

Domestic Rewilding: a living land acknowledgment

Project Overview

WHAT IS IT?

Domestic Rewilding is a series of site-sensitive native plant earthworks that are ecological in nature.

The earthworks are curated prairie ecosystems, flush with colorful blooms at different times of year. The public are invited to participate in the fabrication of these works, alongside communities of people, plants, animals, microbes, and insects. The *Domestic Rewilding* series reflects wider concerns around interspecies relationships, animal welfare, sustainable agriculture, Indigenous knowledge, eco-social-engagement, and sustainable systems restoration. The series carries overarching goals to inspire and activate a viewer to consider the past, present, and future of our environment and the living beings who co-create it, using the capacity of art to address pressing social and climate issues in unconventional ways.

Domestic Rewilding (a living land acknowledgment) is the flagship work of this series. This flagship iteration is one acre, features a large hugelkultur mound, a prairie, gathering space, a series of text-based works throughout, and is positioned as a Living Land Acknowledgment—putting action behind typically empty land acknowledgments.

HOW IS IT MADE?

Much of the site design of the *Domestic Rewilding* series provides positive impact for pollinator and nonhuman species by prioritizing ecological benefit in material considerations. These earthworks are fabricated, maintained, and activated through collaborative interspecies labor: from a team of oxen or horses cultivating the soil, human hands planting species like Big Bluestem and Cardinal flower, to the labor of pollinator insects and birds maintaining the site.

This project uses draft animal power in both the agricultural and ecological practices. Employing draft animal power reduces the use of fossil fuels through renewable energy sources, eliminates the need for soil-compacting heavy machinery; the animals provide composted manure enriching depleted soils at the sites. By utilizing native plants with deep roots systems, the earthworks sequester carbon at host sites, providing cleaner air, healthier soil, and native habitat/food sources for nonhuman animals and insects.

Oxen, like Clark & Sparky, and draft horses will till the soil, pull and move large amounts of organic material, and provide manure for compost. Humans will then plant native plant seedlings, and spread seed in designated areas. Microbes will get to work in the soil, and insects and birds will pollinate the plants.

COLLABORATORS

This project is a collaborative effort. Lead artist Ruth Burke, an art professor in the Wonsook Kim School of Art, is working with the Horticulture Center, and Dr. Shannon Epplett. Dr. Epplett is a theatre artist and member of the Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians; he leads outreach to Native communities, provides Indigenous counsel, and educates on land acknowledgments. Epplett mounted an extremely successful and moo-ving performance titled “Sunset on the Longest Day” at the site in June 2023.

The Horticulture Center has made a 10 year commitment to host this work on the west end of the Center. Through programming in Spring/Summer/Fall 2025, the public is invited to participate in making Central Illinois’ first earthwork built with draft animal power.

TIMELINE

We’ve spent the last three years doing the back end work for this monumental project. With your help, we’ll be ready to roll as soon as the ground thaws in 2025.

January-April 2025:
Procure Materials & Organize Field Day Event

May 3, 2025: Public Field Day Event

May-June 2025: Public Planting Events, date TBD

June 21, 2025:
Public Solstice Performance directed by Dr. Shannon Epplett

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

We are currently experiencing the largest extinction of nonhuman life in history. Natural disasters are stronger, the planet is the hottest it’s ever been, and animal and insect habitat is disappearing at an alarming rate. As a species, we need pollinators to survive and thrive. This project presents an opportunity for the public to strengthen our relationships to the natural world. The earthwork not only enriches the cultural landscape of Central Illinois by serving as an action-based, publicly accessible acknowledgment, but on a practical level, it will support biodiversity, pollinators of all kind, sequester carbon, and establish disappearing prairie ecosystem.

Domestic Rewilding (a living land acknowledgment) has historical site-specificity. In the 1820’s, teams of oxen “prairie breakers” removed native prairie to make way for human-directed agriculture in Central Illinois, an economy now dependent on specialized crop production. This change reduced human-centered labor at great environmental cost to other species.

At this same time, Native people were being removed and re-settled from Central Illinois under the Indian Removal Act. 200 Years later, how might animal power, and specifically oxen, regenerate ecologically diverse communities, soil, art, and land?

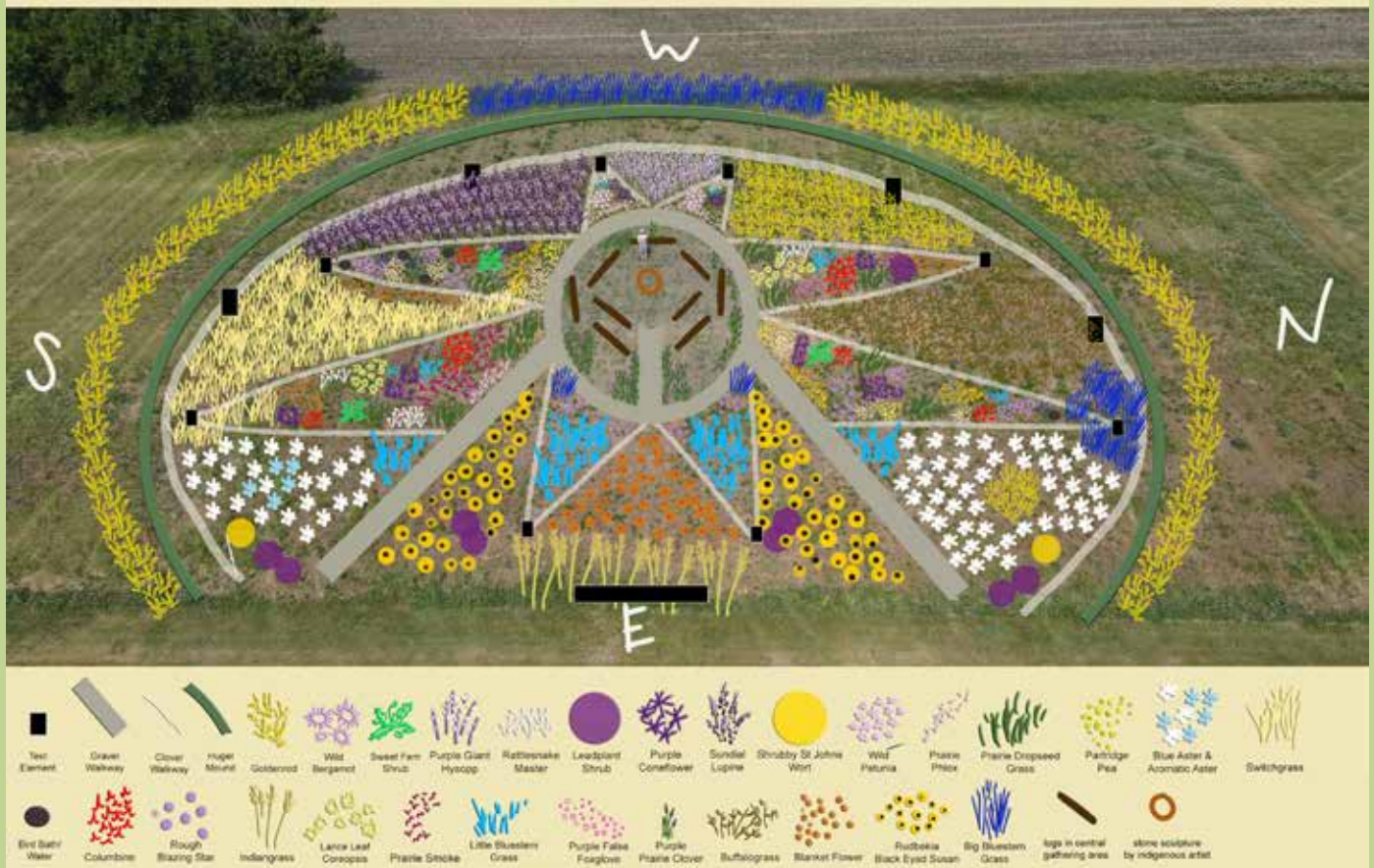
The project carries an ethos of interconnectivity, and emphasis that we need each other: all species and all peoples.

Domestic Rewilding (a living land acknowledgment) is an opportunity to care for our environment, the living beings who co-create it, and strengthen social ties without our community.



**Clark & Sparky
“the boys”**

Domestic Rewilding (a living land acknowledgment) site mockup



ISU HORTICULTURE CENTER

*Domestic Rewilding:
a living land acknowledgment*

HATCH FUND



Calendar of Events

November-December 2024

sunday	monday	tuesday	wednesday	thursday	friday	saturday
24	25 <i>Kickoff Video</i>	26	27 <i>What is Domestic Rewilding?</i>	28	29 <i>Fun Fact Friday: Land Acknowledgments</i>	30
1	2 <i>Draft animals & sustainable agriculture</i>	3 <i>Giving Tuesday</i>	4	5	6 <i>Fun Fact Friday: Illinois the Prairie State</i>	7
8	9 <i>History of Oxen in McLean County</i>	10	11 <i>What is an earthwork?</i>	12	13 <i>Fun Fact Friday: Oxen Pedicures</i>	14
15	16	17 <i>Upcoming Events</i>	18	19	20 <i>Fun Fact Friday: Native plants as resistance</i>	21 <i>campaign end, thank you for your support!</i>

winter solstice



QR Link to Hatch Fund, scan me!

Mark your 2025 Calendars:
Saturday, May 3, 2025: Public Field Day Event at the Horticulture Center

Questions?
Contact Ruth Burke rkburke@ilstu.edu
or Jessica Chambers jmchamb@ilstu.edu

Giving Levels & Fundraising Needs

pollinator

give at this level for:

_____ \$25 _____ Clark & Sparky Sticker

prairie

_____ \$50 _____ Clark or Sparky
nose print
apprx. 5" x 10"

soil

steward

_____ \$100 _____ seed tile
(native midwest seed)
apprx. 9" x 9"

land

protector

_____ \$200 _____ Clark or Sparky
hoof print ornament
apprx 7" x 7"

eco

ambassador

_____ \$500 _____ Clark & Sparky fur
collage pigment print
10" x 10"

sustainability

circle

_____ \$1000 _____ Invitation to Special
Donors Breakfast before
May 3rd 2025 Field Day

conservation

leaders circle

_____ \$5000 _____ Name on Donor Wall
on front-facing
earthwork signage at
Horticulture Center

\$8000 Black Dirt Topsoil **\$3000** Horticulture Center trailer

\$1700 Native Midwest Pollinator Prairie & Native Groundcover Seed

\$4000 Gravel for Walkways **\$2000** Text-engraved Boulders

\$4800 Potted Native Plugs

TOTAL \$24000