

Daniels joins in celebration of Sylvan Lake island acquisition

By Dennis Nartker
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Wednesday afternoon on the tree-shaded shoreline of the Gene Stratton-Porter State Historic Site, with Sylvan Lake and Boy Scout Island in the background, Gov. Mitch Daniels joined in the Sylvan Lake Improvement Association's Celebration of Acquisition of the 100-acre island.



"What a beautiful spot. What a historic spot where many historic figures have passed," Daniels told the assembled Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) officials, association members, Sylvan Lake and Rome City residents. "This is a remarkable partnership of self-help, who took on the leadership of this project and drew in partners."

The association raised \$1.25 million to purchase the largest island on Sylvan Lake to preserve its natural, wooded beauty and historic value and protect it from development. The Indiana Heritage Trust administrated by the IDNR contributed more than \$300,000 to the island's purchase, which contains about 77 acres of upland forest, a seven-acre wetland known as Blueberry Bog, and an additional four acres of wetlands.

The Anthony Wayne Area Boy Scout Council operated its summer camp called Camp Big Island on the site from 1935 to 1967. Remnants of the camp remain but are being removed by volunteers as the island is transformed into a site for educational and recreational programs. The council sold the island to private interests and ownership changed hands several times over the next four decades. There were several efforts to develop housing on the island before the association purchased the property in March 2007.

Linda Yerick, Noble County Community Foundation president who chaired the association's fundraising committee, explained the association's plans for the island. The first phase was acquiring the island for \$1.25 million. The second phase will be clearing the debris, developing trails and returning the island to its natural environment, estimated to cost \$500,000. The last phase is to develop educational and recreational programs.



Sylvan Lake resident Joe Costello, association president for the past 36 years, explained the island's history and importance of its natural environment to the lake. "Someday it will something we can all be proud of where children can walk among woods who may have never done so."

The island has more than 60 types of native plants and trees, and the Eastern box turtle and four-toed salamander, both on

the state endangered species list, according to an IDNR Division of Nature Preserves survey of the island's fauna and wildlife. Daniels said he took particular interest in the project because it showed what a group of people can do on their own. He also praised the Boy Scout connection. "This shows what local people can do when they take the lead," he said.

"This is a remarkable story, that I plan to tell others. It's a real role model for the state," said the governor. The association is also celebrating its 100th anniversary.