

Houston Meadow Hoping for Meadowlarks

By Curtis W. Helm, Park Manager II

Parks & Recreation Urban Forestry and Ecosystem Management team has been working to restore the Houston Meadow to its former beauty and ecological status for the past 4 years.



Houston Meadow is located within the Wissahickon Valley Park between West Bells Mill Road and Cathedral Road. The meadow consists of northern and southern sites that total approximately 50 acres. These meadows had developed following the cessation of farming in the 1960's and in combination with occasional fires that periodically eliminated trees and shrubs. Since no fires had occurred for a number of years, trees had begun to dominate the site, and the meadow had largely disappeared. In an effort to

restore the meadows, which are a very uncommon ecological community in our area, trees and shrubs were removed with forestry equipment during winter 2009 and spring 2010. In addition, a forested area abutting the meadow, of about 7 acres, was thinned to favor native oaks and hickories. In 2011, a 4000 ft. deer fence was installed to protect the forested area and 3500 native trees and shrubs were planted to increase diversity. PPR staff have drill seeded the meadows with warm season grasses and wildflower and are working diligently on controlling invasive plants, which tend to thrive on disturbed sites. It is hoped that grassland species of birds, such as the grasshopper sparrow and the meadowlark, will return and breed at the restored Houston Meadow site.



Park Projects Technician, Tom Dougherty selectively treating invasive plants within the area protected by deer fencing.