little pockets of land and made little dams" to create areas that will fill with water and become new wetlands.

Fox and other workers had planned on plugging up an old ditch to create one of the wetlands.

"The beavers beat us to it," he said. "They moved in and built a dam pretty much where we were going to."

The Sam Shine Foundation Preserve in northwest Monroe County has fields and forest. Some of the field areas are being converted into wetlands by Sycamore Land Trust. PHOTO PROVIDED/JOHN LAWRENCE

A preserve already in use and hope for more to come

A wildlife camera was set up nearby and captured the beavers in action, as well as other wildlife that began using the dam as a bridge to move through the area. Movements of beaver, deer, wild turkey and bobcats (some with their kittens) have been caught by the camera, along with owls, great blue heron and even flying squirrels.

"They are more common than people realize," Fox said of the flying squirrel, adding it's been a "cool process" to attempt restoration without getting in the way of Mother Nature, or a family of beavers.

The hope is that more frogs and salamanders as well as toads, snakes and other wetland species will find a home in the shallow waters that will not provide a good home for most fish. The goal is to provide better breeding ponds for amphibians, especially salamanders, a favorite food of fish.

Fox said if the wetlands become home to salamanders, it will prove the area has been restored. He said salamanders, as well as other amphibians, are the "canaries in the coal mine" for wetlands.

"It's been great to go through this process and work with our partners on it," he said, stating that staff with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources and Natural Resources Conservation Service have been instrumental in the project's success.

A multipurpose project

Besides providing proper habitat for wildlife, the wetlands are also crucial for helping hold water, keeping the nearby creek from causing downstream flooding and to help filter out sediment.

Once the wetlands have been formed and fill with water, native plants will be planted nearby. The majority of those plants were grown in a native nursery that Sycamore Land Trust developed. It's the first year native seeds harvested near the planting areas have been grown and then planted in areas of the preserves, Fox said.

Some of the native plants attract pollinating animals, from monarch butterflies to hummingbirds. More trees will be added after the wetlands are functional, as well, but almost 80 acres of the Sam Shine preserve will be wetlands when the project is complete.

"We've already lost 80 to 90 percent of (wetlands) historically in Indiana," Fox said. "We can build wetlands on our property," something he said the land trust intends to do "as long as we have the land and the funds to do it."

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