Title: Mentor Marsh: History, Tragedy, Recovery

Speaker: David Kriska, Ph.D.

Bio:

David joined the Cleveland Museum of Natural History in 2003 and is the Restoration Ecologist with the Natural Areas Division where he specializes in rare plant and animal surveys, community ecology, and habitat restoration. The Museum's Natural Areas Division currently has 57 scientific natural areas spread across over 10,000 acres that contain unique natural communities, such as hemlock northern hardwood forest, Lake Erie island alvar, fossil dune ridge, marshes, swamps and glacial wetlands. These high-quality habitats- many are globally rare, together protect more than 250 different kinds of endangered, threatened, or rare plant and animal species, and represent the remarkable biological diversity that was once widespread throughout the region.

Abstract:

Mentor Marsh has been designated a National Natural Landmark since 1965 for being one of the most species-rich sites on the Great Lakes shoreline and was named Ohio's first State Nature Preserve in 1971. This unique wetland suffered dramatically in the late 1960s when salt-mine tailings leached into Blackbrook Creek, killing most of the swamp forest trees and marsh plants. The site was overtaken by reed grass (Phragmites australis), a 14 to 24-foot-tall non-native invasive plant that grew so densely within the nearly 4-mile-long marsh basin that an estimated 1 billion plants were growing just a few inches apart. After partial abatement of the salt source, the Cleveland Museum of Natural History began a large-scale restoration of Mentor Marsh in 2012, where the Phragmites is being treated via helicopter and amphibious vehicles. The Phragmites has also been physically mashed flat to allow native plants to grow. Dozens of native plant species are sprouting throughout the Marsh and rare marsh birds — such as rails, bitterns, and snipe, are now nesting. Fish such as Northern Pike are spawning and Yellow Perch fingerlings are starting to use the marsh as a nursery.