

## **Thousands of Native Plants Scheduled for Planting at Alcoa Howmet**

Volunteers needed. Lots of them. The Muskegon Conservation District has thousands of native plants ready for fall planting at the Alcoa Howmet native landscape site at Plant 4 on Benston Road in Whitehall. Volunteer plantings are scheduled for November 20, 23, and 24, beginning at 12 noon and ending at 5 p.m.

Native landscaping at Alcoa Howmet, plus several other native landscape projects in the White Lake area, is part of the **White Lake Community Native Landscape Initiative**, developed to increase the awareness of the benefits of native landscaping and green infrastructure, promote the linkage of White Lake area green infrastructure, and stimulate similar private and public native landscaping projects in West Michigan.

The Muskegon Conservation District is heading up the Initiative and Alcoa Howmet's native landscape project, which features almost five acres of lawn at Plant 4 that is being converted to a native prairie landscape. According to Jeff Auch, the organization's executive director, "Prairies are scarce in Michigan, having been replaced many years ago mostly by farm fields and pastures. It's important to restore prairies because they provide homes for valuable bird and butterfly species, whose populations have become smaller due to habitat losses." In the next few years, there will also be several attractive rain gardens to help reduce stormwater runoff, walking paths and benches throughout the area, interpretive signs, and a connection to the White Lake Pathway. The native landscape may also serve as an outdoor educational lab for local schools.

Erin Charles, a project coordinator for the Muskegon Conservation District, will be at the Plant 4 site to provide gloves and gardening tools and direct the planting. "We need help," she says. "We need to get these plants in the ground before freezing. They may not look like living plants, as they are dormant, but they will grow up fine next spring."

Gloves and tools will be provided for those who need them, but volunteers may bring their own. "Gardening" clothes are recommended. Volunteers are encouraged to plant for an hour or whatever time they are able to contribute and should come to Plant 4's west parking lot (closest to Mears Avenue) any time between 12 noon and 5 p.m. The planting project will take place rain or shine. RSVPs are not required.

For more information, access the project's web site at:

**[www.muskegoncd.org/alcoa\\_habitat](http://www.muskegoncd.org/alcoa_habitat)** or call Erin Charles at (231) 773-0008 or Tanya Cabala, the project's public participation coordinator, at (231) 981-0016.