

## **Natural Resources Management and South Maintenance Activities**

### **DeKalb County Forest Preserve District**

#### **Spring 2019**

Spring is typically when we start hitting our weed spraying operations hard, specifically Reed Canary Grass. The rains that we have had have limited our spray days to a degree. Even with that considered we have been able to get out and hit some of our priority sites and higher quality habitats. Reed Canary is one of the first weeds to emerge and in the sites that we burned in the spring it is easier to find and spray even earlier. When the current wet weather pattern shifts we will be able to catch up and move on to our early summer weeds.

With the rain limiting our spray days we spent more time on projects that we usually do on the fewer rain days in a typical year. We spent time in the greenhouse transplanting seedlings and weeding our propagation beds. We ordered small tree "whips" from the State and planted many of those throughout the district. Whips are bare root trees and shrubs that are typically only a few feet tall that are fairly inexpensive and easier to plant than large trees. We were able to plant plugs grown in the greenhouse in several preserves.

Our stewards' days were very productive this spring. At South Branch Prairie the stewards planted around 400 plant plugs and around 200 shrub and tree whips in an area that we cleared with the Fecon last winter. At Merritt Prairie the stewards planted 200 whips of various species and 250 sedge plugs also in an area we cleared with the Fecon last year. Last week at Swanson Grove the stewards planted 250 plant plugs, 8 larger trees, and pulled nine huge bags of Garlic Mustard. Garlic Mustard is an invasive weed of woods that can push out natives and eventually dominate. The area where the stewards pulled was one where we spent time pulling last year and it looked very nice this spring. We pushed at the edges this year and hope that next year we can push it even further. Since we purchased Swanson Grove we have spent a good amount of time there and the effort of the stewards and staff is starting to turn a degraded area potential into a diverse savanna that will be an excellent example of savanna habitat when fully restored.



Our stewards are a great asset and we are so thankful for their hard work and dedication. Here they are with the bags of Garlic Mustard they pulled. They are standing near one of the large oaks in the Swanson Grove Savanna. There are at least 20 more oaks of this size throughout the site.

You may notice a pattern in the way we are doing our restoration work and planting. We find that we get better results if we follow up the brush work we do in the winter with spraying and planting. We return to these areas in the spring as staff and with the stewards and preform weed work and plant. In the early summer we will return and spray re-sprouts of the invasive shrubs that we removed. This follow up work will make it easier for us to manage these sites in the future and hopefully the planting will restore the native vegetation faster than just seeding alone. We also try to focus our weed spraying on the areas that we burned in the early spring. This allows us to see and spray the invasive weeds earlier than without fire. We have found that by following this pattern we have been able to get great results.

This year we have been able to grow many more plants in the greenhouse than in the past. When we have every plant that we have grown we will have several thousand plants to plant out in the preserves. Couple this with the seed that we are able to collect out of the seed propagation beds we will be benefiting greatly from the work that has gone into these areas.

## **South Maintenance Report**

The wet spring has had an effect on the maintenance operations as well. While the mowers have been able to get out and take care of the grassy areas the mowing has taken longer and some trails have been so wet that they haven't been able to be mowed this spring.

-There have been several days where staff has had to clear storm debris and fallen trees from preserve roads and trails.

-Road grading was done at Afton and will be done at Shabbona as soon as we are able to get a truck down to the site.

-Picnic table are being built at Afton for use throughout the district.

-The bridges over the creek at Afton are getting new guard rails. One is done and one is in progress.

-Staff continue to work on making public areas, shelters, and other public amenities more attractive and appealing to the public. New information signs with various informational poster have been installed in many preserves. Outhouses have been painted and upgraded. Shelters have been cleaned and repaired.