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Visions of nature: conflict and compatibility in urban park restoration

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Abstract

Although various disciplines have developed "objective" principles and practices for landscape restoration in recent decades, the concept of restoration itself often rests on subjective questions of cultural value. Issues related to restoring the naturalness of urban open spaces were explored in a planning effort for an area of parkland along Chicago's lakefront. Four different "visions of nature" emerged through dialogue with stakeholders, each emphasizing a different set of characteristics related to the landscape's perceived structure and function as well as its human values and uses: (1) *nature as designed landscape*, where the concern was to restore the original 1938 naturalistic design for the site by a noted landscape architect; (2) *nature as habitat*, where individuals sought to restore a hedgerow created during the 1950s that has since become a magnet for migrating birds; (3) *nature as recreation*, where a variety of interests sought to balance nature restoration goals with the preservation of established recreational activities occurring on and adjacent to the site; and (4) *nature as pre-European settlement landscape*, where individuals sought to restore the site as a reflection of the regional landscape as it may have existed before development of Chicago in the 1830s. It became clear during the course of the effort that the landscape features some individuals sought to restore had attained an iconic status, symbolizing for them meanings and values deeper than what might be discerned by those not intimately knowledgeable of the site and its social context, and that the preservation and enhancement of these features needed to be a central part of any final plan for the site. Trying to maintain these icons in accommodating the various visions of nature did give rise to some conflicts, but stakeholder negotiations also showed how the visions were compatible and how iconic features might "nest" within each other as a result of different scales and locations of concern. Implications for landscape design and management are discussed. Published by Elsevier Science B.V.

Keywords: Urban parks; Nature; Restoration; Landscape icons; Stakeholder perceptions; Chicago

1. Introduction

Urban parks mean many things to many people. This is especially true of large, diverse urban parks like Chicago's Lincoln Park and New York's Central Park, which are popular destinations for local residents but which also serve regional, national, and even international clientele. These parks are viewed as spaces where a spectrum of recreational and leisure activities can be pursued, from active endeavors such as baseball and soccer to passive activities such as walking, picnicking, and relaxing. But they are also seen as *places* (and places within places), landscapes that by design or happenstance provide people with unique experiences as a result of the natural and cultural features present and the social communities that gravitate to them. Thus, one of the greatest

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challenges to urban park planners, landscape architects, and managers is to balance the tension between providing for the diverse uses and values of park space and preserving and enhancing the unique qualities of place.

In many cities today, this challenge is being faced by parks departments and civic groups as they seek to restore the great landscape parks created during the last 50–150 years by landscape architects such as Olmsted, Jens Jensen, Simmonds, and their contemporaries. These landscape architects, blending principles of naturalistic park design from 17th to 18th century England with nascent understandings of ecology, created aesthetic wonderlands of nature within expanding urban centers in the US and other countries around the world where "real" nature was rapidly disappearing (Grese, 1992; Rybczynski, 1999). Many of these parks became victims of neglect due to lack of funds and workforce required for their upkeep. However, changing priorities among urban residents and decision makers, as evidenced by recent park restoration initiatives, have called attention to the irreplaceable value of these places as cultural and natural resources.

A 1995 forum on urban park restoration, held at the Fourth International Outdoor Recreation and Tourism Trends Symposium, concluded that "ecosystem approaches" should receive greater attention in urban park restoration efforts (Dwyer and Stewart, 1995). These approaches recognize the complex interactions between physical, biological, and social aspects of landscape planning and design, and necessitate interdisciplinary involvement from such diverse perspectives as landscape ecology, restoration ecology, landscape architecture, and historic preservation. Ecosystem approaches offer the potential for large urban parks to be more than aesthetic symbols of nature — such parks can contribute to local and regional biodiversity, provide critical nodes and linkages to maximize habitat values, and bring nature education experiences in close proximity to millions of people. However, forum participants also recognized that if such approaches are to succeed, they must also work to incorporate the diverse cultural values that people hold toward urban nature. Broad-based citizen involvement in planning and implementation of restoration efforts is as critical as interdisciplinary professional involvement; it empowers stakeholders and helps ensure that the landscapes they desire will be maintained over the long term.

In the research reported here, I examine how a participatory planning and design process is being used to identify natural and cultural values in urban park restoration within a large urban park in Chicago, IL, USA. In particular, I was interested in finding out how a diverse constituency views urban nature and how different visions of nature might be integrated into the restoration process. Cultural geographers and other scholars of place have long called our attention to the variety of ways in which people interpret landscapes and the importance that symbolism plays in our attachment to place. Meinig (1979), for example, describes how a varied group of people each might describe a different set of values and uses they hold for the same landscape. Tuan (1974) notes that such landscapes can sometimes take on a heightened significance as symbols of these values and uses, attaining the status of "special places", "heritage regions", or "sacred sites" whose appreciation is shared by groups large or small.

While these ideas have become widely recognized in the landscape planning and design literature (e.g. Hester, 1985; Williams and Stewart, 1998), less has been written about what happens when multiple meanings and values are held *for the same landscape*. To what extent are people's visions of nature compatible with one another? What elements will most likely be points of conflict? Social scientists Hull and Robertson (2000) see people's differing visions of nature as a "tournament of value", in which each group competes to establish its vision as the dominant one. Whose nature will prevail? Or can different visions coexist in time and space?

In this research I found that landscape "icons" — natural or cultural features in the park landscape that hold important symbolic value to certain groups of people — played a central role in constituents' attachment to the place I was studying. Because of their underlying symbolic meaning, these features may not be readily identifiable in the landscape the way that other valued attributes are, for instance, scenic elements like large trees or distant views (e.g. Gobster, 1993). However, as the planning and design process unfolded it became apparent that acknowledging and protecting these icons was essential in negotiating a broadly acceptable direction for urban park

restoration. It is within this conceptual and policy context that the following case study was undertaken.

2. Montrose Point case study

More than 1200 acres (485 ha) in size, Lincoln Park is Chicago's largest park and one of the largest city parks in the US. The park's central lakefront location and variety of natural and developed settings makes it an extremely popular recreation destination, with an estimated 20 million visits annually. Thus, despite its size, competition and demands on spaces and places in the park are high, and incremental accommodation of changing park uses over time has resulted in a degraded landscape condition and numerous user conflicts. To address these problems, the Chicago Park District began work on a restoration and management plan for the park in 1990 in cooperation with a broad-based citizens steering committee. The Lincoln Park Framework Plan, approved in 1995, laid out a comprehensive set of guidelines for the park's restoration as a whole. Among these guidelines was one that focused on restoring several areas within the park to provide more natural conditions for wildlife and park users (Chicago Park District and Lincoln Park Steering Committee, 1995). The plan also set the stage for more detailed, place-specific plans to be accomplished under the policy framework it established. One of the first such plans focused on Montrose Point, the subject of this case study.

Montrose Point is an 11 acre (4.5 ha) area in the northern portion of Lincoln Park. From a restoration standpoint, the park has an interesting natural and cultural history, one that exemplifies the challenges inherent in urban park restoration. Like much of Lincoln Park, Montrose Point was created entirely from landfill, placed in the lake to extend Lake Shore Drive and develop new parkland for a rapidly developing Chicago. Work began in 1929, and a plan for Montrose Point was developed by landscape architect Alfred Caldwell in 1938 (Nathan et al., 1991). Caldwell studied and worked with Jens Jensen, who helped define a regional style of naturalistic landscape design called the Prairie Style.

Following the Prairie Style ideals promoted by Jens Jensen and others, Caldwell's plan for Montrose Point used native plants in an aesthetic-symbolic emulation of the diverse midwestern US landscape of prairie, savanna, and woodland (Domer, 1997; Grese, 1992). The central feature of the plan was a large meadow enclosed by multi-layered masses of wildflowers, shrubs, and trees, with openings that created views to the lake and the park landscape beyond the point. The meadow was mowed to facilitate passive recreational use, and a path around the perimeter of the point provided access to a swimming beach and a breakwater-beachfront promenade (Fig. 1).

Although the Caldwell plan had commendable features from both ecological and aesthetic standpoints, little of the plan was ever implemented. Soon after the landfill project was completed, the US army took over Montrose Point for use as a World War II radar station, and in the 1950s they put a Nike missile base there as part of a Cold War strategy to protect Chicago. A screen of honeysuckle shrubs was planted along the fence separating the base from the bathing beach next door. When the Chicago Park District reclaimed the area as park space in the 1970s, the landscape consisted mainly of scattered trees — some of which may have been legacies from the Caldwell plan — and the honeysuckle hedgerow. Other than mow the grass, the park district did little to develop the point, and did not address planning for the park until the Framework Plan was initiated in 1990.

During that 20-year period something unexpected happened that would dramatically change the perception of Montrose Point as park space. Partly due to benign neglect of the point and partly because the point juts out into the lake and away from active use areas, the honeysuckle hedgerow became a virtual magnet for birds. Birders dubbed this scruffy mass of non-native vegetation the "Magic Hedge", and regularly counted more than 200 different species of birds there during spring and fall migrations. With the cooperation of the park district, Chicago area birding groups began augmenting the Magic Hedge in the 1980s with additional plantings, and helped develop a "no-mow" policy for the point in more recent years. These actions have provided better food and cover for the birds and have resulted in a substantially different look from the groomed grass and shrubless landscape found in the rest of the park (Fig. 2). Publicity given to these habitat improvement efforts has helped to attract birders, and today the

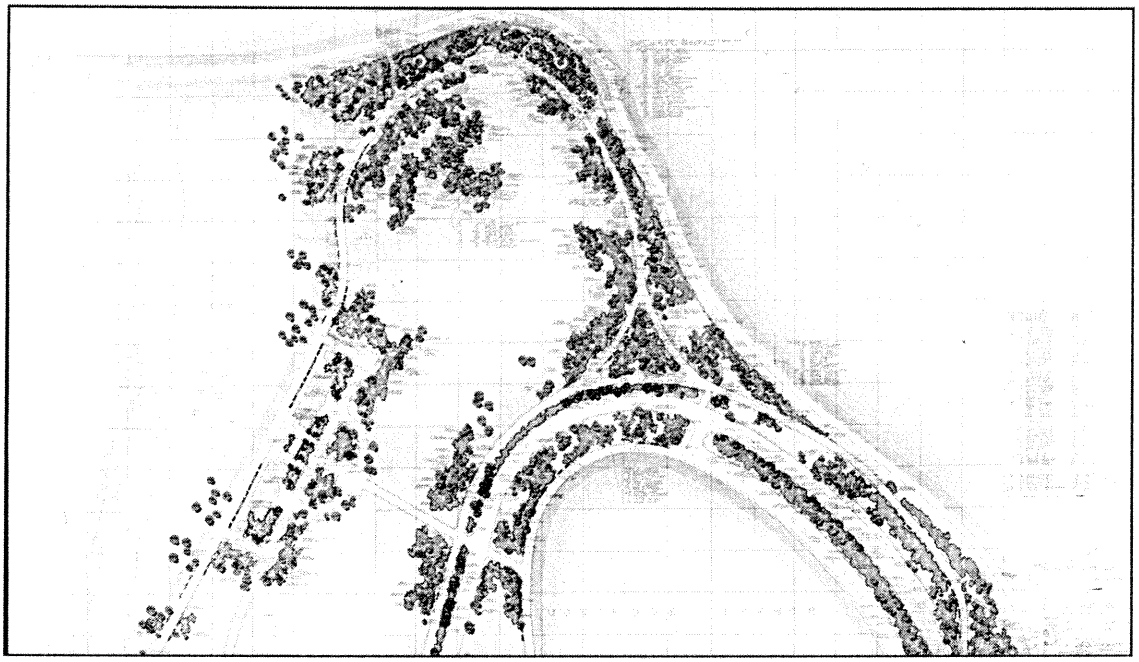

Fig. 1. 1938 Plan for Montrose Point by Alfred Caldwell (Chicago Park District Collections).

Magic Hedge has a national and international reputation for birding.

For these reasons, in 1997 my office helped fund an effort with the Chicago Park District and the Lincoln Park Advisory Council (LPAC), a non-profit civic group with formal authority to assist the Chicago Park District with planning for Lincoln Park, called the Montrose Point Restoration Project. This research, planning, and development project has as its focus the restoration of Montrose Point as a natural and cultural landscape. As social scientist observers in the project, our objectives were to document and understand: (1) the different visions of nature that stakeholders saw for Montrose Point; (2) how the restoration or management of the natural and cultural elements of the landscape are compatible within those visions; and (3) the patterns of consensus and divergence across different stakeholder groups.

3. Visions of nature at Montrose Point

To get an initial idea of how different people envisioned managing Montrose Point as a more naturally functioning and diverse environment, we conducted focus group discussions in the fall of 1997 with six groups of individuals identified as principal stakeholders of the point and its adjacent areas: birders and other environmentalists, historic preservationists and landscape architects, passive users, volleyball players, anglers, and yacht club members. Each session began with a tour of the point followed by a discussion lasting about an hour and covering topics related to uses and values, problems and concerns, and restoration and change (see Gobster and Barro, 2000 for further details).

When asked why people valued Montrose Point, focus group participants strongly and overwhelmingly stated that nature was a key element in their use and appreciation. Individuals of diverse affiliations saw Montrose as a special natural place that provides the kinds of recreation opportunities and experiences not available elsewhere in Lincoln Park or the city. But while there was broad agreement on preferring to see the natural values of Montrose Point improved for plant and bird species, individuals within the various groups also had specific visions of what nature at Montrose Point should be, and how concerns for

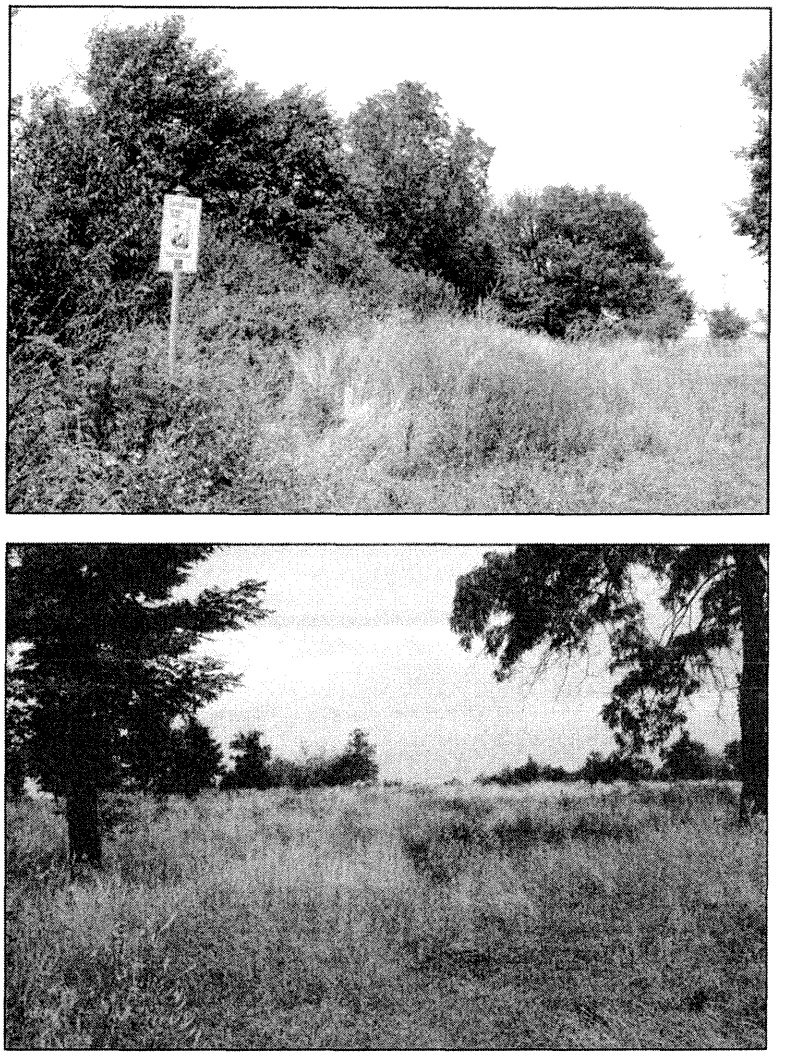

Fig. 2. 1999 Vegetation conditions at Montrose Point. Top: the Magic Hedge, bottom: unmown meadow (photos by author).

nature should be balanced with those for human use and enjoyment.

In attempting to more fully understand these different visions, I examined a broad set of materials related to Montrose Point and the Montrose Point Restoration Project. These materials included transcripts: (1) from the focus groups just mentioned; (2) from a follow-up focus group in the spring of 1998 with park district staff representing different professional and administrative functions; and (3) from a winter 1999 workshop on balancing environmental and historic preservation goals for Montrose Point that included representatives from stakeholder groups, park district staff, and outside experts. These transcribed records, along with notes from a number of different public meetings held between April 1998 and November 1999, constituted my principal "data" documents for analysis. For support information, I also examined primary documents produced by the different stakeholder groups such as memoranda and reports, and secondary source documents such as newspaper articles, planning reports, and research

reports. Most of these support materials were produced during the course of the project, with a few going back to the early 1990s. A complete list of sources is available from my office.

In analyzing these materials, I identified four major "visions of nature" that people expressed. I based these constructions on implicit criteria regarding: (1) *function* — how people view the "purpose" of nature in the Montrose landscape; (2) *structure* — how vegetation as the primary structural element defines the character and appearance of the landscape; (3) *values* — what aspects of the natural and cultural landscape have meaning and significance to people; (4) *use* — how the landscape should be used and by whom, reflecting the balance between people and nature-as-defined; and (5) *icons* — symbolic natural or cultural features in the landscape that are critical in defining the special character of the place for a particular vision of nature.

The four nature visions are summarized in Table 1 and described below.

3.1. Nature as designed landscape

Individuals with this vision see nature realized through the restoration of Alfred Caldwell's naturalistic design for Montrose Point. This vision of nature came out of the focus group discussions with the landscape architects and historic preservationists and with park district staff, and especially from the workshop. While this vision does not have a broad-based constituency, it has strong roots in park district policies for the point as expressed in the Lincoln Park Framework Plan. It also has a small number of highly committed people within the park district and civic and professional groups who see historic restoration of the point as a unique opportunity to preserve and enhance Chicago's landscape design legacy, particularly with respect to the Prairie Style movement.

3.1.1. Function

The chief purpose of nature realized through restoration of the Caldwell plan would be to provide people with an aesthetic experience. As proponents of this vision stressed, the Caldwell plan uses the "native" Illinois landscape as a design metaphor for achieving an aesthetic experience, and thus emulates but does not attempt to replicate the structure and species mix that might be found in this native landscape. In this metaphor, the central feature of the space, the expansive meadow, symbolizes the open prairie, creating what is known in Prairie School terminology as "the broad view". Surrounded by multi-layered masses of flowers, shrubs, and trees, the meadow is to be experienced as a "room" enclosed by "walls". The meadow is mown and uniform in color and texture so as to provide an uninterrupted path leading the eye toward openings through the wall, creating another Prairie School aesthetic device called "the long view". These views lead outward to the lake, creating a sense of the infinite, and inward to the park, creating a sense of mystery of what lies in the landscape beyond the point. These and other design principles work together to create static (from given view points) and dynamic (from movement through the space as well as from

Table 1
Visions of nature expressed by Montrose Point stakeholders

Criteria	Designed landscape	Critical habitat	Recreation	Pre-European settlement
Function	Aesthetic experience, enclosure, sense of infinite, mystery	Primary focus on birds	Nature as substance and backdrop	Emulate pre-settlement ecosystems and processes
Structure	Native plant palette, multi-layered masses	Food and cover, less of a concern if it is native	Natural appearance	Native plant communities
Values	Landscape art	Uniqueness, bird diversity	Nature appreciation, wildness, special place	Biodiversity, endangered species, nature experience
Use	Passive-appreciative	Limit use except for birders	Balance nature with use	Active (restoration) appreciative
Icons	The meadow, the long view	The Magic Hedge	Beach, harbor, "hook", revetment	Entire landscape

Fig. 3. Elements of the Prairie Style landscape as seen in Jen Jensen's design for the Edsel and Eleanor Ford house, Grosse Point Shores, Michigan (photo by Robert Grese).

seasonal effects) aesthetic experiences for the visitor. An example of this type of landscape can be seen in Fig. 3, Jens Jensen's landscape design for the Edsel and Eleanor Ford house in Grosse Point Shores, Michigan.

3.1.2. Structure

The vegetative walls surrounding the perimeter of the meadow are the primary structural elements that define the character and appearance of the Caldwell design. These multi-layered masses include a diverse mix of ground layer forbs, mid-layer shrubs, and canopy-layer trees with an emphasis on, but not strict adherence to, a palette of native species. Proponents of this vision were not locked into duplicating the exact plant list specified by the original plan, and felt a good restoration would provide the same horizontal stratified look of the Prairie Style design yet take advantage of the greater diversity of native plant species now commercially available and ones better suited to the specific conditions on the site. Proponents were, however, fairly insistent on maintaining a mown or low growing meadow, in that taller grasses and forbs would obscure views and the aesthetic effect that the uniform ground plane achieves.

3.1.3. Values

One of the chief values of this vision of nature that separates it from the other visions is that the Caldwell plan is conceived of as "landscape art". Thus, restoring the Caldwell plan may realize not only the important human value of aesthetics, but also the historic value of the design itself. The Caldwell plan is also perceived by proponents as being compatible with passive recreational and natural values espoused by other groups, although in this vision these uses are secondary in nature.

3.1.4. Use

The dominant use perceived for the site would be for passive-appreciative recreational activities — sitting, relaxing, walking, and watching the views of nature and people — in the traditions of park behavior promoted by Olmsted and other designers of the great landscape parks (see for example, Olmsted and Kimball, 1970, pp. 407–436). To facilitate this,

some proponents advocated installing the "council rings" called for in the original Caldwell plan — circular arrangements of stone benches and a signature element of Jensen's and Caldwell's Prairie Style designs. Others conceded that these structures should be left out of the design to deter what those in other focus groups felt could become incompatible uses of the site, such as large picnics or other group activities.

3.1.5. Icons

Although the Caldwell plan has not been described in detail here, its two main structural elements — the meadow and the long view — were seen as key defining features; proponents of this vision of nature felt that if these features were compromised, the integrity of the restoration effort would be severely diminished.

3.2. Nature as habitat

Within this vision of nature, individuals see the restoration of Montrose Point in general, and the Magic Hedge within the point in particular, as a means to improve wildlife habitat along the lakefront. This vision was expressed in several of the focus groups and was a stated policy for Montrose Point in the Framework Plan, but had its strongest proponents within the birding community in terms of organization and vocal support. Birding in Chicago is highly popular, with several organized groups and many non-affiliated individuals, and with a core group of highly committed and vocal individuals, some of whom have been actively involved in issues regarding the point since the early 1980s. It should also be noted, however, that compared to other stakeholders, individuals in the birding community more often expressed a dual vision for Montrose. In this respect, birders saw nature on the point both as habitat for birds and as a recreational destination for birding. While these visions shared the same goal of increasing the desirability of the point as a place for birds, the ways in which this goal would be achieved through design sometimes seemed contradictory, as described below.

3.2.1. Function

Habitat, when spoken about by the dominant proponents of this nature vision, nearly always meant habitat for birds, mostly as a stopover point for seasonal migrants but also for some species who would use the point for nesting. In some cases, birders and other people extended the idea of habitat to include other species such as small mammals and butterflies.

3.2.2. Structure

The main objective of the birding community was to maintain and enhance the Magic Hedge, currently the dominant habitat feature on the point. The exotic honeysuckle shrubs that make up a good portion of the hedge have a life expectancy of only about 35 years, and many are currently diseased and dying. Birders began working to restore the hedge in the mid-1980s by planting additional honeysuckle shrubs, but more work is needed if their efforts are to succeed. Their goal is to replace the dying plants with ones that will supply food and cover for birds, and some birders are not so concerned about whether those plants are native or exotic. A second objective focused on the "meadow". Again, birders worked with the park district to leave the point unmown over the last few years, but are now somewhat divided as to how it should be further managed for species such as migratory grassland birds, as well as for insects that attract birds. Many favor active management, planting a diversity of grasses and forbs, but some are satisfied with how the meadow is evolving and suggest "letting nature take its course". Other structure-oriented recommendations aimed at improving habitat include: (1) increasing tree and shrub planting at other locations throughout the point, including mid-story as well as tall canopy trees; (2) increasing tree and shrub plantings along the beach and leaving seaweed to accumulate along the beach for shorebirds; and (3) creating a wet area on the upland part of the point.

3.2.3. Values

One of the primary values for which Montrose Point is regarded in this vision of nature is its uniqueness as a place for birds and birding, both in terms of its proximity to millions of people within the metropolitan area and in the diversity of birds that use and can be seen at the point. This latter point is particularly important, for the unique combination of geographic and habitat factors not only makes Montrose Point attractive to nesting and migratory birds; songbirds and raptors; woodland, grassland, and shorebirds; and

other types; it also makes these birds easy to see. As the only significant structural feature on the point, the Magic Hedge is a great concentrator of birds, and birders can easily get close to view them. Even including the meadow and shore areas, the entire site can be traversed easily to view birds attracted to these different habitat types.

3.2.4. Use

Many individuals in the different discussion forums saw the need to limit the types of uses that might occur on Montrose Point to more passive kinds of activities compatible with nature as habitat. The tall grasses that have grown up since the park district stopped mowing the point have effectively deterred some more active kinds of uses, not only in the sense of what people can easily do there but also in the psychological feeling one gets being in a "wilder" landscape. Individuals in several of the groups were concerned that if the meadow were mown in adherence to a strict restoration of the Caldwell plan, it would provide an open invitation to activities like ball playing that would be incompatible with the habitat objectives stakeholders were trying to achieve. For the same reason, many opposed development of site amenities like the council rings mentioned above, shelters, or picnicking areas on the point. Some of the more ardent birders saw a need to go beyond physical design solutions and provide signs and policing that would more tightly restrict what they saw as incompatible uses, including dog walkers, volleyball players, mountain bike riders, picnickers, anglers, sail surfers, and jet skiers who used habitat portions of the meadow, beach, or water off the point for their recreation. But some of these same birders, with their desire to enhance habitat for birds, also foresaw that the tall grass and increased tree and shrub habitat might disperse birds that now lighted exclusively on the Magic Hedge, in effect making the birds harder to view. Thus, ironically, some birders simultaneously advocated restricting access to protect birds from other groups and called for mowing paths near habitat features so they themselves could get closer access for viewing birds.

3.2.5. Icon

Of all the natural and cultural features mentioned by stakeholders, the Magic Hedge was the one most clearly referred to as an icon. Many birders held it as sacred in and of itself, and reacted strongly against any proposals to modify it except to make it better for birds. Other individuals, both birders and non-birders, saw the Magic Hedge more as a metaphor for the importance of Montrose Point as habitat. These others felt that although the Magic Hedge was currently the central feature of importance for bird habitat, it was more of an accidental artifact than an icon. If its structure could be replicated and even improved upon at several locations elsewhere on the point, birds would not have to rely solely on the original Magic Hedge, in effect making it of less central importance compared to the overall habitat value of the point.

3.3. Nature as recreation

Individuals with this vision of nature see Montrose Point as a focus of nature-based recreation and as scenery for other recreational activities adjacent to the point. This vision seemed to share the broadest support among individuals in the focus groups, including those within the environmental/birding and historic preservation/design groups.

3.3.1. Function

In this vision, nature serves as both substance and backdrop for recreation. As a place for nature-based recreation, Montrose Point has been described above as a popular place for birding, but it also attracts people who appreciate the other animals and plants and the "wilder" landscape look that can be found there. Walkers, dog walkers, picnickers, bikers, and others take the extra effort to get away from the main areas and paths in Lincoln Park to come to the site. Montrose Point is also the center of a variety of significant activities that take place adjacent to it; it serves as a backdrop and in some cases a route to those activities. One of these is league volleyball, which during the summer occupies a major portion of the beach area next to the point. Another activity is sailing, which centers on Montrose Harbor and the Corinthian Yacht Club just west of the point. Fishing is a popular activity that takes place around the harbor area and especially on the breakwater "hook" that extends outward from the base of the point. The hook is the top pedestrian fishing location along the entire

Lake Michigan shoreline of Illinois. Finally, the step stone revetment that protects the shoreline of the point offers one of the most spectacular views of the city and is a popular destination for Lincoln Park visitors. These and other users see the natural qualities of Montrose Point as a scenic asset that contributes indirectly to their activity.

3.3.2. Structure

Many of those whose dominant vision of nature at Montrose is as a scenic backdrop for their recreation see the naturally appearing character of the point as important, but beyond that are not too concerned about the vegetative structure or whether the species present are native or non-native. Some users feel that the vegetation "should not be messed with" and should be left alone to grow, while others opt for more active management of nature, for its own sake and to enhance their own recreational activity. For example, the volleyball players wanted to see more plantings of trees and shrubs along the court areas on the beach to increase shade. Some anglers wanted to see nature kept intact but not so much that it inhibited access to the breakwater "hook".

3.3.3. Values

While naturally appearing scenery has already been mentioned as a major value by those who recreate near the point, those who directly use or experience nature at Montrose Point often talk about deeper values that set it apart from the rest of Lincoln Park. These values are variously described by individuals as "a sense of wilderness", "isolation from the din of the city", "a breath of fresh air", "a special place", and "a spiritual retreat from the rest of the park". The unmanaged naturalness, low use, and physical separation of the point are some characteristics that contribute to this *genius loci* that recreationists value at Montrose Point, characteristics that stakeholders were nearly unanimous in wanting to preserve.

3.3.4. Uses

Proponents of this version of nature were clear about the need to balance the restoration of the natural and historic design qualities at Montrose Point with facilities that would maintain and enhance their recreational use. This was especially true for the anglers, many of who felt disenfranchised when a parking lot and access road to the hook were removed in 1996, in part to make conditions on the point more natural. These anglers wanted to see greater access restored, and if not a road then a hard surfaced trail and a closer parking lot for disabled anglers. Recreationists, including anglers, looked for other site improvements such as restrooms, picnicking facilities, and interpretive signage.

3.3.5. Icons

Each of the principal recreation stakeholder groups had an iconic landscape feature that defined their affinity to Montrose Point. For volleyball players it was the beach, for yacht club members the harbor area, for anglers the breakwater "hook", and for the passive recreation group the step stone revetment (see Fig. 4).

3.4. Nature as pre-European settlement landscape

This vision sees nature at Montrose as an opportunity to create a landscape as it may have existed before Europeans settled Chicago — a rich mosaic of prairie, savanna, and shore land ecosystems. Proponents of this vision included a core group of individuals who in 1996 organized themselves as the Montrose Point Stewardship Group, some birders, and a few park district staff. A larger group of stakeholders seem sympathetic to the general concepts behind ecological restoration (e.g. emulate indigenous community types, increase biodiversity, use native plants), but have reservations about how completely restoration principles and practices should be implemented.

3.4.1. Function

The purpose behind this vision of nature would be to "restore" Montrose Point to pre-European settlement ecosystems and processes. This purpose seems ironic to some individuals and groups, who are quick to mention that at the time Europeans first settled in Chicago the area where Montrose Point is now located was entirely submerged in Lake Michigan. Yet ecological restorationists see good reasons for working at Montrose Point. First, although much of the Chicago lakefront is protected as parkland, it is nearly all groomed and thus provides little in the way of plant and animal diversity. Because of its relatively large size, Montrose holds high potential for a successful restoration, one that would sustain plant and animal

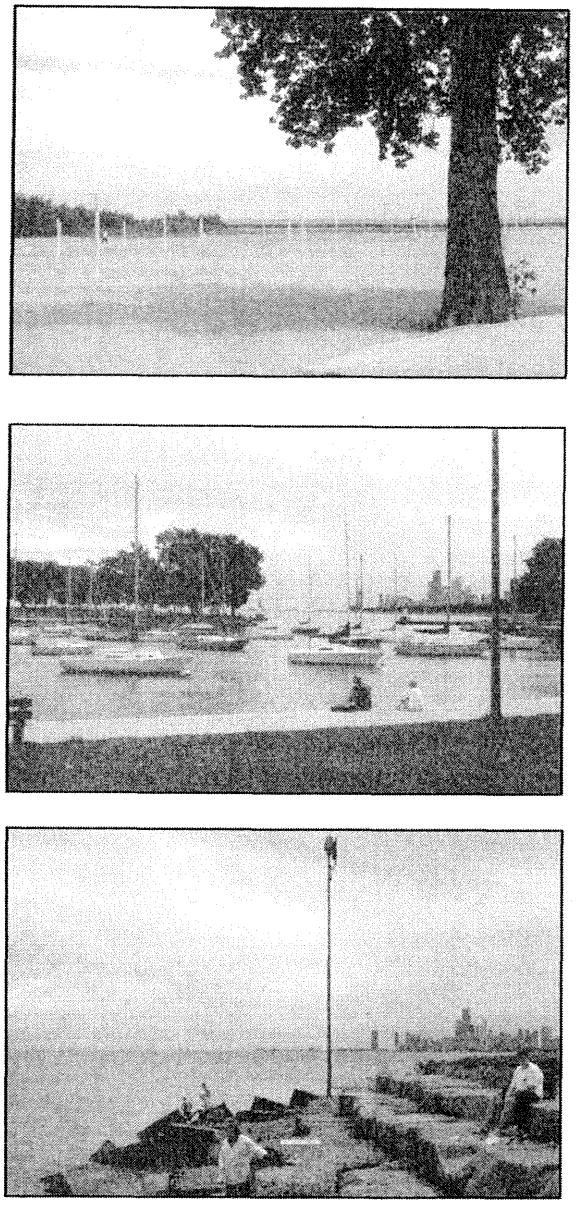

Fig. 4. Recreational icons at Montrose Point. Top: volleyball beach and breakwater "hook" (background); middle: Montrose Harbor; bottom: step stone revetment (photos by author).

communities exhibiting a high degree of native diversity. Second, Montrose Point would be one of the few ecological restoration projects taking place within the city limits of Chicago and the only one on the lakefront, and thus would be accessible to many people to participate in, learn from, and experience restoration efforts.

3.4.2. Structure

Although no detailed ecological restoration plan has ever been developed for Montrose Point, proponents of this vision hope to restore several native plant communities, emulating what might be found at similar "natural" and restored sites in the region (see Fig. 5). Such a restoration could take place within the general vegetative structure defined by the Caldwell plan and the Magic Hedge, with a tallgrass prairie meadow surrounded by savanna trees and shrubs, and with beach plantings of tree, shrub, and groundcover vegetation. If carried out to their full extent, these restorations would feature native plants exclusively, and restorationists would work to remove non-native species as soon as possible if they are invasive, and more gradually in the case of trees and shrubs that are non-invasive but not native. Fire and herbicides are commonly used tools in restoration of these community types, and most likely would also be advocated in a full-blown ecological restoration project.

Like past habitat initiatives that have occurred at the Magic Hedge, several groups have already made forays into the ecological restoration of Montrose Point (Fig. 6). Some restoration work began as early as 1994 when the park district began working with groups to prune dead branches and remove invasive weeds around the Magic Hedge. In 1996, the Montrose Point Stewards and other groups seeded sections of the point with prairie grasses and forbs, including the bed of the access road and parking lot that was taken out earlier that year. In 1997 the Chicago Park District commissioned an ecological rehabilitation plan for lagoons and natural communities in 24 city parks; recommendations for Montrose included planting a variety of native prairie and savanna species and gradual elimination of non-natives. In 1998 and 1999, the park district and Lincoln Park Advisory Council worked with the Montrose Point Youth Project to design and plant two small peripheral areas of the point with native trees, shrubs, and forbs as prototypes for the forthcoming restoration of the point. While all of these ecological restoration efforts have taken place without the benefit of a final plan or design for the point, they have been done on a small scale and have been generally compatible with efforts to restore the Magic

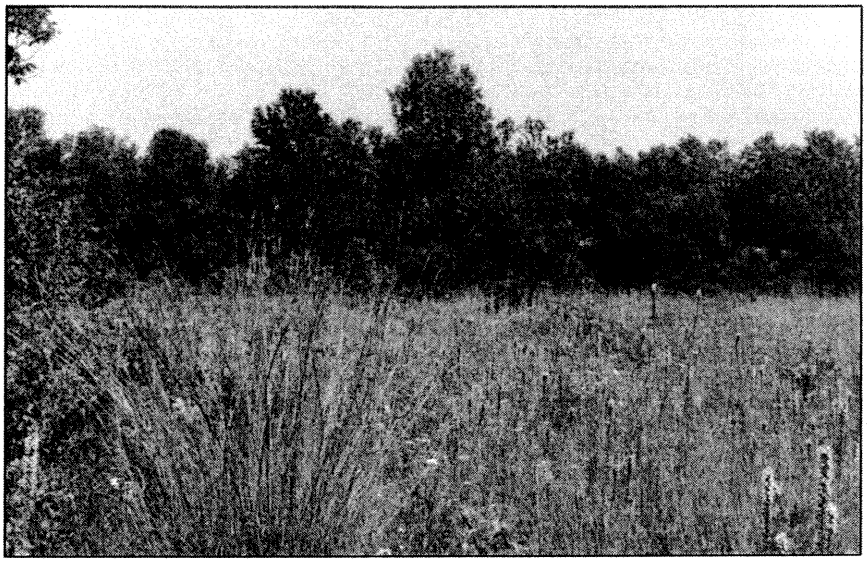

Fig. 5. Prairie-savanna restoration site at a forest preserve near Montrose Point (photo by author).

Hedge and the vegetative structure of the Caldwell plan.

3.4.3. Values

As with many ecological restoration efforts, the improvement of native plant and animal biodiversity has been stated as a principal goal in the ecological rehabilitation plan for Montrose. Another ecological value that has surfaced as a reason for ecological restoration is the protection and enhancement of rare and endangered plants and animals such as sea rocket (*Cakile edentula*), a native mustard and Illinois endangered species that was recently found growing along the sandy edge of the point, and trailing juniper (*Juniperus horizontalis*), a low-growing evergreen shrub native to Lake Michigan dune ecosystems that restorationists believe could be successfully established here. In addition to these ecological values, restoration also would provide a spectrum of human values including aesthetic and recreational values, nature experience and learning, and historic values.

3.4.4. Uses

Like many other visions of nature for Montrose Point, ecological restoration would necessarily limit the types of activities that could occur, and would focus on those related to appreciation of the restored environment. This appreciation, however, would not be limited to passive activities like viewing plants and animals. To the contrary, the Montrose Point Stewards, the park district, LPAC, and other groups who see ecological restoration as a complete or partial means of realizing their vision of nature see active community participation as an essential component to successful restoration of the point. In collaboration with the park district, interested stakeholder groups would be actively involved in planting and other activities needed to restore and manage the site.

3.4.5. Icon

Unlike other visions of nature mentioned by groups, restorationists rarely mentioned specific features of the Montrose landscape as static icons. Rather, their concern is to see the entire landscape, both in terms of its structure and the ecological processes that would take place there, take on the characteristics of pre-European settlement nature.

4. Conflict and compatibility in restoring nature visions

These visions of nature should not be considered as monolithic visions advocated by any one group. In

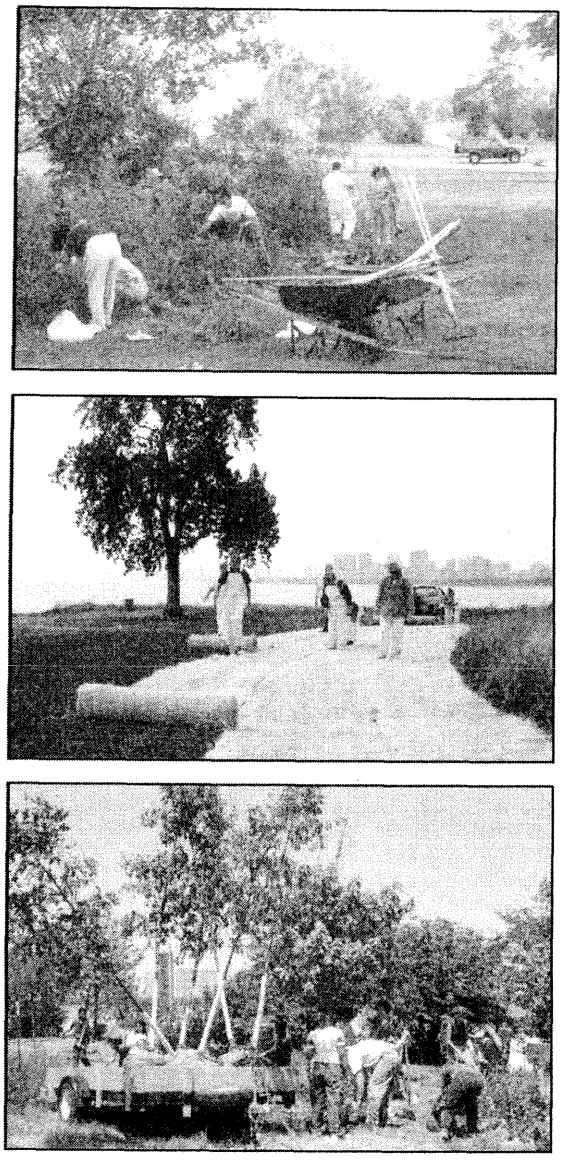

Fig. 6. Participatory ecological restoration activities at Montrose Point. Top: pruning and weeding of the Magic Hedge, 1994; middle: seeding old road bed with prairie grasses, 1996; bottom: planting prototype savanna bed, Montrose Point Youth Project, 1999. (photos by Kathleen Dickhut).

some cases, there was a considerable range in viewpoints among participants in groups such as the anglers, designers, or birders. In fact, as different stakeholders described their preferences for Montrose Point, a given individual sometimes expressed different visions of nature at different points in time.

The different visions also shared much in terms of general landscape function and structure, and the uses and values individuals sought in the restoration. No one proposed, for example, turning the point into additional soccer fields or restoring the Nike missile base that once stood there, visions that would be quite at odds with those identified here but that could be argued as legitimate. Rather, the variation among the different visions was more one of degree, with a core set of ideas about nature held in common and differences in how specific aspects of function, structure, uses, and values might be achieved.

Finally, it must be noted that three of the four visions of nature identified here raise serious questions about the validity of applying traditional concepts of restoration to the Montrose site. The Caldwell plan may be a significant design by a significant landscape architect, but even landscape historians question whether or how much of it was ever built. Since the army takeover of the point was so rapid and complete, an exact restoration of the plan as it appears on paper could smack of "fake historicism". The Magic Hedge is a real phenomenon as habitat, but it is a chance artifact of the military era. Is it important to restore the hedge at its exact location if habitat is maximized all around the point? And what does "ecological restoration" mean at a site constructed entirely of fill that only 60 years ago was completely underwater? The questions raised by these visions of nature give proponents of different views room for negotiation.

These considerations helped landscape architects working with LPAC and the park district to draft three design alternatives in early 1998 that expressed the range of variation in people's visions for Montrose. All three plans preserved and enhanced the Magic Hedge and used the Caldwell plan as a general organizing framework, emphasizing a multi-layered vegetative structure with a central meadow surrounded by shrub and tree masses and a primarily native plant palette. The basic differences in the alternatives related to the treatment of the central meadow: one plan featured a mown meadow, most like the Caldwell plan; another featured a mown central meadow with taller grasses and forbs along the edges of the shrub and tree masses; and a third plan featured a tallgrass

prairie in the central meadow with mowed paths between it and the shrub and tree masses.

In putting physical form to the visions of nature expressed by stakeholders, these alternatives set off a process of negotiation among the various stakeholder groups, guided by the LPAC design team and the park district (see Gobster and Barro, 2000 for details). Early on in this process it became clear that the important differences separating stakeholders were not so much how the function, structure, values, or uses of a particular vision of nature were accommodated within a design alternative. Rather, advocacy of one design over another seemed to hinge mainly on whether a given group's icons were protected and enhanced.

This was most easily seen in the approval or acquiescence of some stakeholders to the overall design directions for the point. Beyond matching their general vision of nature, these individuals did not seem much interested in the details of the plan except as it would limit their ability to use the point for their principal activity. This was especially true with the groups whose vision of nature was as a backdrop for their recreation: the volleyball players, anglers, yachters, and passive users. Their icons — the beach, the hook, the harbor, and the step stone revetment, respectively — were located on the peripheries of the point, and thus they were not so much concerned with what happened on the point proper (see Fig. 7, top). When they felt that their icons would be preserved and their uses accommodated by the plan, these groups no longer sought an active role in the negotiation process.

As it turned out, the most problematic issues in working out a final design for nature at Montrose Point related to the icons of vegetation. Here, discussions with ecological restorationists, birders, and historic preservationists showed that there would be no easy resolution of ideas; not only had the landscape elements they cared about attained iconic status, but the restoration of one icon was viewed as the destruction of another. Foremost was the Magic Hedge, which lay directly in the path of "the long view" in the Caldwell plan (Fig. 7, bottom). Suggestions to open up the hedge and restore the long view met with vociferous resistance from birders:

> the Magic Hedge is an icon. It's a cultural icon that's so powerful you can't even imagine it. I can't talk for all birders, but lots of birders hold it sacred. You do something to the Magic Hedge, anything other than augment it I mean, and I've got bail money set aside, I mean, I'll chain myself to a tree and lots of other people will too.

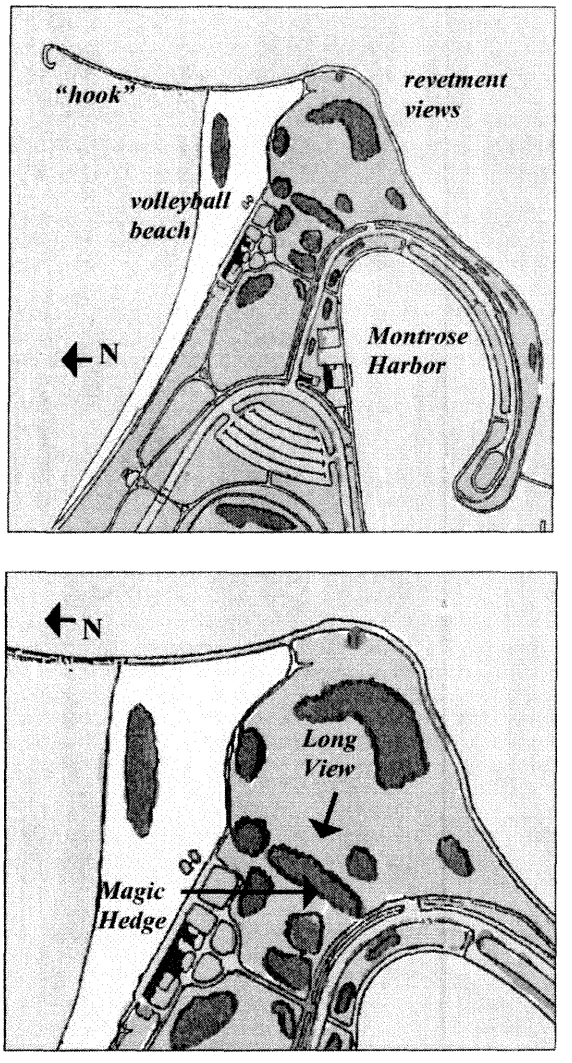

Fig. 7. Location of landscape icons at Montrose Point. Top: recreational icons at periphery of point; bottom: clashing icons of the long view and the Magic Hedge.

Similarly, proposals by birders and ecological restorationists to manage the meadow as a prairie made up of tall grasses and forbs met with opposition from the historic preservationists:

> Chicago has this tremendous legacy of designers who lived here and worked together, and there

> was a renaissance that happened at the turn of the century where these designers together with politicians, other kinds of artists, writers worked together... this [Prairie School] design style, I think, is one of the really remarkable things that happened as part of that. And I've likened it to having the Mona Lisa in your backyard. If somebody handed you a Leonardo Da Vinci painting, would you say, let's just paint over this?

Continued discussion and negotiation among the stakeholders has shown that these vegetation management issues are not mutually exclusive, and that there may be opportunities to achieve common goals of nature enhancement while protecting the spirit of the icons central to each group's concerns. For instance, options discussed during a winter 1999 workshop on balancing environmental and historic preservation goals for Montrose Point suggested that a variety of relatively low growing grasses and forbs might be planted in the central part of the meadow that would provide good habitat for insects and birds as well as rich plant diversity but would also maintain, if not the exact feel of the mown meadow in Caldwell's plan, then a reasonable approximation. Additionally, lower growing native shrubs might be used to replace dying honeysuckle in a certain part of the Magic Hedge, giving people an opportunity to experience "the long view" of the park landscape that Caldwell had intended, at least during the part of the year when foliage is off the shrubs. Finally, while most proponents agreed that restoration of the point should emphasize a native plant palette, to be acceptable the restoration must also work within the vegetation structure and species mix now present and select new plants best adapted to site conditions, consider habitat needs, and aim for historic design authenticity in plant forms, lines, colors, and textures.

In these ways, the Montrose Point Restoration Project highlights the potential for "nesting" icons and visions of nature within one another. At the smallest scale, the Magic Hedge provides an important piece of habitat within the larger designed nature of the Caldwell plan. These icons as well as those of the different recreational interests can in turn nest within an overall context of the pre-European settlement landscape. While each of these visions of nature may look different than it might have under a "pure" single-purpose restoration, this hybrid vision accommodates a broader and ultimately more "culturally sustainable" solution (Nassauer, 1997).

Although the planning process is still ongoing, this appears to be the general direction being taken by stakeholders for Montrose Point. In a well-attended November 1999 public meeting, participants broadly agreed to a revised concept plan for the point presented by LPAC and the park district, with the understanding that a task force made up of representatives from the major stakeholder groups would work out the details about specific heights, species, and locations of plants, and other matters (Fig. 8). Like the earlier plan alternatives, this revised plan meets the goal and objectives shared among the different visions of nature, using the Caldwell design to guide the general structure of the landscape but maintaining and expanding the Magic Hedge. The central meadow would be more like a prairie than a mown lawn, but would be managed to maintain the spirit of the Caldwell plan in terms of key views and aesthetic effects. A perimeter gravel path and mowed paths surrounding the meadow would provide access to features and locations within and around the point.

Although not a restoration of any single vision of nature, this hybrid design in a sense extends the original vision that Alfred Caldwell and others in the 1930s had for Montrose Point, in essence the same vision that excited and encouraged historic preservationists, ecological restorationists, birders, and other recreationists in the 1990s to work toward restoring Montrose Point and its landscape icons as premier symbols of nature and culture in an urban setting. In the words of a landscape historian who participated in the winter 1999 workshop:

> designers [like Caldwell] did something that was really quite special here in Chicago, that was the start of where we are today in terms of thinking about restoring landscapes. They weren't perfect by any means in terms of taking into consideration a number of ecological issues. But they worked very closely. They're one of the best examples anywhere of the kinds of partnerships between ecological thought at their time and design to try to create public landscapes for people to enjoy. And to the extent that we can respect some of their framework but yet adapt it to the kinds of needs and conditions that we see

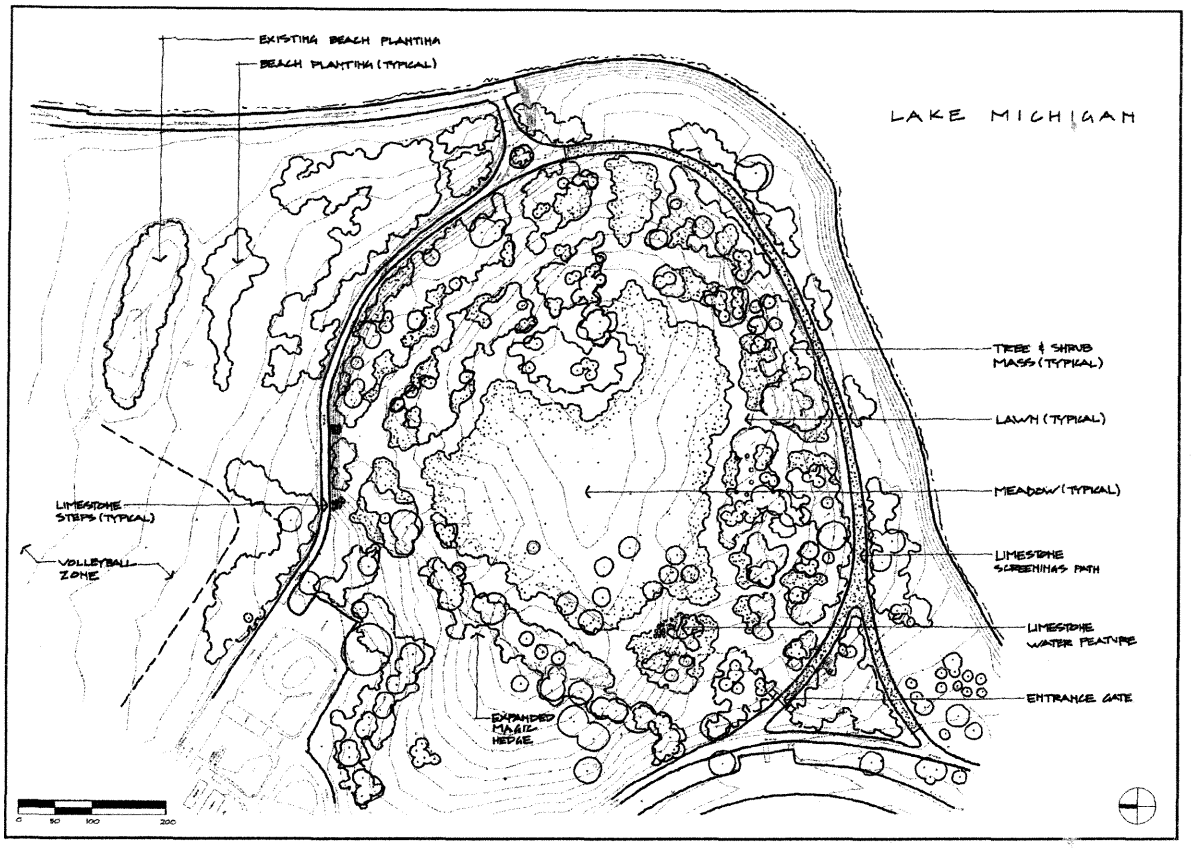

Fig. 8. Revised design plan for Montrose Point (Wolff Clements Associates).

today, I think that's as important a legacy that this group can make for the next generation in the same way that they left a legacy for their particular generation.

5. Conclusion

Restoration is an ambiguous concept, and in the case of urban park landscapes like Montrose Point this paper suggests that many different "natures" could exist. The successful restoration of Montrose Point thus depends not so much on choosing the "right" nature as it does on integrating diverse values of culture and nature. This integration is a key principle behind cultural sustainability, an idea developed by landscape architect Nassauer (1997) that "Landscapes that attract the admiring attention of human beings may be more likely to survive than landscapes that do not attract care or admiration" (p. 69). In expanding upon this idea in the Montrose Point Restoration Project, by working to integrate the different visions of nature expressed by the parks' stakeholders and protecting the icons that they value most highly, park planners and landscape architects can build the cultural support needed to sustain natural processes and functions. This support might be especially needed in urban settings — where political, financial, and other unforeseen forces have led to past deterioration of the special qualities of places like Montrose Point — but the integration of visions being realized at Montrose Point may also have applicability to other locations and situations in rural and wildland settings.

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