

Environmental Philanthropy project: Forest Park

BACKGROUND: St. Louis' Forest Park is one of the area's most prominent natural resources, but over the past few decades it has become a gradually deteriorating resource. In response to this deterioration, Mayor Freeman Bosley Jr. has appointed a committee to develop a Master Plan for the park. The plan will be made public in December of this year (1995); but its general outline is already in place. The plan will urge a re-engineering of the park's ecology to develop a more sustainable ecological balance. A key part of this redesign, and the part which offers Monsanto the best possibility for involvement, will be the connection and expansion of the park's lakes and lagoons into a linear water system.

OPPORTUNITY: The nonprofit group Forest Park Forever recognizes that the plan's implementation will require resources beyond those that the city can offer, so it has already requested that major firms such as Monsanto be partners in the effort.

There are many possibilities for involvement. One suggested by Forest Park Forever is to provide technical and financial assistance in the effort to build a sound and sustainable water ecosystem in the park. The Master Plan will contain some fairly specific directives about how to accomplish this. Examples include:

- * Fund the reconfiguration of certain lakes and lagoons needed to improve the park's drainage and water quality while improving their aesthetic quality and multipurpose use as recommended by the Master Plan.

- * Help in maintaining the lake system to achieve natural aquatic balance and acceptable water quality.

- * Support a program that uses the aquatic ecosystem as a living laboratory for the region's schools as part of their science education efforts.

- * Identify threats to the health of the aquatic ecosystem, provide advice to address these and adopt a public education program to raise awareness.

The implementation of these directives, however, will require further study to determine the best way of accomplishing them. Monsanto thus has the opportunity to offer a combined package of technical and financial support for an environmental sustainability project which has "showcase" qualities while also having a significant community impact.

MONSANTO'S ROLE: Forest Park Forever suggests that Monsanto consider partnering with Forest Park "in both the design and implementation of the Master Plan recommendation to create a linear water system with natural vegetation able to sustain a variety of appropriate wildlife." Within this request, Monsanto has significant leeway to determine the exact nature of any assistance we decide to give. Ideally we would provide technical assistance and environmental know-how to the design of specific projects and then follow that up with the financial assistance to implement those projects. This plan could be modified, though, to take into account the extent and applicability of our knowledge base about aquatic systems and the amount of financial assistance we want to give.

We might tie this in with our support of science education in the schools

with a focus on ecological sustainability.. There may be a possibility for especially involving the new City science magnet school, located next to the Science Museum adjacent to Forest Park. Getting the students engaged in the park's ecosystem planning, development and monitoring would complement their science curriculum. This is the school to which Monsanto donated a science laboratory in honor of retired CEO Dick Mahoney.

BENEFITS: The opportunity to have a lasting impact on a major community resource that is used by many of Monsanto's people and is a source of pride for all; beneficial publicity gained from being involved with an environmentally responsible project; the opportunity to demonstrate our scientific knowledge and commitment to the idea of ecological sustainability; the opportunity to determine our own level of involvement.

RISKS: Without sufficient publicity, few might know of Monsanto's involvement; differential success in implementing other parts of the Master Plan might create the impression that the park is still deteriorating; proprietary concerns over offering our technical know-how to a public project.

POTENTIAL PARTNERS: Forest Park Forever, St. Louis City Parks Department, St. Louis Mayor's Office, local universities or environmental groups (for additional technical assistance), and other major St. Louis corporations (if this project requires more assistance than Monsanto can give).

RESOURCES NEEDED: Forest Park Forever did not request specific dollar amounts, and the initial involvement will consist more of people and expertise than of money. Monsanto has the chance to get in on the planning stages of this project, determine what monetary resources will be needed, and act with that knowledge in mind.

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