

## Natural Resources Management Activities

### DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

September 2017

Primary activities for the month of September included:

- 1. End of summer season plantings.** They vary, but the first frosts in our area are usually the first or second week in October, so we plant through the first and second week of *September*. This give the plants a month or so to “root in” and avoid frost heaving during the spring freeze-thaw cycles. This year we concluded the summer planting season with projects at the Hoppe Farmstead, the South Branch Prairie, and the Swanson Grove Sedge Meadow. We also installed an erosion control planting of *Prairie Cord Grass* at the entrance of Swanson Grove, where heavy July rains cut a gully across our lane and in to the stream. Prairie Cord Grass has a dense, thick rhizomatous root system that locks the soil in place once it is established.
- 2. Seed collection.** September is a busy seed collection month. As planting activities and weed control wind down, our staff, volunteer groups, and especially our stewards become the core of our seed collection efforts. The South Branch Prairie and Afton Forest Preserves are where the bulk of our collection activities take place. The density and diversity of the prairie and wetland plant communities at these two preserves allow for a wide range of species that can be collected, and September is second only to October as to when seed is ripe. Troop 2810 has been our most continuous volunteer group, helping us for over ten years in a row now. NIU also provides a number of groups that come help us on a regular basis.
- 3. Late summer weed control.** As long as herbaceous weeds are green and growing, they are susceptible to herbicides, so we keep spraying. Canada Thistle and Giant Reed were the two most prominent targets during September. At this time of year, we are often treating re-emerged plants that come up from rhizomes, or smaller plants that we missed in previous “sweeps” through the sites, but which are now visible and prime targets. We will do a little more weed control in October, too, before we switch to “brush season” – control of *woody* invasive plants during late fall and winter.
- 4. Wildlife research.** This year’s two primary research projects, the snake monitoring and the mussel surveys, continued through September. They will wind down in October, as both groups of animals will begin to hibernate during the winter. Snakes will seek shelter below what will be the hard-frozen soil surface, and mussels pull themselves below the sand, gravel and stones at the bottom of the streams. Results of this year’s mussel research will be provided by Al Roloff and Carl von Ende later this year. The results of the research carried out by other agencies that use our preserves will be provided as it becomes available.
- 5. Annual Wetland Bank site visit.** We hosted the US Army Corps of Engineers and US EPA representatives for their annual site visit. This year they visited the Afton Wetland Bank, as well as the South Branch Prairie Wetland Reserve site. In the past, these agency representatives have recognized our wetland restorations and re-creations as very high quality, and did so again this year.



This is a live specimen of the rare and state endangered Slippershell mussel, found in Little Rock Creek during our mussel surveys in September. None of our research crew had ever before seen a live one.



A riot of September colors in the South Branch Prairie. It's even more beautiful when you're actually standing next to it.



Stewards trudge out of the prairie after a seed collection foray in nearly 90 degree temperature.



Recognize this grass? This is the extremely rare Leiberg's Panic Grass, previously known in DeKalb County from only one small prairie remnant. Now it grows at four sites in our preserves.