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Grant Supports Conservation Effort at Duff Lake Fen

Angola, IN – The LaGrange County Parks Departments, in partnership with Friends of LaGrange County Parks and Blue Heron Ministries have undertaken an ambitious project to restore Duff Lake Fen, a 130 acre wetland and prairie at Pine Knob County Park. This group was recently awarded \$5,000 in funding from the Ralph E. Taylor Conservation Fund held at Steuben County Community Foundation for conservation of the fen.

Duff Lake Fen was purchased with funding from The Bicentennial Nature Trust, Heritage Trust, LaGrange County Community Foundation and Friends of LaGrange County Parks. The LaGrange County Parks Department is working with Blue Heron Ministries to restore the fen and adjacent uplands to a pre-settlement oak savanna natural community. Funding from the Ralph E. Taylor Conservation Fund was used for the purchase of three orchid species that are native to northeast Indiana but have disappeared in this fen over time as a result of grazing cattle. This project is part of a larger effort to diversify the plants in areas of northeast Indiana.

The Ralph E. Taylor Conservation Fund was created in 2003 to support the conservation of the natural environment in northeast Indiana. The fund provides support for educational opportunities about conservation practices as well as the reintroduction of plants and animals to their natural habitats. It was created by Cheryl Taylor in honor of the service of her husband, Ralph Taylor, in his 30 years with the DNR. Taylor believes this project clearly speaks to Ralph's interest. "Re-introducing species to their natural habitat; providing an additional reason for people to enjoy the wonders of nature; reminding us how truly connected we are to the earth – all these reasons would have captured his attention," said Taylor. "My hope is that Duff Lake Fen will draw visitors from near and far to see its beauty."

According to Michael Metz, Director of LaGrange County Department of Parks and Recreation, this project is part of a larger effort that also includes the construction of walking trails and a boardwalk connecting Duff Lake Fen to Pine Knob County Park. Blue Heron Ministries and the Friends of LaGrange County Parks have received funding for this project from multiple organizations, including the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and Sustain Our Great Lakes. Nate Simons, Executive Director of Blue Heron Ministries, said there is still work to be done in terms of controlling invasive species and prescribing fires. "The goal is to perpetuate the restored prairie fen and surrounding dry prairie and oak savanna ecosystem with fire as it once was prior to European settlement."

Work on the fen began in April 2015 with controlling invasive plant species, plugging ditches, and seeding wet and dry prairie seed mixes. "In the long run this project will expand the natural diversity of Pine Knob Park," said Metz. "Duff Lake Fen is an asset for the people of LaGrange County and surrounding area. We appreciate support from the Ralph E. Taylor Conservation Fund and look forward to celebrating the natural beauty of Duff Lake Fen."

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Through philanthropic services, strategic investments and community leadership, Steuben County Community Foundation helps people support the causes they care about, now and for generations to come. The Steuben County Community Foundation is a nonprofit organization with assets totaling more than \$25 million. Our vision: Serving as a community leader and improving the quality of life by assessing, supporting and coordinating philanthropic giving and endowment building. Our mission: Connecting people who care with needs that matter to our community. For more information on the Foundation, visit its website at www.steubenfoundation.org.



Pictured: Cheryl Taylor, Ralph E. Taylor Conservation Fund; Michael Metz, LaGrange County Parks Department; Nate Simons, Blue Heron Ministries; and Gary Chapman, Gloria Sherwood, and Elma Chapman of Friends of LaGrange County Parks gather at Duff Lake Fen to view newly planted native orchids.