

COMMUNITY NATIVE MEADOW

A volunteer led restoration for wildlife

What began as a bush hogged stretch of common land along Dividing Creek in Ditchley, Virginia, has become a living meadow with a clear mission — supporting nesting bobwhite quail and restoring native habitat. This 2.8 acre former cornfield proved to be an ideal candidate for community driven ecological restoration.

Laying the Groundwork

Volunteers launched the project by walking the field with flags and plant identification guides, marking which plants to protect and which to remove. A winding, mowed path was established to allow the landscape to evolve naturally while providing access for observation and maintenance.

Along the path, experimental planting beds were created — living test plots to determine which native species thrived in the site's sun, moisture, and soil conditions.

Managing What Was Already There

At the outset, Queen Anne's lace dominated much of the field. Although non native, it provided nectar for monarch butterflies and helped suppress aggressive grasses while native goldenrod, milkweed, passion vine, and Virginia creeper gained a foothold.

Targeted, carefully managed burning using garden torches weakened invasive plants without harming soil structure or wildlife. Plantain, bindweed, autumn olive, Johnson grass, and other invasives were steadily removed with minimal soil disturbance.

Planting and Learning

More than 600 native plants were installed across the meadow in soil that proved surprisingly moist and loamy. New plantings were watered and closely monitored during the first growing season.

Each season brought new lessons. Additional beds were added. Some areas were mowed in late fall, while others were lightly burned to prepare for seeding. Successful plants were propagated, and invasive species were continually monitored and removed.

Expanding the Habitat

A second lot expanded the project to include a marsh once choked by phragmites, brambles, invasive olive trees, and aggressive grasses. After years of clearing, native grasses and trees have returned, supplemented with species matched to varying water depths.

The site also includes a wooded area and vernal pools, further enriching habitat diversity. Each March, selective bushwhacking opens new spaces for reseeding with native plants.

Wildlife Responds

The results have been remarkable. Bobwhite quail now nest in the tall grasses, and rare grasshopper sparrows have established heavy nesting sites. Butterflies, birds, and beneficial insects thrive along the meadow path, creating a dynamic and resilient ecosystem.

This meadow is not just beautiful — it is functional, educational, and deeply rooted in community stewardship.

Today, the meadow offers neighbors a place to walk, reflect, and learn from a living landscape. It demonstrates how shared land, thoughtful management, and volunteer commitment can restore native ecosystems while reducing long term maintenance.



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