

Natural Resources Management Activities

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

April 2015

April is the month in which we see the most change occurring in our preserves, so it is appropriate that it is also the month when we carry out the greatest range of activities to preserve, protect and restore our natural plant and animal habitats. Primary activities for the month of April, 2015 included:

1. **Burn Season Wrap-up.** We completed our burn season in early April with controlled fires in five units at Afton, Merritt and Thompson Road preserves. This year we burned a total of 18 units in six preserves for a total of 82 acres. The weather was cooperative, with limited rain days and unusually steady and reliable winds.
2. **Spring Planting.** We had one of our most successful April planting seasons. Our volunteers planted over 750 trees and dozens of shrubs in five different preserves. We planted 4 to 6 feet tall bare-root trees in the Afton, Hoppe, Russell Woods and Sannauk preserves. Species included Swamp White Oak, Bur Oak, Pin Oak, Sycamore, Red Oak and Butternut. Only 150 of the holes for these trees were able to be dug with an auger – all the rest were planted by volunteers and staff with shovels! Fifty shrubs were planted at Nehring. In addition, our staff planted almost 3,000 Water Lily tubers in the two upper marsh pools of the wetland bank.

Volunteer groups that helped with our April plantings this year included:

April 10th - 33 SEALYP (Southeast Asian Youth Leadership Program) students.

April 18th - 16 NIU Cares program and 5 from Kish College biology dept.

April 26th – 8 Volunteers from the NIU Outdoor Recreation Program.

April 26th- 30 Volunteers from BioLife.

April 30th – 38 Students from Kelly High School in Chicago.

3. **Stewards Activities.** Our weekly stewards had a very active and productive month, as well. Early in the month they dug and divided hundreds of root divisions of Sweet Flag, Lake Bank Sedge, Hairy-fruited Lake Sedge and Indian Plantain. They potted several hundred of these divisions for planting later in the season, and planted rare sedge and forb seeds into plug trays. They weeded, raked and mulched the woodland plant landscape around the Resources Center at Russell Woods, and planted over 230 of the trees (above) at the floodplain savanna at the South Branch Prairie. They planted another 70 trees where the Ash have died out in the Northwest Forest Unit at the Russell Woods Preserve.

Some of our botanically inclined stewards are now assisting us two days a week; in April this year we began a formal plant ID and inventory in half of our preserves. By the end of 2016 we hope to have a comprehensive floristic inventory and qualitative assessment of every preserve in the district.

The Blanding's Turtle. We have begun our 3rd season of tracking the endangered Blanding's Turtle at Afton. The turtle emerged from hibernation a bit later this year, in April, and had been meandering around the upper Ideal (Water Lily) marsh. We were able to see him out of the water for the first time this year- on a tussock of grass in a shallow ephemeral pool just outside the berm of that marsh. Although there are four species of turtles at Afton, there are no females of his species, so he may soon begin another journey out of the preserve like he did last year. We will see if he wanders again.

4. **Weed Control.** In addition to the herbicide spraying that our staff does, we have contractors this year for invasive species control at the Afton Wetland Bank and the Merritt Wetland Mitigation. The contractors began the first of three seasonal treatments in early April after our prescribed fires, and will continue as other species become most susceptible to herbicides. Our staff still does the majority of invasive weed control, but the addition of new preserves in the past few years requires some assistance to maintain the high performance standards we have achieved in our mitigation sites.
5. **Beaver Control.** Beavers build dams; it's what they do. Unfortunately, at the Afton Wetland Bank and occasionally elsewhere, we don't always want a dam where they build one. Often, their dams create deeper ponds from the shallow marshes that we are required to maintain at a shallow depth (i.e. shallow emergent marsh, not a fish pond) by our contract with the Army Corps of Engineers. So we have had to figure out ways to live with the Beavers, but control their impact on our wetlands. A strategy that seems to be working for us is to: (1) remove the dams regularly, which makes the Beavers more quickly use up the available woody food and dam construction supply near their "ponds" and (2) build cages and apply a stinky repellent around the trees we want to save that are near their ponds. Beavers don't like to go more than 200 feet from the water, and will eventually move out as the food and construction supply diminishes. It seems to be working.... we will keep you apprised of our success... or lack thereof.

I have attached a few extra photos this month; we had so many interesting and enjoyable activities with our stewards and volunteers that I decided to share a few more of them with the committee. I hope you enjoy seeing them as much as we did doing them.

Al Roloff, Natural Resources Management Report, April 2015



SEALYP student from 10 different countries enjoyed digging holes for our forested wetland. Some, though, did not at all enjoy the small garter snake I picked up. One ran a block away.



The spring burns revealed a few creatures that didn't last the entire winter, like this deer.



This curious mink at Afton would duck down in its burrow, I would walk closer and it would peek out again. I got within 10 feet before it wouldn't come out.



Stewards Jan Grainger and Karen Matz, with seasonal technician Kevin Schmidt in the background, begin a plant inventory at the Sannauk Forest Preserve.



A Sandhill Crane calls to its mate at the South Branch Prairie. The two Cranes stayed at the prairie for two weeks but were eventually chased away by a visitor with an off-leash dog.



Christine Lagattola, NIU coordinator of Outdoor Recreation Programs, has brought 8 to 10 volunteers to help plant trees for 5 years in a row. Christine is a Marine veteran of Afganistan.



Four year-old Sadie Roloff hovers over a small DeKay's Brown Snake, barely visible in the aquarium. Brown snakes seldom reach a foot in length. They are common at Russell Woods.



Here is a closer look at the Snake. It was only 5 ½ inches long, but Sadie still wouldn't hold it. Some of our instincts are pretty strong, and, wisely, take some time to reconcile.