



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

For more information, please contact:

Dawn Caldwell

Interim Village Manager

(815) 886-0279

[dcaldwell@romeoville.org](mailto:dcaldwell@romeoville.org)

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### Volunteer Workdays Train Stewards of Romeoville's O'Hara Woods

Since the fall of 2019, the Conservation Foundation has been working with the Village of Romeoville to maintain the O'Hara Woods Nature Preserve. The Nature Preserve and the adjacent O'Hara Woods Forest Preserve, owned by the Forest Preserve of Will County, make up the 137 acre woodland located behind village hall. Volunteer workdays have been held once a month, inviting members of the community to learn what is necessary to maintain the preserve and then having them go out and do it. "It can seem intimidating," admits Sam Kilgore, Land Stewardship Manager & Native Plant Specialist for the Conservation Foundation and the person heading up the volunteer workdays. "It can seem like there is a steep learning curve to doing this work, but we format the volunteer days so that high school students and adults can easily get involved in ecosystem management."



Why does O'Hara Woods need help? Natural communities like woodlands, prairies, and wetlands are not stagnant, unchanging places. There is a lot happening in them, including pressures from the outside. Invasive species like garlic mustard, buckthorn, and honeysuckle come in and threaten the native species by outcompeting them. People walking through the woods can leave garbage and trample plants. As a result, sites like O'Hara Woods need maintenance like removing invasive species, doing prescribed burns, and picking up garbage. "The Conservation Foundation doesn't have the staff to do management work," explains Kilgore. "The goal of these volunteer days is to set up a group who can. We want them to fall in

love with O'Hara Woods and, by teaching them how to do the work, they can be stewards of these woods on a monthly or even weekly basis."

Ecosystem management includes cutting and burning invasive brush, pulling garlic mustard, and collecting seeds from native plants. All of these tasks are seasonal, so when you attend a workday, you will likely be only doing one. "Garlic mustard shows up in spring and starts to die in the summer, so the spring is the time to address them," said Kilgore. "We don't want to burn in the summer when things are hot and dry, so burning happens in the winter. Seed collecting is late summer to late fall. These activities are cyclical and seasonal." Volunteer days have attracted 12-15 people per day thus far, which Kilgore says is a solid number. "It's a really fun and rewarding activity. You don't need any prior knowledge to help and we will provide you with the supplies you need like gloves, safety glasses, and tools."

The goal of the restoration work is to allow O'Hara Woods to be as healthy and diverse as possible. The removal of invasive species helps to forward that goal. With 137 acres to patrol, these invaders will never be completely gone from the woods, but, after a period of consistent upkeep, it will be a more manageable problem.

If this sounds like something you may be interested in trying, the workday schedule for the entire year can be found on [romeoville.org](http://romeoville.org). Workdays are one Saturday per month from 8 am – 11 am. Please dress for the weather and wear closed-toed shoes. Long pants are also recommended. Additionally, until COVID-19 is no longer an issue, masks are required to be worn the entire time. By keeping the workdays COVID safe, the Conservation Foundation can continue training the stewards of tomorrow and the community can be comfortable in taking care of O'Hara Woods today.