

Green Fund Project Final Report

Name of person(s) completing report: J. Chance Watley
Identify if the person completing report is a student, faculty, and/or staff: Student/Graduate Assistant
Department: Touch of Nature
Contact Phone and email address: 318-554-9010 jeffrey.watley@siu.edu
Faculty Advisor (if applicable): Tom Brummer
Project Title: GA Touch of Nature Trails
Project ID #: 24SP111
Award Date: 4/18/2024
Completion Date: 5/15/2025
Total Funds Used: \$3,500

1. Provide a summary of your project/project experience.

During the 24-25 academic year I have worked with volunteers and TON staff to maintain and improve the existing trail system while preparing for future expansion. Each week I have checked out a part of the trail system and performed maintenance such as weed eating, leaf blowing, and/or clearing debris. In the fall I primarily worked on small trail maintenance like weed eating and leaf blowing making sure the trails were clear for rider use. During this time, I also worked with other TON staff to build a small foot bridge for one of our trails in order to eliminate a rough rock crossing. After the winter freeze event I worked to clear every trail of small debris as well as fallen trees. Over the beginning of the Spring semester, we worked to ensure that all trails were clear and ready for use once the weather permitted.

I have also worked with multiple volunteer groups throughout the academic year. During volunteer events I have lead groups in beautifying areas surrounding trails, cleaning up debris, leveling out ground as part of trail maintenance, and clearing/finishing trails. I have coordinated with the university honors volunteer groups for beautification projects as well as trail maintenance allowing us easier access to trails for future maintenance as well as to assist in case of an injured person. I have also worked with volunteer high school groups to work on bench cutting an existing trail for easier use and more effective protection against erosion.

We have also held two community events centered around the trails. The Rocky Ledges 5K/10K focused on a trail run around our trail system. We also hosted the Spooky Catalyst Mountain Bike Race which involved most of our trail system in addition to a kid's specific ride. These races had a combined total of 132 registered participants and our annual trail users was over 9000 including students and the community.

The trail system that is maintained through the green fund grant is also a valuable part of our local community. A local bike shop host Wednesday evening rides on the trails from spring through fall. In addition to this group ride, a local high school mountain biking team also uses the trails for practice and skill development. A previous study on the trails put the total traffic for the trail system at over 10,000 users for 2023 and our estimates are that we have only grown in usage since then.

2. Provide a summary of your results (environmental, social, and/or economic) including quantifiable data as appropriate (ex. # of individuals reached, lbs. diverted from landfill, energy saved, etc.).

During the 24-25 academic year there have been 104 hazardous trees removed, 30 drainages cleared, 122 volunteers over 7 volunteer days. There have also been miles of trails cleared repeatedly with the goal of providing students and the community with an excellent trail experience.

3. Summarize how your project promoted the Green Fee/Sustainability on campus including, but not limited to, flyers created, screenshots of website, signage, etc. Please include website links, if applicable. (Reminder: you are required to promote your project using at least 2 items from the awardee website promotion list.)

The Student Green Fee is noted at the trailhead, on all trail zone markers, trail brochures, and the Touch of Nature website.

<https://ton.siu.edu/trails-races/student-green-fee.php>

4. Provide evidence of how you used the Green Fund Marker in your project.

See attached photos

5. Is there anything you would do differently if you were to do a similar project in the future? If so, please describe.

Moving forward, I would like to communicate more with campus about opportunities out at Touch of Nature and make sure that the main campus is aware of what all they can do here. I would also like to get volunteers involved more with trail reporting so that we could more efficiently plan the work needed to maintain the trails.

6. Provide as an attachment to the email (see email address below) a minimum of 5 digital images. A minimum of one of the five images should include a person. Images should be of high a quality as possible and be attached in jpg format, if available. Images will be used to promote interest in sustainability projects on campus and may be used on our website and in other promotional material. These can be photos of the progress of the project or the completed project. Provide captions for photos here.

1. The first university honors volunteer group of 24-25
2. A group of university honors volunteers with TON staff
3. Volunteers carrying a log
4. Volunteers working to clear out invasive stilt grass
5. An image of the lake view trail
6. A before image of a large tree fallen across one of the trails
7. An after of the tree cleared from the trail with the trail GA and a TON staff member

7. In 2-5 sentences, describe what you learned from completing the Green Fund grant process. Include a detailed response (Do not simply respond "yes" or "no.") to at least one of the following questions to help us understand how this project has impacted your overall university experience.
 - Do you have a different understanding of sustainability now than you did at the beginning of the process?
 - Did you apply knowledge or skills learned from courses at SIU?
 - Did the completion of the Green Fund grant process help to prepare you for your future career opportunities?

The completion of the Green Fund grant process has been instrumental to my future career opportunities and plans. I originally came to SIU under a different graduate program and through my experience provided by the Green Fund grant have switched to a masters in the recreation program. Through working with the Green Fund grant I have been working to prepare for a future career in recreation. Not only has the Green Fund helped to prepare me for my future career but it has also helped me find my future career.

8. List suggestions for the SIU Sustainability Council to improve the Green Fund Award Process here:

A meeting between the Sustainability Council and Green Fund Awardees would be great to meet with the members of the council and discuss projects further.

