

## **Improving Ecological Monitoring of Restoration Sites in Northwest Indiana through a GLISTEN-NIRMI Partnership.**

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Northwest Indiana is an area of active ecological restoration with 169 documented restoration projects. However, the ability to assess the success of restoration projects is incomplete because monitoring of the progress of these restorations does not exist. NIRMI was created in 2010 to establish a system of evaluating and quantifying plant species in local habitat restoration projects throughout Northwest Indiana. NIRMI uses a standardized approach to collect data that is placed within an open-access database for use by other researchers, restoration groups, and individuals in evaluation of restoration efforts. Data collection uses the CVS-EEP protocol for recording vegetation, a standard developed at the University of North Carolina. NIRMI allows for evaluation of the restoration trajectory.

Student stewardship liaisons who are part of the Great Lakes Innovative Stewardship Through Education Network collaborated with NIRMI through a summer research stewardship position that will lead into incorporating NIRMI's methods into undergraduate biology curriculum. This year NIRMI is evaluating 20 sites through Lake, Porter, and LaPorte counties, an increase from 6 the previous year. NIRMI incorporates GPS and GIS allowing for visual comparison of sites across northwest Indiana. This position provides hands-on scientific training in ecology, plant identification, research methodology, and data collection.

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