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Respondent

12

Kevin McSweeney

05:01

Time to complete

1. Date of this semester progress report submission *

2/19/2025

2. Name of project exactly as it was listed in your award letter *

Cultivating Indigenous Gardens within the Southern Arboretum Woodlands

3. Date of original award letter *

5/5/2023

4. Date of expiration listed on award letter (or on scope change approval if more recent) *

4/30/2025

5. How much was your award (i.e., original award plus any approved budget increases)? *

\$149,320

6. How much of your award has been spent to date (in dollars)? *

\$81679.08

7. Date of forecasted project completion *

12/31/2025

8. Have you submitted one or more semester progress reports previously? *

☒ YES☐ NO

9. Describe, in detail, what has been completed on the project since the last semester progress report (or since the project commenced if you have not yet submitted a semester progress report)? *

The project has made considerable progress on field activities since the last semester report. Plant selection and garden design was delayed because of complications in establishing a partnership with The Shawnee Tribe, Miami, OK (see below, 10. Challenges and Obstacles). The project has adjusted by developing several initiatives that highlight native plants and cultivars.

Dr. Jack McCoy (Crop Sciences) is contributing to the project and has established a 'Plant Evolutionary Garden' in the Hartley Garden during the 2024 growing season. The garden provides a visual representation of crop domestication through the lens of chile pepper (*Capsicum* sp.) and Maize (*Zea* sp.) collected near centers of origin throughout Mexico. One end of the garden displays the wild progenitors of modern pepper and maize (corn), while planted on the opposite end of the garden are modern cultivars of the two crops. The transition from wild to modern varieties are represented by landraces (i.e. local varieties) of varying indigenous domestication and cultivation histories, saved through generations of farmer-mediated selection. We plan to continue this and other displays of plant domestication during the 2025 growing season.

Justin Vozzo (NRES & Extension Special in Forestry, Illinois Certified Arborist) is contributing to the project and is providing invaluable expertise in design and management for the wooded area in the Southern Arboretum Woodlands and the adjacent NRES Oak-Hickory plantings

Four interns were hired in the Fall of 2024 through the present and have been essential to the maintenance and improvement of the South Arboretum Woods and the adjacent NRES Oak-Hickory plantings. (located at the southwest corner of Race St and Windsor Ave.). This Oak-Hickory planting serves as a living collection of each oak and hickory species native to the state of Illinois, one of only a few such plantings that exist in the state. In this planting, the students have worked to improve the condition of existing plantings as well as assist in planting new trees to add to the collection.

The students have also assisted Arboretum staff, Justin Vozzo and Illinois Natural History Survey/Natural Areas Division staff, Jamie Ellis and Nathan Hudson, in site preparation in the Southern Arboretum Woodlands. Having a team of five professionally-certified chainsaw operators has benefitted the efficiency and safety of logging operations.

Non-native trees, including a large tract of Norway Maples, have been felled and invasive understory plants suppressed within designated groves in the Southern Arboretum Woodlands. Plans are in place for planting the groves with native species (trees & shrubs) based on their characteristics for food and fiber production and traditional silviculture. The species include (subject to availability):

Prunus americana (American plum)

Corylus americana (American hazelnut)

Amelanchier arborea (serviceberry)

Viburnum prunifolium (black haw)

Asimina triloba (paw paw)

Hamamelis virginiana (witch hazel)

Aronia melanocarpa (Photinia m., black chokeberry)

Crataegus (*C. mollis* or *crus-galli*) hawthorn

Zanthoxylum americanum (prickly ash)

Quercus macrocarpa (bur oak)

Quercus muhlenbergii (chinquapin oak)

Carya illinoensis (pecan)

Diospyros virginiana (persimmon)

The following species are located on-site and management protocols have been established for their protection:

Sambucus nigra (*S. canadensis*) elderberry

Rubus pennsylvanicus (blackberry)

Rubus occidentalis (black raspberry)

Tilia americana (basswood)

10. Describe, in detail, the project's challenges/obstacles since your last semester progress report (or since the project commenced if you have not yet submitted a semester progress report)? *

Initially, the project focused on building a collaborative initiative with tribal Nations, particularly, in northeastern Oklahoma. Tangentially, but significantly related to the Arboretum project, the Shawnee Nation and ACES signed on to an agreement with that would permit the University to grow "Shawnee corn" on the grounds south of campus to work around the poor conditions in Oklahoma resulting from climate change. The Shawnee withdrew from the project when Professor Jacki Rand was let go from her position as Associate Vice Chancellor of Native Affairs and the project collapsed. A conversation between the Chief and Prof. Rand indicates that the tribe is not interested in reviving the project.

In light of this complication and delay in project implementation, we will be requesting a no-cost Scope Change with an end date of 12/31/2025.

11. Describe, in detail, the project's successes since your last semester progress report (or since the project commenced if you have not yet submitted a semester progress report)? *

In addition to the valuable work they have performed for the program, the interns have also had opportunities to participate in several professional development activities including chainsaw safety trainings, arboriculture techniques trainings, and opportunities to prepare for pesticide licensure in the state of Illinois. Throughout the spring and summer of 2025, the interns will continue to assist with maintaining and improving the South Arboretum woods and will have opportunities to continue developing their skills in relation to natural areas management, design and uses of native plants. Interest in the project has attracted new partnerships including those with Professors Justin Vozzo and Jack McCoy, which are amplifying positive impacts in the field and for student engagement.

Prof. Rand followed up on her plan to integrate the project into a course for the American Indian Studies Program. The course, launched in Fall 2024, centered on project themes and related lines of inquiry, through the lens of history and Native perspectives, including:

- Native peoples, knowledges, practices, and relevant philosophies
- Indigenous plant species of the Indigenous Midwest
- "Traditional Environmental Knowledge" (TEK) as the western STEM approach of following Native traditional knowledges
- environmental history of the Indigenous Midwest with an emphasis on rivers systems and the transformation of prairies
- The intersection of western research and Native plant knowledge

Students produced, in some instances stunning, projects that exhibited a strong grasp of course themes. Prof. Rand has committed to teaching the course in Fall 2025. The project will continue to inform the evolution of the course.

Going forward, the project will shift toward a collaborative relationship with the Red Bison student group with which Prof. Rand has been in conversation. The winter break interrupted those conversations but are picking up as we write this report. Professor Rand met with the head of the student group on February 13 to initiate planning for a meeting with the all the partners to plot next steps. Red Bison, some of whom took Prof. Rand's course in Fall 2024, is eager to launch this relationship.

Prof. Rand's initiative will include a working group involving Red Bison and the rest of the project team focused on developing outreach material including signage.

Prof. Rand will then consult with campus colleagues and others as needed before finalizing content.

12. Did your project have any changes to its team that SSC should know about (e.g., project lead, faculty/staff advisor, departmental financial contact)? *

NOTE: If yes, please complete the SSC Project Contact Information Change Form located at this link: <https://forms.office.com/r/uBjx9nmNpG>


☐ YES

☒ NO

13. Complete and upload the semester financial documentation for your project. You should reflect all expenditures since your last semester project report. We strongly suggest that you also upload supporting financial documentation from Banner for your award CFOP. NOTE: When your project is completed and/or expired (whichever comes first), any remaining project funds will be transferred back to the SSC.

<https://studentengagement.illinois.edu/sites/default/files/2024-09/SSC-Budget-Timeline-SEMESTER-PROGRESS-REPORT-template.xlsx>

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14. (OPTIONAL FOR SEMESTER REPORT) Upload project marketing and/or media not previously submitted in semester progress reports.

NOTE: Project marketing and/or media must include SSC's logo and/or a statement of which fee(s) funded the project.