

June and July Natural Resource Report

Prepared by Joshua Clark

Natural Resource crew continues to be busy in the preserves. We have been planting plants grown in the greenhouse, mowing and removing our biennial summer weeds (Sweet Clover & Wild Parsnip), spraying some of the late thistle patches, and collecting seed as it comes ready. Our new plantings from the last couple of years look nice and we have been monitoring them for weed issues before they become major infestations. Our crew continues to work well together and we have been accomplishing many of our goals for the season.



The bumblebees and dragonflies have been busy at Afton this year.

This summer we were joined by Abbey Rogers as an AmeriCorps seasonal worker. She will be finishing up her work with us the first week of August to return home to Wilson, North Carolina. Wilson lies on the border of the coastal plain and the piedmont, has a magnificent rose garden and an interesting looking whirligig park. (<https://www.wilsonwhirligigpark.org/>) She will also return to school at UNC Chapel Hill where she studies history.

Abbey was drawn to AmeriCorps to do something different this summer and to help out in a community. She was drawn to the program in Northern Illinois because a majority of the work would be outside and give her a chance to learn about the environment, natural communities, and why restoration is important especially in another part of the country. Abbey came to us with very little knowledge of prairie and wetland ecosystems but will leave us with quite a bit of new knowledge.

Abbey said that her favorite part of the work here was the prescribed fire we had when seeding the South Afton Wetland Bank and her least favorite was how early she had to wake up to make it to work on time. She was never late! Abbey plans to return to school and take a few more environmental education courses in the future and learn more about the local natural communities in North Carolina.



It has been great to have Abbey with us this summer. She has been an important part of our team. Her work ethic has been great and her curiosity and desire to learn have been constant all summer long. Thanks Abbey and good luck!

We finally had a chance to use the seed mill we purchased last winter. This piece of equipment will allow us to process our seed from the collected material down so that we can either add it to our seed mixes for spreading or clean it further to use for growing. This process would typically take quite a bit of time depending on quantity collected but with the seed mill it takes minutes.



Crew using the seed mill to process Spiderwort

Work on the South Afton Wetland Bank is close to wrapping up. One of the final and most important steps in the process is to get the seed that will grow into our wetland plants spread into the future wetland areas. On two hot and humid days in July we mixed and divided the seed, gathered our spreading buckets, put on our knee high wet boots, and started walking the wetland. Typically we spread seed with a tractor and a broadcast spreader. The future wetland areas were too wet for that so we had to do all 24 acres by hand. There was one area on the east side of the bank, the former farmed wetland, where excavation wasn't required. This area had dormant cool season grasses as the dominant plant and because it was dormant it was the perfect fuel for a fire. We burned it off with the hope that removing the dormant vegetation would give us better seed to soil contact and we would get better germination of the seed we spread there.

We spread thousands of seeds across the wetland areas. We place a lot of hope and trust in these tiny bundles of genetic material. By spring of next year the work by the numerous people who have put time and energy into this project will be rewarded in the blooms of flowers, the buzz of insects, and the birds frogs, turtles, and mammals that will call this wetland home.



Fire prior to seeding



Crew seeding wetlands



The wetlands have already started filling up