



PEORIA WILDS, NOT-FOR-PROFIT
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PRESS RELEASE

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**Peoria Wilds Urges Continued Protection of Rare Tallgrass Oak
Savanna at Historic Springdale Cemetery**

Peoria Wilds has had a long and positive relationship with Springdale Cemetery, dating back to the late 1980's with the sole objective to restore the biological diversity of the Springdale Savanna. This rare native remnant of tallgrass oak savanna and hill prairie has for over 20 years enjoyed the voluntary protection of the cemetery's owners as a designated Illinois Natural Heritage Landmark registered with the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission and Illinois Department of Natural Resources. Situated on the bluff of Historic Springdale Cemetery, this living piece of history representing the natural community that greeted early explorers to the Peoria area now faces the threat of permanent destruction.

We hope that the collective viewpoint of the Springdale Management Authority is a bit more enlightened and that the value of the continued preservation of this natural area is seen as an important aspect of their role as stewards of the historic cemetery. At the October 18, 2011 public meeting of the SCMA, the future of the Springdale Savanna will be discussed; Peoria Wilds urges continued protection of this rare remnant of tallgrass oak savanna.

Recent events including repeated mowing of the designated natural areas indicate at the very least a lack of knowledge of the efforts and the thousands of hours of volunteer labor performed by hundreds of Peoria Wilds volunteers as well as an unawareness of the agreement between the SCMA and the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission and Illinois Department of Natural Resources. This agreement originally predates the formal creation of both the Springdale Cemetery Management Authority as well as Peoria Wilds, not-for-profit; its origins date back to the days of private ownership of

Springdale Cemetery and involvement of The Nature Conservancy in creating the Peoria Wilds project.

Comments by SCMA General Manager Jon Austin reported in the September 26, 2011 *Peoria Journal Star* "Word On the Street" column by John Sharp, seemed to imply that the tax-exempt status of Peoria Wilds, not-for-profit is of concern in regards to the Illinois Natural Heritage Landmark agreement. While the paperwork issue resulting in the temporary loss of tax-exempt status has now been resolved, the fact of the matter is that 501(c)(3) status has absolutely no bearing on Peoria Wilds' ability to follow its mission to *ensure the protection and restoration of biologically diverse habitats and ecosystems through volunteer stewardship of our remaining natural areas*. In fact, Peoria Wilds only originally applied for and currently maintains its 501(c)(3) status in order to be able to receive tax exempt contributions or for eligibility for some grants.

Peoria Wilds strongly encourages SCMA to reconsider any termination of the Illinois Natural Heritage Landmark agreement with the State of Illinois. The existing environmental, historical, ecological, and even economical benefits of this small but highly visible area within Historic Springdale Cemetery greatly outweigh the short-term gains of one-time sales, especially given the generous availability of existing plots within the cemetery; according to public numbers released just a few short years ago, without even touching the designated natural area 50,000 burials plots are still available within Springdale.

It is in the public interest to provide proper stewardship of these unique natural areas located within Historic Springdale Cemetery. Once destroyed, these ancient native communities that welcomed Peoria's founders, will be lost forever.

Peoria Wilds is a local grassroots volunteer organization dedicated to the restoration of biological diversity in the Peoria area. Find more information at www.peoriawilds.org.

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