

## Natural Resources Management Activities

### DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

January 2016

Primary activities for the month of January included:

**1. Snow plowing.** A few minor snowy days and that storm that brought several inches of slush required some plowing early in the first half of the month, but it was nothing like the last few years. Significant snowfall not only requires that we divert efforts to snow removal, but also means that it is much more difficult to get our people and equipment out to do our top winter priority, brush removal.

**2. Planting.** What? Planting in the winter? Yes, just a couple inches of snow on the soil surface resulted in ideal conditions for planting a prairie. We planted nearly 100 species on the 30 acres of former farmed floodplain in what will be the prairie component of the new Sycamore Forest Preserve (the former Evergreen Village Trailer Park). Winter seeding or “frost seeding” mimics what happens in nature as many of the prairie species slowly drop their remaining seed into the soil over the course of the winter. How did we do it? We borrowed a nice old McCormick drop seeder from Nachusa Grasslands and pulled it behind our new Kubota 4WD utility vehicle. See the attached photos.

**3. Brush removal.** January is prime brush removal season, and *so much more* can be accomplished with additional staff, new and additional equipment, lots of help from stewards and, most important of all, not much snow. So, during the last couple weeks of January, we cleared acres and acres of invasive brush from the Great Western Nature Trail, the Afton prairies, the Bicentennial Grove, and the southern savanna area of the future Sycamore Forest Preserve. We used our new BrushCat mechanized brush-cutter, chain saws and hand-held brush cutters. And lots and lots of “elbow grease”, although I don’t know where that term came from because it sure *feels like* we need “lower back grease” instead. Also some photos attached.

**4. Stewards activities.** Our stewards had the busiest January since they began almost four years ago. Not only did they help us with cutting, hauling and burning brush, but they also mixed the nine barrels of seed that were planted at the Sycamore Prairie, and, on one particularly cold and windy day, they built birdhouses in the remodeled shop at Afton. Several new members have joined us within the last few months; new stewards are always welcome.

**5. Floristic Quality Assessment.** Since last May, two of our stewards, Jan Grainger and Karen Matz, have put in double duty. Not only did they participate in the weekly activities on Wednesdays, but they also came out each Thursday during the growing season and helped record plant inventories for most of our preserves. Since November, we have also been meeting each Thursday to review these inventories and enter them in a database called the *Universal Floristic Quality Assessment Calculator*. This tool uses various formulas that allow us to look at different aspects of various plant communities and their “quality”. It gives us a method to assess the quality of both our remnant flora and our restored areas.

**6. Other activities.** Also during January, we met with contractors to assess sites for contractual invasive species work later this year, we finalized and distributed management schedules and we met with Conservation Foundation staff twice: once to assess the conservation easement at the Sycamore Preserve, and again to discuss acquisition options.



This is the old McCormick drop seeder that was used to plant the 30 acres of the Sycamore Prairie. Notice how the tire tracks make it easy to see where we have been.



This is the seed distributed on the snow. We aim for 50 to 100 seeds per square foot.



Here is the drop seeder behind the new Kubota utility vehicle.



Stewards haul cut brush to a burn pile along the Great Western Trail. This 200-yard long site at Larson Road is probably the richest prairie remnant left in DeKalb County. Invasive brush was severely impacting many of the rare plants.