

March and April Natural Resource Summary

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March and April are typically especially busy months. With the Corona Virus and the distancing that is required we have had to be creative and adaptive accomplishing tasks throughout the district. March brings an awakening to the preserves and after a winter of clearing brush and burning piles the natural resource crew is ready for spring.

Our spring burn season was limited. We were able to burn at Sannauk, Afton, and Potawatomi. Having to stay six feet apart it made the process of burning, which typically takes anywhere from 4 to 8 crew members, challenging to say the least. We burned close to 25 acres which is well below what we would usually burn in a spring season. We were able to burn the Potawatomi Sedge Meadow which was a priority burn for us this spring. The reason it was a priority this year was because we are going to have contractors spraying Reed Canary Grass (invasive wetland grass) and having the previous year's duff burned off makes it easier to spray the grass without damaging much of the native vegetation.



Burning the sedge meadow at Potawatomi Woods Forest Preserve

One of the benefits of the shortened burn season was that we were able to get into our spray season earlier. Patrick has been running our spraying operations and is doing a great job of coordinating our crew. The plan for this spring is to spend at least 3 days of the week spraying. Weather has been cooperative for the most part. So far we have sprayed at Afton, Prairie Oaks, Merritt Prairie, and Potawatomi Forest Preserve. It looks very likely that we will be able to spray most of our high quality wetlands for Reed Canary Grass this spring.

Our stewards group has not met since early March. They are vital to our operations and to our community outreach. As soon as the social distancing restrictions are loosened we will begin meeting with them again on a weekly basis. Through e-mails we have communicated with them that they can continue to volunteer in the preserves solo. I know that several of them have been pulling Garlic Mustard in some of our woodlands and that many of them have been using the iNaturalist app in the preserves helping us get a better inventory of the flora and fauna in the preserves.



A group of our steward after pulling Garlic Mustard at Swanson Grove last year. We miss them!

Our greenhouse and propagation gardens are looking good again this year. One of our initiatives for 2020 was to grow many plants that are DeKalb County natives. The seed from these plants were collected and then stratified in our greenhouse. Many of them have sprouted and we should have a good batch of these DeKalb County native plants to plant in the preserves this year. This year about 50% of the plants we are growing are Native to DeKalb County. Next year we are planning on being around 90%.



Green house summer of 2019.