



Ford County Soil and Water Conservation District

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Bob Reber, Speaker, Woodlands Tours
Photo courtesy of Debra Slade, AC, FCSWCD.

Woodlands Tours at Howard Thomas Memorial near Ten Mile Grove

On May 6, 2009, the Ford County SWCD hosted a morning and afternoon Woodland Management and Spring Wildflowers tours of the Ten Mile Grove area, a prairie remnant three miles west of Paxton.

A total of thirty-five visitors from Ford, Iroquois, and Champaign counties were introduced to the native species found there by Dr. Robert Reber. Reber is the steward of the grove and co-managing editor of *The Illinois Steward* magazine. Four raffle prizes were given to participants, the magazine and the Creating Habitats and Homes for Illinois Wildlife book.

Dr. Reber presented the cultural and natural history of the grove, explained woodland management techniques and pointed out the diversity of the plants present.

The grove is officially designated the Howard Thomas Memorial Nature Preserve and is open from mid-March to Thanksgiving on weekends and holidays.



AJ Wilken, Wilken Worm Farm
Photo courtesy of Wilkens.

Lady Landowners Vermiculture Tour

On June 24, 2009, the Ford County Lady Landowners toured the Wilken Worm Farm in Ashkum. AJ and his father, Lynn, started the operation approximately seven years ago. AJ demonstrated and explained the process they use to raise earthworms and harvest the castings for use as a natural fertilizer. He also explained the many benefits of using castings.

They currently house about 200,000 worms and produce approximately 15 to 17 tons of castings every six weeks. They distribute the castings nation-wide in bulk, primarily to landscapers and golf courses. They also sell a five-pound bag of the castings at garden shops under the label of "Worm Warrior". Each tour participant was given a complimentary bag to take home.

After the tour, the ladies were served refreshments by Pam Wilken and then given a bonus tour of the bird seed processing plant by the company sales rep, Doug Hanson.

Both of these operations are in addition to the seed company, MWS Seeds, which produce their own corn, wheat, and soybeans.