Management Policies For:
Juanita Hults Environmental Education Learning Center

A Property of the
Ball State University Field Station and Environmental Education Center

Property Description

The Juanita Hults Environmental Education Center (JHELC) contains ecosystems that reflect the natural diversity found in this region of Indiana including a wetland, a prairie, wooded areas, areas undergoing ecological succession, as well as areas that are utilized for agriculture. This site was mostly in agricultural land use when it was donated to the Natural Resources and Environmental Management Department at Ball State University; however, we have made an effort to restore biodiversity to the property, including reestablishing a wetland area and planting a tall grass prairie. All of these areas are easily accessible for teachers and their students, creating great opportunities for hands-on learning experiences in environmental education as well as field research opportunities.

The JHELC property came under Ball State University ownership on December 28, 1987 to be managed by the Natural Resources Department by means of a donation of the property accompanied by a trust fund to help in the Center's development. This property is located in the the SW ¼ of Section 36, Township 21 North, Range 11, Delaware County, Indiana. The Hults Property is 99 acres, comprised of wooded areas, a two-acre wetland, an acre of tall grass prairie, old-field succession acres, and about 50 acres of agricultural fields. Also included is a forested riparian area that adjoins Halfway Creek, which flows to the south and is located on the west side State Road 167 which bisects the property. This property is bounded by a golf course on the north and east sides, County Road 800 E. on the west side, residential properties and Highway 67 on the south side.

History

Historically the land originally belonged to the Miami natives of this region. This region of the state was part of a vast fertile deciduous forest /wetland system. The land was then purchased by the U.S. Government as part of the Northwest Territory in 1783 and was sold to private owners as payment for military services.

The land that is now JHELC property was originally purchased by two different men in September of 1834. Jacob Noggle purchased the west half of the property, and Warrner Mann purchased the east half. Warrner Mann constructed a hewn log cabin on his portion of land for a schoolhouse. In 1839 the school became part of the Niles township school system and was named The Wingate Schoolhouse because in the same year the land, was sold to Booth Wingate. The Wingate family owned the land until 1920 when, upon the death of Mrs. Wingate, the property passed to her brother, Bob Taylor. It was subsequently purchased by Walter Hults, father of Juanita Hults in 1935. Following the death of Mr. Hults in 1942 and the death of Mrs. Hults in 1966, the farm ownership passed to their daughter, Juanita Maley.

Mrs. Maley was a lover of nature and attended a seminar in conservation at Ball State in 1970. She subsequently contacted Dr. Clyde Hibbs, chairman of the Department of Natural Resources, to ask him if the department would be interested in her farm. Told that the department was interested, Mrs. Maley made arrangements for the university to receive the 99-acre farm and an endowment upon her death, which occurred in 1986. In 1987 ownership of the property was transferred to Ball State University to be used as an environmental learning center.

The original orchard of 2.5 acres immediately south of the house was removed and a small section of orchard was replanted with dwarf fruit apple, pear, and peach trees in 1989. There are 30 apple trees, five each of Paula Red, Red Chief, Jonee, Smoothie, and Granny Smith. There are 10 peach trees, five each of Red Haven and Elberta. There are 10 pear trees, five each of Moonglow and Bartlett.

Windbreaks were planted during the period 1988-1990. They were planted to 1) help reduce soil erosion, 2) delineate JHELC property lines, and 3) provide habitat and travel lanes for wildlife. Dr. Charles Mortensen directed the planting, which was done by department faculty, staff, and students. Norway spruce, green ash, and eastern redbuds were planted in the windbreak. To correct the problem of under stocking and increase species diversity, several species (black oak, tulip tree, persimmon, swamp white oak, and green oak) were under planted in 1989 and 1990. To enhance esthetics and provide wildlife habitat, northern bayberry, persimmon, flowering dogwood, silky dogwood, crab apple, pecan, butterfly bush, and Washington Hawthorn were planted near the house, barn, and trail head. Red and white pines were also planted in 1989 and 1990 on the eastern edge of the property. Finally, wildlife shrubs including bicolor lespedeza, Washington hawthorn, high brush cranberry, and dogwood were planted in 1990 along the parking area and along the fence line.

In the summer of 1992, under the auspices of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service wetland restoration program, a drainage tile system was interrupted and a dam built to restore a former wetland on the property. Several species of rooted aquatic vegetation were planted in and around the wetland by the faculty in the fall of 1992.

A one-acre tall grass prairie was established on the site of the former orchard in the spring of 1992 under the direction of Dr. Charles Mortensen. Following site preparation, faculty and staff of the Department of Natural Resources planted about 30 species of prairie plants.

In the early 1990's an amphitheater was built just south of the wetland. A loop trail known as The Big Tree Trail was designed by Dr. Mortensen's interpretation class. They also developed an interpretive trail guide booklet for use on the trail.

Structures on the property include a seven-room two-story house, parts of which were built in the late 1880's. The house has a large room on the west side that serves as a classroom for indoor activities and inclement weather. Other buildings include a large barn and two outbuildings. Currently the house is being rented and the barn and one outbuilding are used primarily for storage. The other building is unused. Vehicle parking is available in a gravel parking area on the south side of the prairie. This parking area is connected to the house and barn area by a trail.

General Information

The JHELC is just outside the small city of Albany, and is about 14 miles from the Ball State Campus in Muncie. Its size, variety of habitats, and easy accessibility make the JHELC a prime location to have environmental education activities targeting the primary and middle school children of the surrounding communities. JHELC and its environmental resources are available for educational purposes including: visits by local school groups K-8 (mainly); field trips for youth groups; Ball State University undergraduate and graduate student field research; field trips conducted by university educational faculty; and workshops for environmental education teachers.

Management Guidelines

Management of the JHELC is targeted at offering educational activities, retaining existing habitat, and restoring additional areas to native plant and animal species. Some grounds maintenance such as mowing, prescribed burns, and other land management techniques will be utilized to provide access to the different areas of the property.

Juanita Hults Maley's will included the following statement:
"The primary purpose of the Hults Nature Center shall be to provide a place of natural beauty to which people can come to observe, where children can earn that there is always something interesting to do and see if they really look, where plants and animals can flourish unharmed, where students can practice the art of teaching others to observe and appreciate nature: and it is the hope of the testatrix that the entire farm will be returned eventually to forest"

Policies for Hults Environmental Learning Center listed in the will of Juanita Hults Maley:

1. No improvements shall be built except for instructional purposes or for housing for a caretaker.

2. No timber, including fallen timber, shall be removed from the farm.

3. No hunting and/or trapping shall be allowed. "No Hunting" signs shall be posted.

4. Agricultural land may be used to demonstrate conservation practices or to seek answers to environmental problems.

5. A nursery may be developed to provide seedlings for reforestation. An arboretum is also allowed.

6. The following activities would be allowed: "To establish a variety of environmental quality monitoring stations with appropriate interpretive displays, such as weather stations, stream gauging station, and high volume air sampler".

Additional policies developed by NREM Department:

1. Collection of plants, animals, artifacts, or even dead or inanimate items from the JHELC property is prohibited unless approved by the managing entity.

2. Use of the JHELC property by outside groups should be supervised. Permission for access to the environmental center should be directed through the graduate assistant working with the JHELC, the Coordinator of the JHELC, or the Natural Resources and Environmental Management Department Chairperson.

3. Exotic species of plants and animals will be controlled where necessary.

4. Introduction of native species where needed to enrich the biodiversity of this habitat.

Management of Wooded Areas

1. Trails will be maintained by mowing and removal of tree falls that impede an established path.

Management of Wetland Area

1. The trail, pier, and an open area at the wetland edge will be maintained for access.

Management of Tall Grass Prairie Area

1. The trail that passes through the prairie will be maintained.
2. Prescribed burning in intervals of 3-5 years.

Management of Old-Field Succession Area

1.Areas that are in a natural succession should be allowed to continue this process undisturbed.

Management of Riparian Area

1. No access trail has been built in this area, but it should be considered in the near future.

Management of Orchard.

1. Pruning trees and harvesting fruit through out the growing and harvesting seasons.
2. Fertilization and pest control using Integrated Pest Management.

Management of Agricultural Areas

1. Lease out portions of agricultural areas.
2. Encourage environmentally-friendly cropping techniques.
3. Soil fertility testing as needed to monitor the quality of the soil and allow fertilizer recommendations.