

Natural Resources Management Activities

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

January 2015

Primary activities for the month of January included:

1. Brush removal. Winter is brush removal season in the forest preserves. The mosquitos are gone, the fragile forest floor plants are dormant under the frozen soil and the leaves have fallen from most of the woody plants, making it easier to identify the invasive species that we target for removal. During January, staff and our Stewards group focused our brush removal efforts on the northwest forest unit at Russell Woods. Because of the density of trees, hand-cutting –instead of the mechanized Brushcat – is the best option to remove Honeysuckle and Buckthorn from this woodland. Staff cuts the stems with a brush cutter or chain saw and the stewards apply herbicide to the stumps and then drag, pile and burn the brush. We average 6 to 8 stewards at our sessions during the winter; this number makes for a very efficient crew and allows us to move more rapidly through the site.

2. Frost seeding. January was a good month for continuation of winter “frost seeding”. We over-seeded several areas of sedge meadow at the Afton Wetland Bank and South Branch Prairie. A woodland seed mix was scattered on the margins and eastern segment of the central forested unit at Prairie Oaks preserve. We will continue enhancing or expanding the density and diversity of our native plant communities in our preserves until the seed runs out.

3. Streambank protection project on the Kishwaukee River at the South Branch Prairie. The Illinois Smallmouth Bass Alliance has awarded the Forest Preserve District a \$4,000 grant for streambank stabilization and habitat improvement. The project site is an eroding portion of the South branch of the Kishwaukee River as it flows past the South Branch Prairie, just before it enters Russell Woods. We are refining the details of the project, which is at a bend in the river where old concrete slabs had been dumped down the streamback in an ineffective attempt to prevent erosion. We have consulted with the local Soil and Water Conservation District and the Natural Resources Conservation Service about this project, and will incorporate state-of-the-art techniques in our restoration project. Stay tuned.

4. Wild Things Conference. Natural Resources Manager Al Roloff and eight of our Stewards attended the biennial *Wild Things* Conference that takes place at the University of Illinois Chicago every two years. The conference had over seventy sessions available, with topics ranging from subjects on backyard prairie gardens to the technical formulas for Floristic Quality Assessment. It was an extremely valuable event for all of us who attended. Staff and Stewards will meet on February 11th to share insights and information gained at the event.

5. Additional activities. Other activities during January included snow plowing, equipment maintenance, Afton South Prairie Wetland Mitigation Bank Instrument “tweaking”, and updating of management schedules, burn plans and monitoring protocols for 2015.



Morning light in winter softens the tones on Oak leaves under a 100 year-old tree.



What is this? If you guessed that it is the cambium layer under the bark of an Ash tree killed by the Emerald Ash Borer, then, you are, sadly, correct.