



## **An Update from Save the Dunes - Stockwell Woods Nature Preserve**

As you may know, in December of 2021 the Town of Long Beach graciously donated three parcels of untouched duneland ecosystems to Save the Dunes. Adjacent to our Stockwell Woods Nature Preserve, these new parcels nearly tripled the size of the preserve, which now sits at just under 43 acres. We at Save the Dunes are eternally grateful for this gift and are honored that you have entrusted us with the care of this special place. We do not take that responsibility lightly.

We would also like to acknowledge that previous stewardship projects at the Stockwell Woods Nature Preserve were carried out in a manner that did not prioritize communication, community engagement, and follow-through. These three values are at the core of our work today, and we are committed to doing better, and working with the Town of Long Beach and its residents to care for Stockwell Woods through transparency and collaboration.

To that end, we are thrilled to share that we have secured funding to do some management at the preserve over the next two years. Thanks to the hard work and dedication from a group of Long Beach community volunteers, invasive plants have been treated at Stockwell Woods for many years. However, with a property of this size and the plant species found on it, there is only so much work we can accomplish on our own. That is why we are excited that this year we will be able to hire a contractor to remove invasive species such as bush honeysuckle, oriental bittersweet, multiflora rose, and other woody invasives on all ~43 acres of the Preserve. Retreatment will occur in 2024.

In addition, about 5 acres of remnant oak savanna habitat will undergo tree thinning in the coming weeks. Please know that we are being very purposeful in how this is done. We are working with conservation professionals and Long Beach community volunteers to mark specific trees - only those small enough to be moved by hand – for removal. We'll be moving the downed trees later this year to line the trails during a volunteer workday. Stay tuned for a date if you are interested in helping out!

The reason that this tree thinning is important is that oak savanna ecosystems support incredible biodiversity and are exceedingly rare. Oak savannas are sparsely treed grasslands where fire-resistant oaks stand among prairie plants. They are richly diverse ecosystems that contain plants and animals found in both oak forests and prairies. If neglected, prairie plants disappear as the habitat becomes dominated by trees which shade out the understory. Once covering roughly fifty million acres from Michigan to Nebraska, oak savannas now cover only about 30,000 acres. In the Midwest, it is estimated that less than 0.02% of high-quality oak savanna habitat remains.



We have the rare privilege of owning a small piece of this special habitat type that was once so prevalent in our area. We intend to follow the lead of our many partners such as the IN Dunes National Park and Shirley Heinze Land Trust in prioritizing the preservation of oak savanna ecosystems whenever possible.

This project is only the first step in our long-term commitment to restoring the natural space, enhancing the public's access and enjoyment of the property, and learning all that Stockwell Woods has to teach us. Our mission is to protect the dunes for the health and vitality of both the environment and the people who call it their home. We hope you will join us in restoring and enhancing Stockwell Woods Nature Preserve so that our families, and those of future generations, may know the joys of this special place.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Katie Hobgood".

Katie Hobgood  
Program Director  
Save the Dunes Conservation Fund