

Natural Resources Management Report

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

February, 2017

Primary tasks for the month of February included:

1. Prescribed fire. For the first time ever, we carried out prescribed burns in the forest preserves during February. Two critical weather conditions are required to carry out burns: (1) the temperature must be above freezing and (2) the fuel – grass and leaves – must be dry. This February was not only the warmest on record, but was dry, as well. There was no measurable snow or rain during February this year! Our highest priorities for prescribed fires are in sites where we have contractual obligations (such as the wetland bank and the wetland reserve site at the South Branch Prairie) or high quality remnant prairies that thrive best with frequent fire. So, we burned three units in the Afton Wetland Mitigation Bank (WMB), and one unit of remnant prairie at the Swanson Grove *in February*. Might be the new normal.

2. Brush control. Despite some thawing, we continued a banner season for brush control in the preserves. Brush control work by contractors was finished along the Great Western Trail and the Sycamore Forest Preserve. Clearing was expanded in the former nursery site near the maintenance facilities at Afton, and more brush and dead tree piles were burned by staff and stewards. Willows that invaded the wet prairies in the Afton wetland bank were shredded by the BrushCat. Massive 40 year-old Honeysuckles and other invasive brush and trees were removed along Crego Road where they had morphed in to a traffic hazard as well as a pernicious invasive species. Brush control season will slow now that fire season has begun.

3. Wetland Bank. Along with the brush control work being carried out at the Afton WMB, we worked with the Wendler Engineering group to finalize the replacement design and upgrades to two of the weirs at Afton. Both upgrades will allow maintenance equipment to cross the outlets where it was not possible before. Also this month, our excavation contractor completed the rip-rap armoring that was begun in January. Our wetland bank has generated revenue of over a million dollars for our district; the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) is pleased when we make efforts to keep it top-notch. And it is, according to USEPA, the Mitigation Bank Review Team, and the independent environmental consulting firm that prepares the annual monitoring report, which was submitted to the ACOE this month.

Conferences. February is the month for conferences in the world of conservation and natural resources management. Four staff members attended this year's state conference of the Illinois Association of Conservation and Forest Preserve Districts. Two, Al Roloff and Josh Clark, were presenters. Al provided a presentation on the Freshwater Mussels of the Kishwaukee River, and Josh participated in two panel discussions: Tools of the Trade, and Deer Herd Management. We always come back with lots of useful new information. Also, we provided registration to our six most active stewards for the biennial Wild Things conference sponsored by the Chicago Wilderness organization and the Nature Conservancy. This is the premier conference of its sort in the upper Midwest. There were over 100 presentations to choose from (we could attend seven) with some of the most noteworthy authorities in their field as presenters. And this is a good way to reward our stewards who do so much to help our efforts.



Josh Clark finds a higher view to oversee the final flames of a prairie burn at Afton.



Although quite smoky, the fire at the Swanson Grove prairie reduced years of duff accumulation. We expect to find more rare plants, and perhaps animals, at this remote remnant this year. It was only partially burned to protect over-wintering insects that live only in high quality prairie remnants like this.

Al Roloff, NRM report, March 2017