

Natural Resources Management Report

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

July 2015

Primary activities during the month of July included:

1. Continued weed control. While April, May and June are the months when we most concentrate on weed control, we continue herbicide application on weeds in to the month of July. We sprayed thistles at Merritt, Afton, South Branch Prairie and Prairie Oaks. Cattail were sprayed and hand-wicked at the South Branch Prairie and at Afton. Our stewards helped with hand-wicking the Cattails. The boom sprayer was used to kill weeds on and along the Peace Road Bike Trail in preparation for resurfacing the trail with new asphalt. We also treated a new exotic invader at Afton: Oriental Bittersweet. Unlike our native Bittersweet vine, this plant can behave like Kudzu, clambering in great masses over trees and shrubs until it suffocates its host plant. This is another pernicious weed we will have to watch for with great caution and concern

2. Planting. The frequent rains through mid-July, while not too great for corn or beans, made for ideal conditions to continue planting the rare or uncommon prairie and wetland plugs that we have been planting this year. We installed almost 2,000 plugs at South Branch Prairie, Afton and Prairie Oaks during July. These plants are those species that are often difficult to establish from seed, or they are plants we want to establish in order to collect seeds *from*, because the seed is expensive or hard to get. Our stewards group often helps with this task, too.

3. Orientation of our new Preserves Manager/Restoration Ecologist. Josh Clark comes to us with a broad background of parks management and restoration experience and education. He most recently worked for the DeKalb Park District, and has also been with the Kane County Forest Preserve District, the St. Charles Park District and the Oswego Park District. He was part of the 2007 seasonal crew at Nachusa Grasslands and still volunteers there on a semi-regular basis. We are pleased and enthused about Josh joining our staff.

4. Seed collection. Bulrushes, sedges and some of the early prairie species were the focus of our seed collection during the month of July. Our stewards play an especially important role in seed collection, since this collection is all done by hand, usually in areas where it is difficult or impossible to collect by machine. Some of the seed collected this month included Red Bulrush, Fox Sedge, Dudley's Rush, Great Manna Grass, Porcupine Sedge, Spiderwort, Chair-maker's Bulrush and Flat-stemmed Spike-rush. Once collected, the seed must be dried and carefully processed and stored until planting. Some of this year's harvest will be carried over to next year in preparation for the new 24 acre Wetland Bank at Afton.

5. Beaver control. As anticipated, new, young Beavers have returned to the Afton wetland pools, and have resumed cutting woody stems and building dams. This is what they do, and Afton is the ideal spot for them to do this. Unfortunately, it conflicts with the maintenance of shallow pools in which the emergent wetland plant species can thrive. If Beavers build dams and make the pools deeper, some, or all, of the emergent species die back. So, our control strategy is to continually remove their dams in order to require much more work and more materials from them, while we (1) protect the trees we

want to save with wire cages and stinky repellants, and (2) remove other available woody material within about 200 feet of the pools, which is about as far as Beavers get from the water. We will continue to make the pools into a place that is not desirable for them – too little building material and food supply. It will, of course, be an ongoing effort.

6. Preparation for stone-toe armoring of the Kishwaukee River curve at the South Branch Prairie. This armoring will help reduce the rapid erosion due to the frequently high flood surges which are the result of human activities upstream along the river. Presently this erosion flows right into Russell Woods Forest Preserve where the river contains one of the richest mussel beds in Northern Illinois. A grant from the Small Mouth Bass Alliance is helping pay for this project. We have mowed the site and the access lanes and are now ready for the trucks and excavation equipment.

7. The turtle saga. July must have been a slow news month, since the lost turtle made the local paper and a few other news outlets. It was necessary to tell everyone thanks for the good intentions, but the Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources has strict regulations about how endangered species are managed, so let's leave turtle management to the scientist and wildlife management professionals. We are glad that this episode helped increase public awareness of the plight of these rare and gentle creations.



Are those *Thistles* the stewards are planting?! Yes! The rare, beautiful and *native* Fen Thistle, *Cirsium muticum*. They are joining other rare native plants in the wetlands at Prairie Oaks Preserve.