

Spaces: Former waste sites now offer an escape for people

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mink, foxes and whitetail deer.

"The deer probably first moved into the site from railroad corridors," Spiering said. "They live, breed and die right in the city of Buffalo."

Across the country, gems like the Tiff Nature Preserve are thriving atop closed landfills and former industrial sites, turning some of society's most unwelcome places into stunning outdoor postcards.

As residential and commercial development cuts into the amount of untouched natural areas, leaders are realizing that once-desolate locales can be transformed into lush sanctuaries for wildlife and city dwellers looking for a temporary escape.

Spiering said the museum system still has the challenge of convincing some that Tiff has overcome its past. Before it was a landfill, the site was a dump site for the city and a Lake Erie shipment center, where waste from the steel and coal industries, namely slag and fly ash, were disposed for decades.

"It smelled bad, looked bad and was unsightly," he said. "Now school kids are coming through and the trails are open seven days a week. [We had] to change the perception that this is an unclean place. It's an urban gem."

Tiff, along with other successful restoration projects such as the Grange Insurance Audubon Center in Columbus, Ohio, and the Trinity River Audubon Center in Dallas, are located just minutes from the honking horns of each city's downtown.

Tiff is three miles from Buffalo's downtown; Grange is only a mile from the heart of Ohio's capital; and Trinity is a mere eight minutes from downtown Dallas.

Heart of the city

John O'Meara, executive director of Columbus and Franklin County Metro Parks, said Grange,



The Buffalo, N.Y., skyline can be seen in the distance from the mounds at Tiff Nature Preserve along Lake Erie south of downtown Buffalo. Beneath the mounds of dirt and plant life are 2 million cubic yards of municipal solid waste.

which opened in 2009, was created on land that used to be an asphalt plant and vehicle impound lot.

O'Meara estimates the area was an industrial site for 150 years.

Audubon Ohio subleased five acres for the center, which is located within the 120-acre Scioto River Audubon Metro Park on the Whittier Peninsula.

The park features a 35-foot outdoor climbing wall, dog parks and sand volleyball courts. The center also has become a popular wedding spot, with 40 ceremonies already scheduled this year, as the staff looks for ways to generate revenue, said Christie Vargo, center director.

Grange also targets underperforming inner-city schools in low-income areas for its educational programs.

Vargo said the center shapes its lesson plans to fit the curriculums of the visiting classrooms. The strategy paid off at one school recently, where fourth-graders saw their passing rates



Children roam the grounds of the Trinity River Audubon Center in Dallas during an education program. The center, which opened in October 2008, was built on a former 120-acre landfill once used as an illegal construction debris dump.

on the science portion of the state assessment test jump from 8% to 48%.

"I think it's a great use for a former industrial site," O'Meara

said. "You can take something that was really a rundown eyesore in the city and you're turning it around and making it a major attraction."

Bald eagles are among the 200 bird species that have been spotted at Grange.

At the moment, researchers are studying migratory birds to see how much body fat they are accumulating while making pit stops at Grange.

"What happens is that they migrate through from South America and Mexico to breeding habitats in the north in the spring and come back through in the fall," Vargo said. "What they do is take advantage of stopover sites so they can continue their journey. We can see if they are gaining the energy to move on."

Waste-to-sustainability

Dallas' Trinity River Audubon Center, nestled on a former 120-acre landfill in the 6,000-acre Great Trinity Forest, has broken from its wasteful pedigree to become a model of sustainability.

The 25,000-square-foot center, which opened in October 2008, utilizes a rainwater harvesting system that channels it to 30,000 gallon underground cisterns. That water is then used for irrigation, said Ben Jones, acting center manager and director of education for Audubon Texas.

One area of the building sports a green roof adorned with prairie grasses planted in six-inches of soil that absorbs rainwater.

Even the parking lot, which is permeable so that water seeps into the ground, is eco-friendly.

"I think it's a wonderful example and a wonderful message for the public and for guests that something that's a real scar on the landscape, something that's detrimental to wildlife and native plants and the environment, can be turned around to something that's such a source of pride for the community and such a wonderful thing for humans and wildlife," Jones said.

In order to turn the center and the surrounding landscape into

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