

# Bluestem Park: Restoring Native Prairie to an Outdoor Learning Lab

Bluestem Park at Alliance Town Center is one of the largest original native prairie and stream restoration projects in the state and serves as a unique gathering space for programmed activities and recreation. The 14-acre natural retreat in the heart of Alliance Town Center is a showcase of land stewardship and sustainability, core values of the Perot family and hallmarks of all Hillwood developments.

Never before has a private development company undertaken an effort like Bluestem Park. In consultation with the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center in Austin, Texas, Hillwood reclaimed land that was altered in the 1940s for agricultural purposes and returned it to its original terrain. The project includes restoration of a natural stream that had been turned into a man-made pond for watering cattle.

The decision to restore the historic reach of Upper Whites Branch and recreate a unique, natural, native prairie ecosystem was driven by the many benefits the project would provide to the community such as ecologically sound drainage for the surrounding developed area and a recreational and educational amenity for the development and larger community. The park also promotes water conservation by cutting losses from evapotranspiration, and is relatively safe compared to a pond.

Aerial photos from the early 1940s provided landscape designers with a roadmap for recreating the original stream, while the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center provided guidance for selecting and planting native grasses, trees, wildflowers and other prairie plants. The result is a native landscape that has not been viewed in its original state for more than 70 years. The park features called for over 3,000 linear feet of pedestrian trail with three pedestrian bridges, allowing visitors to experience the restored stream and adjacent native grassland within Bluestem Park.

Since its opening in May 2016, Bluestem Park has hosted numerous community activities such as the annual Run in the Dark race. Bluestem Park also serves as a living laboratory for students from area schools, as well as members of the community. Through educational programming, students can explore and experience the reclamation efforts and the flora, fauna and wildlife that now inhabit the park.



## BY THE NUMBERS

**50** species of native plants

**500** native trees and shrubs planted

**550** pounds of native grasses and forbs seeded

**1,543** cubic yards of compost added

**2,643** linear feet of stream restored

**3,000** linear feet of trail added

**15,000** cubic yards of top soil added

**200,000** cubic yards of materials moved

**14 million** gallons of water conserved annually

