

Recommendations for Natural Features on the Mills Property

Illinois Yearly Meeting
Environmental Concerns Committee
2009 September 11
Roy C. Treadway, Clerk

The Environmental Concerns Committee (ECC) met in retreat and work day on 2009 September 11-12. During part of our time, we toured the grounds of the Mills Property to consider what work on the natural features, such as trees, weeds, prairie plants, bushes, and lawn, we would recommend to Maintenance and Planning Committee and the Ad Hoc Committee on the Mills Property.

In our evaluation and recommendations, we were guided by two criteria:
reducing the use of energy and carbon footprint to maintain the natural landscape and
maintaining a safe and attractive landscape in harmony with our natural surroundings.

New uses of the land to reduce mowing

We reviewed ways the area to be maintained by mowing could be reduced, thus lowering ILYM's energy costs and carbon dioxide contribution. We considered many viable options: expand the prairie, set up a memorial-tree grove, develop a community garden, add playing areas (such as a volleyball court), make an additional area for camping, expand the automobile-parking area, and create a labyrinth.

While we have not developed these options concretely, we do recommend two specific developments of the landscape as soon as feasible. First, we suggest laying out a path from the meetinghouse to the Mills house, possibly winding slightly, with meditative nature features along the way; we are not sure whether this path is best placed to the north or south the long building. Second, we would like to see the "garden" around the pond near the Mills House be made into a meditation area.

As part of this process, we considered what to do with the field to the south of the long building, which has only a few native species, but many invasive plants and trees (mostly silver maple). For the time being, we suggest that the trees in this "Old Field" be removed but allow the other plants in it to continue to grow, so that this area continues **not** to need mowing. During our weekend, we started to remove the trees in this "Old Field" and will continue at our next opportunity. If this area is eventually turned into a genuine prairie, we suggest that it be plowed, the seeds in the soil allowed to germinate, and the area plowed again to remove undesirable plants before both tall and short grasses are planted. The process should also be used for any expansion of the current prairie.

Except for the meditative garden, we are not ready to recommend any specific location for any of the possible uses of the land as alternatives to the lawn until a long-range plan for use of the current buildings and placement of any new buildings is developed. We feel there is no purpose in spending time, money, and effort in developing any of these new uses of the land until their best location is decided in connection with the buildings. We hope to work with the Ad Hoc Committee on the Mills Property and the Maintenance and Planning Committee to decide on the best use of the natural features of the land.

Trimming and Removing of Trees on the Mills Property

The Environmental Concerns Committee also reviewed the trees on both the Meetinghouse grounds and the Mills property to recommend those trees we felt should either be trimmed or removed. The main reasons for recommending removal or trimming a tree was whether it posed a danger to

people near a tree or to a building or was in the "Old Field." Diseased trees away from places where people might be, such as on the edge of the property, are valuable for birds and other wildlife and should be kept. Healthy trees adjacent to buildings or near power lines, in the "Old Field," in decorative plantings (such as the evergreens at the west entrance to the meetinghouse), leaning over an adjacent farm field, or walnut trees near other plants (because of their toxins) should be considered for trimming (if one or two branches are a threat) or removed. (The ECC has already cut down many small maples and mulberry trees for these reasons.) Some trees that might otherwise be removed but provide valuable shade to buildings or to the lawn should be watched to see if removal later is desirable.

Thus, the committee recommends removal of the following trees by a professional tree company or experienced persons from ILYM:

Silver maples (2) on the west side of east driveway to the Mills House because of power line.

We recommend the following by a professional tree company:

Removal of the silver maple on the east of and in front of the Mills House;
Trimming of branches of the sugar maple over the garage on the east and back of the Mills House;
Trimming of dead branches of the walnut tree on the west of the Mills House; and
Trimming of branches near the house of the silver maple on the west of the Mills House.

Trees that we recommend watching for future action:

Large silver maple to the east of the meetinghouse;
Norway Spruce to the east of the meetinghouse; and
Bradford pear trees north of the long building because of splitting.

The Environmental Concerns Committee plans:

Trimming branches touching the house of the red cedar near the entrance of the Mills House;
Trimming or removing the apple tree on the west of the Mills House; and
Removing the dead crab apple tree north of the long building.

We recommend a member of the Environmental Concerns Committee mark the trees requiring a professional tree company so there is no ambiguity about which trees should be trimmed or removed.

Planting New Trees

Because several trees on both the Mills and Meetinghouse property need to be removed now or in the future, ECC recommends planting carefully selected new trees in locations to be determined when feasible and funds are available.

Prairie Burn

Even though the prairie is not on the Mills Property, ECC plans to burn it on a weekend day in mid November 2009 after a hard frost when there is no significant wind, no rain, no corn stalks in the field to the south, and no event by Clear Creek Meeting.

The Environmental Concerns Committee hopes these recommendations and suggestions are helpful to the planning for the use of the Mills Property. We look forward to working with others in developing this property as an expansion of the natural landscape and spiritual home of Illinois Yearly Meeting.