

## **WCCD's School and Community Habitat Grant: Post Installation Report**

**PROJECT NAME:** "Expanding and improving native pollinator gardens at Leslie Science & Nature Center to support biodiversity, healthy habitats, and visitor education."

**MAIN CONTACT (NAME & EMAIL/PHONE):** Charlie Reischl, creischl@aahom.org

*Please fill out the sections below and feel free to add any additional information you would like to share about the project or your experience as a grant recipient. **Please include photos** which will be used across various platforms to promote the program. Reminder, WCCD will follow up for a 1-year post installation report.*

### **PRIMARY GOALS OF PROJECT**

One primary goal of this project was to create a visual and physical barrier between the Raptor Loop and Nature Playscape, discouraging our younger visitors from running through the area where we house our birds of prey. The well-being of our avian ambassadors is a priority of ours, and we believed this garden would help reduce the kind of noise and fast movement that could cause stress to the animals.

Another primary goal was to contribute to conservation efforts by providing a pollinator habitat populated by native plants. Conservation education comprises the content of many of our programs, and having on-site pollinator gardens enables us to teach our community, both directly and through informal observation, about the importance of these habitats.

### **BRIEF PROJECT OVERVIEW/TIMELINE (include date of plant install)**

- In October 2023, Summer Roberts connected the Leslie Science & Nature Center with Jared Aslakson from Feral Flora for the proposed project.
- The same day, Jared reached out to set up a walkthrough to assess the two spaces referenced in our original grant proposal. In early November, Susan Westhoff, Serena Dobson, and Jared met and discussed the plans for both gardens.
- In early January 2024, Summer provided an updated budget and plan that she and Jared had determined for the smaller garden between the Raptor Loop and Nature Playscape. Susan and David Clipner reviewed the proposal and approved it, with David requesting a walkthrough with Jared.
- In March, David and Jared met to discuss plant choices and placement.
- In April, the Nature Playscape contractor, Michigan Recreational Construction (MRC), was given Jared's contact information so they could coordinate.

- In early May, Jared reached out to say that he hadn't heard from MRC. Serena sent follow-up to MRC and checked back in with Jared mid-month, confirming that he still hadn't heard from them. Jared said he would come by soon to view the space again.
- In late May, Jared visited for another walkthrough, finding that MRC's subcontracted landscaping company had planted turfgrass and staked the area for three juniper trees. They had also planted in many other places they had not been instructed to. Susan immediately notified MRC, who assured us their subcontractor would not plant the junipers in the space intended for the WCCD garden.
- In early June, the subcontractor planted the junipers, having not received communication from MRC. Serena reached out to Jared and Summer with this information, asking how they would like to move forward.
- Jared visited a few days later and determined he would still be able to plant in the space, though not as extensively as originally planned. He named three potential plant install dates as July 2, July 9, and July 16.
- Due to a booking conflict, Feral Flora rescheduled the garden installation date to July 23. That day, Jared and his colleagues planted in the intended space between the Raptor Loop and Nature Playscape.

## **SUCSESSES AND CHALLENGES**

As noted in the timeline above, we encountered several obstacles throughout this project, most of which originated from miscommunication. Our main challenge was coordinating with internal and external stakeholders while trying to execute a cohesive and timely vision. Development and leadership staff; on-site contractors and subcontractors; the granting agency, WCCD; and Feral Flora were all involved in making this garden a reality.

Despite these challenges, we were ultimately able to plant in the designated plot, bringing another beautiful natural space to everyone who visits our site. Visitors are already remarking on this new garden and how it enhances their experience at the Nature Playscape.

One challenge that has emerged since the planting is that of visitors cutting through the far right of the garden to reach the Nature Playscape from the Raptor Loop. We plan to mitigate this by adding a small, aesthetically pleasing fence to the side of the garden that faces the Raptor Loop, protecting the plants and guiding visitors to the correct path.

## **PLAN FOR FUTURE MAINTENANCE/USE**

For the first several months, we plan to maintain the garden as we do our other new plants, watering them every day until the plants are established enough to survive on their own. Maintenance, including weeding invasives, will be performed regularly by both staff and volunteers.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR WCCD**

We're extremely thankful to WCCD for funding this garden project! Summer was helpful, communicative, and patient throughout the process, answering any questions we had from start to finish.





