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Friday, April 1 2022

Service Opportunity Reflection

Alison Hardie, 2024 cohort

A service opportunity that really stuck with me was collecting prairie seeds with Five Rivers Metroparks. In the fall my mom, sister, and I signed up to collect prairie seeds at Huffman Prairie. Huffman Prairie is a historic landmark where the Wright Brothers flew their planes but also a remnant prairie that serves as a home for many different species. My family and I had been to Huffman Prairie on multiple occasions because it is one of our favorite birding spots. Unfortunately, prairies are becoming increasingly rarer so Huffman attracts many types of breeding songbirds. One of our favorites is the bobolink, a striking black and white bird with a metallic song. We also make sure to visit every summer while the wildflowers are in full bloom.

We had gone seed collecting in the past a few years back at another park so we were excited to see that this time it was at Huffman. When we arrived at the park we were greeted by the leader of the activity who gave us a seed bag to tie around our waist, gardening gloves, and a pair of shears. As we walked down the path to the collection spot the leader pointed out and gave some information on all of the different plants in the prairie. Once we arrived at a spot he assigned each person to collect seeds from a different type of flower. I was assigned to the purple coneflower, which happens to be one of my favorites. Then we had to march into the tall brush to find the flowers that were ready. It takes a moment of braveness at first to step into the tall grass, not being able to see what's under your feet. But you forget about that after the first step. For the coneflowers I was looking for heads that were dried but had not been completely eaten by the birds, they are a favorite snack of the goldfinches. We collected seeds for a few hours before the hot sun started to get to everyone and it was time to head back. On the way back some of the other volunteers spotted a green snake which I unfortunately did not catch a glimpse of.

They informed us that the seeds would be sent back to one of the other metroparks where other volunteers would remove the seeds from the flower heads and then they would be planted across the Metroparks in different prairies. This experience really stood out to be as it showed how much work has to be done in many conservation projects. It was especially cool to be involved in helping one of my favorite places and getting to know the prairie that much better. I had always known they planted the prairies but I had never thought about how they got the seeds. There are also so many parts to this process that are all done by volunteers so it helped me to see how invested the community is as well and some of the direct impact of my hours.

