

## Natural Resources Management Activities

### DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

June 2017

Primary activities for the month of June included:

**1. Weed control.** June is a busy month for weed control, with Canada Thistle being a primary target. Much of our effort is concentrated in the newest restorations or in the established prairies and wetlands (yes, Canada thistle grow quite well in wetlands) in areas where this pernicious invasive can dominate native plant communities if left un-checked. Invasive Sweet Clover and poison Parsnip were also targets. Our work was concentrated in Swanson Grove, Prairie Oaks, Merritt and Afton sites during June. At Prairie Oaks, we continued the boom spraying of the North and Northeast savannas in order to remove the weed seed bank prior to planting this autumn. Now we transition to controlling other invasive plants such as Cattails and Phragmites.

**2. Seed collection.** Early season seed collection is mostly focused on sedge species: Tussock Sedge, Sprengell's Sedge, Buxbaum's Sedge, Fox Sedge, and a couple early Bulrushes. Forb seed collected this month included Swamp Saxifrage, Prairie Ragwort, Marsh Marigold, and others. Frequently, we concentrate our efforts on hard-to-find (or buy) native species; we prefer native genotype from our own prairie, woodland and wetland remnants. Other times we gather lots of seed that we use as one of the foundation species in certain plant communities.

**3. Planting.** June is also a busy month for planting. Why do we install plants instead of just seed? Most of what we plant are rare or uncommon species that are difficult to establish from seed, or are very expensive as seed. So we collect seed or buy a small amount and grow it as plants, which we can install in just the right soil and moisture conditions, insuring, as much as possible, successful establishment of a reproducing population. This month we planted Leiberg's Panic Grass, Prairie Indian Plantain, Prairie Sundrops, Blazing Stars, and various sedges. Most of these were planted by our intrepid stewards group members. Our stewards are a key component of our restoration efforts.

**4. Greenhouse and plant propagation facilities.** Good progress was made this month toward the establishment of our plant propagation and storage facilities. Josh Clark and the Afton crew have completed the site preparation for the greenhouse(s). About half of the raised propagation beds have been constructed and planted with the designated species. Al Roloff and Larry Creekmur, (of *County Road Greenhouses*), have each donated a greenhouse for the facility. Country Road Greenhouses was our go-to resource for growing difficult species or specialty plants, but they will be closing their doors this fall, so we will be all set to take up the slack ourselves.

**5. Wildlife research partnerships.** This year we are partnering with several organizations and individual researchers to expand wildlife research that is done in our preserves. The Fish and Wildlife Service will release captured, banded Kestrels (from the O'Hare Airport) at the Afton Preserve and other sites to determine optimum release distance so they don't return to the airport. NIU herpetologist Rich King, in cooperation with the *Openlands Foundation* and our summer interns, is studying rare snake populations in five of our preserves. Our staff and stewards, in cooperation with NIU, Openlands and the Chicago

Wilderness Organization, are researching the distribution of freshwater mussels in the Kishwaukee and Fox River watershed streams in DeKalb County. Finally, a doctoral student from the U of I Chicago is studying bird predation of agricultural insect pests in croplands adjacent to native plant communities in our preserves.

**6. Other stuff.** We hosted the grant coordinator, Jolie Krasinski, from the Illinois Clean Energy Foundation (ICEF), for a picnic lunch and tour of the Haines Creek Conservation Corridor. ICEF has funded half of the purchase price of three of our acquisitions there, plus some tens of thousands of dollars of restoration work in the sites. Paul Sorensen and his wife Marie hosted a field trip and lunch for our active stewards at their cabin and prairie preserve along the Rock River, south of Oregon. And our most frequently volunteering Boy Scout group, Troop 2810, got together with us one weekend and consolidated large brush piles for burning next winter.



A nice patch of an uncommon native wetland plant, Fringed Loosestrife (*Lysamachia ciliata*) is one of the remnant species that was present when we acquired the Prairie Oaks Preserve. This is the only place we have found it growing in DeKalb County. We gather seed from it each year to expand this local genotype to suitable habitat in other preserves. This “diversity sharing” is one of the key strategies we use to maintain and improve our native plant communities.



Another photo of the rare Prairie Indian Plantain population at the Swanson Grove prairie remnant. We burned only half of the site this spring in order to insure that we do not eliminate any possible insect pollinators that may be responsible for the robust seed production of this particular population. This plant, which is one of the twelve priority species of the Northern Illinois Seed Network, is in high demand for restoration of wet prairies.



Can you guess what this plant is? If you guessed *Hollyhocks*, you were close, but this is actually *Kankakee Mallow*, known in the wild from only one place on earth, an Island in the Kankakee River.