



THE PLAIN DEALER

WEEKEND FOCUS

New Lorain park is a meadow for all

Saturday, September 30, 2006

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On a warm day in fall, the new Wellington Reservation of Lorain County Metro Parks (535 Jones Road, Wellington) can look a lot like a butterfly gallery. Stop by this 539-acre park after it opens at 10 a.m. today, and you might find yourself wandering a path through fields aflutter with cabbage white and yellow sulfur butterflies, along with solo migrating monarchs.

Aside from the visual delight, there are other reasons to celebrate Lorain County's 13th park. Meadows and prairies foster lots of species, but we've lost most of those land areas in Ohio, says Cleveland Museum of Natural History botanist Jim Bissell.

"Meadows disappeared at a quick rate after a lot of farms closed in the 1950s and 1960s," says Bissell. "It only takes 20 years for the forest canopy to grow back."

That growth shuts out species that depend on grasses, wildflowers and low nesting places. Among those affected, says Bissell, are grasshopper sparrows and horned larks, "things we took for granted 20 years ago."

Habitat restoration is just one reason the park district decided to build a prairie here, says director Dan Martin. An old farm field was burned of wooded vegetation and more than two tons of seeds were hand broadcast over an area that surrounds a few waterfowl ponds. The prairie plants that are a foot or 2 tall now will mature to 5 feet in about five years, Martin said.

Lorain County Metro Parks used a \$1 million budget, including some \$100,000 from a Clean Ohio grant, to create the park with Wellington. It has a visitor center on the edge of a 21-acre reservoir, a playground, art gallery and rentable 75-seat meeting room with a fireplace. More than four miles of trails, one mile of which is paved, work in circular fashion to a 20-foot viewing mound in the center. The place is meditative, and the view from the mound is a fine payoff.

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