

NOTICE: A media alert will be issued 24 hours in advance of this event

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Schroeder Homes Plans Prescribed Ecological Burn at Wildflower Meadows
A prescription for a more beautiful landscape

DeWitt, MI (March 22, 2007) – When Duff and Keith Schroeder began planning the Schroeder Homes' Wildflower Meadows development in DeWitt, they realized they would face some interesting challenges. Retaining all storm water on the site resulted in dramatic elevations and homes that overlook large retention basins. Soil from these retention areas was then used to create wildflower mounds that surround the entire development at the corner of DeWitt and Herbison Roads.

"We chose to seed the hills with indigenous wildflowers," states Duff Schroeder. "It has taken longer than expected to see results because immediately after seeding, we went into a prolonged drought that has delayed plantings from getting established. Conducting a burn after the second full season was always planned as part of getting the wildflowers established in their natural state, with no chemicals or irrigation, so that they will continue to thrive year after year."

With the help of one of the country's leading experts in native landscaping, Pollack Design Associates of Ann Arbor, as well as Michigan Wildflower Farm of Portland, Michigan, the plantings include native Michigan plants and flowers that will establish root systems up to 36 inches deep before blossoming to become the beautiful wildflowers you expect to see.

"The drought experienced in 2004 means area residents must wait longer to see the results of the enormous expense and painstaking care that went into planning these flowered meadows," said Schroeder. But help is on the way. "At the end of March or first part of April, a prescribed burn is slated for Wildflower Meadows that will finally reveal the beauty of this carefully planned landscape."

A "prescribed burn" is a safe, carefully controlled fire that burns off the shallow rooted weeds. Few alternative methods can compete with fire from the standpoint of effectiveness and cost. Chemicals provide an associated environmental risk and mechanical treatments are difficult and ineffective. Prescribed burns present much less risk to the habitat and preserve soil quality.

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Two principle results are achieved with a prescribed burn. First, the burnt area is left with a black surface that is rich in nutrients. Solar heat is absorbed by the darkened surface and quickly warms the soil. The remaining native plants profusely grow and blossom. The second benefit is that the desired plants and flowers are now able to flourish without competing weeds consuming the resources of the soil. The indigenous wildflowers that were planted have deeply established root systems that are not affected by the fire. A prescribed burn allows the desired species to vigorously send up shoots and the plants to flourish, providing a welcoming landscape to all residents including the area's wildlife.

Prescribed burn specialists, PlantWise Restoration of Ann Arbor, will conduct the burn with a number of carefully planned precautions. At a City of DeWitt open meeting on June 22, 2006, Schroeder Homes discussed preparations for the prescribed burn. There are many conditions that must be within a specified range before proceeding, such as weather conditions, temperature, wind direction and strength, humidity, barometric pressure and ground moisture. The prescribed burn is conducted in a slow and deliberate manner with safety equipment on hand to monitor and control its spread. Fire breaks, fuel-free areas that the fire will not cross, are carefully determined.

"This is the first prescribed burn of its kind conducted in the greater Lansing area. Fire is a natural process that cleanses landscapes of highly invasive species, providing a healthy environment for Michigan's prairie lands. The entire process is really very interesting and something I think people will be intrigued to witness," stated Duff Schroeder.

Conducted by licensed professionals, the fire will burn all the surface growth and eradicate the weeds that have shallow root systems. Burned areas re-green very rapidly. Plants respond by vigorously sending up shoots and new plant growth is established at an impressive rate. The process encourages native plants to thrive in their natural environment without the use of weed-killer, fertilizer or irrigation. In addition, the diversity of flowering plants also serves to support a robust wildlife.

The prescribed burn at Wildflower Meadows is scheduled for the last week of March or first week of April, however the date is dependent on conditions being optimal to conduct the process.

For more information, please visit the following web resources:

http://forestry.about.com/cs/forestfire/a/prescribe_burn.htm

www.noble.org/ag/wildlife/prescribedburn/index.htm

www.plantwiserestoration.com

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