

around the

serviceRegional Office Transformation

Until a year ago, the patio leading to the Northeast Regional Office employee entrance in Hadley, Mass., was a swath of concrete studded with oversized concrete planters, picnic tables and a few struggling trees. The 200 employees who walked it every work day found it uninspiring at best. Only a few braved the summer heat to eat lunch there. The patio has been transformed now, replaced by a path wandering through native plantings and a pollinator garden, courtesy of the Regional Office Green Team and many other volunteers.

The patio's transformation actually began in 2006. The regional office Green Team landscaping committee, led by Will Waldron and former employee Pam Rooney, envisioned a new patio that would both appeal to employees and help the environment. The committee offered the patio renovation as a studio project for a landscape architecture design class at nearby University of Massachusetts. Students learned about the Service and its mission, links between habitats and species, and sustainable landscaping.

The landscaping committee incorporated the students' ideas into a plan to reduce the amount of concrete by about half, replacing it with native trees and shrubs strategically placed to provide shady nooks for picnic tables. The renovation would



DIANA WEAVER

Regional office employee entrance after renovation includes pollinator garden planting.

reduce the regional office carbon footprint, benefit pollinators and birds, improve water quality, educate staff and visitors about alternatives to conventional landscaping, and set an example of government greening. Then-Deputy Regional Director Rick Bennett and his successor, Wendi Weber, supported the plan.

Facilities manager Jeff Parsons explained the merits of the project to the building owner. In the spring of 2008, with all the necessary approvals in place, the building owner agreed to do the renovation.

Workers and heavy equipment arrived one mid-summer day and over the next couple of months tore up the old concrete patio and hauled it off. Out went the concrete planters and picnic

tables. A new patio was poured, leaving plenty of space to lay soil for the trees and shrubs. Decorative boulders were strategically paced to serve a dual purpose as security barriers. New picnic tables were brought in and some 60 native trees and shrubs were planted.

In mid-October regional office and field staff, retirees, former employees, and the building owner celebrated the new patio during a lunchtime potluck. Regional Director Marvin Moriarty dedicated the new patio to all of the employees who walk through it to fulfill the Service's mission.

Over the winter Shelley Small (Region 5 pollinator coordinator), Willa Nehlsen, Peggy Labonte, Christine Beauregard, Sue Fuller, Gale Huble, and Will Waldron

planned a native plant pollinator garden that would flower along the walkway to the building. Early in May more than a dozen regional office staff ripped out an exotic groundcover to prepare the site. Late May found the regional office staff, joined by national pollinator coordinator Dolores Savignano, celebrating again at a catered lunch planned by Roseann Montefusco. A native river birch tree was dedicated in memory of Regional Web Manager Ron Rothschild, who passed away during the winter. Afterward, everyone pitched in to plant the garden.

By mid-summer, the pollinator garden was in flower, the new picnic tables were in full use, and birds and butterflies were regular visitors. Now, Will Waldron jokes he needs reservations to eat lunch on the patio. □

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