

Natural Resources Management Report

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

November 2014

Primary activities for the month of November included:

1. Replacement of the Wetland Bank outlet structure gates. Our wetland bank has been a wonderful opportunity to not only carry out our mission to “preserve, protect and restore” district lands, but also to generate hundreds of thousands of dollars of revenue in the process. It is our obligation to maintain our wetland bank as a “high quality” wetland, meaning a diverse assemblage of native plant in a stable, natural hydrologic state. The hydrology of the site has been restored to a pre-settlement condition by raising the water table using low berms and weirs (water outlet structures).

This year it became obvious that we needed to do work on our weirs in order to maintain the restored water table. The wooden gates had bowed and we could no longer raise the pool level of the marshes to maintain the outer-most wetland hydrology – our wetland had begun to shrink. After consulting a structural engineer, we decided to replace the wooden gates with galvanized steel. Since beavers had raised the water level in 3 of the 4 pools, the replacement became a little challenging, but by the third week in November we had replaced all 4 sets of wooden gates with the steel. And, we can now control water levels in 3 inch increments. Photos of the new gates appear on the next page of this report.

2. Seed processing. We have nearly finished milling, screening and mixing this year’s seed harvest. Over sixty species have been gathered; a final tally of species, weight and value will be reported in December. We also collected, cleaned and carefully stored over 500 Butternuts from the two remaining live Butternut trees at the Shabbona preserve. Our Stewards Group and the open invitation seed harvest weekends in the fall have significantly increased our annual seed collection, and the resulting density, diversity and size of the native plant communities that we are able to restore.

3. And speaking of the Stewards... Our Stewards Group has been an extremely valuable asset to the entire range of tasks that we carry out as “ecological restoration” in our forest preserves. From planting, to seed collecting, to herbicide treatment of invasive plants, to cutting brush, our stewards have been an enthusiastic and energetic bunch. This spring they completely revamped the landscaping of native plants around the Natural Resources Center in Russell Woods, and haven’t slowed down since. During November, they cut and burned brush at Russell Woods and Wilkinson Marsh, and hulled wild Hazelnuts on one of those miserable snowy days.

4. The new Wetland bank “Instrument”. We completed and submitted the final version of the “Instrument” for the new Afton South Prairie Wetland Bank. The instrument is our proposed contract with the US Army Corps of Engineers for how we will construct, manage, maintain, monitor and report the progress of our proposed wetland bank expansion at the Afton South Prairie. This is, hopefully, the last step before approval by the Corps.



Half of a beaver dam stands behind the shiny new steel gates in the Phase 2 marsh at Afton.



Ice forms behind the new steel gates in the Phase 1 marsh. Water levels will be three to five inches deeper in this marsh during 2015 (average depth will be 10 to 13 inches).