

Natural Resources Management Report

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

August 2015

Primary activities for the month of August included:

1. Wrapping up “weed season” invasive species control. Spot spraying and wicking of invasive species in the highest quality habitats in our preserves has been the primary invasive species control activity during August. One of our priority targets this time of the year is Phragmites, or “Giant Reed” as it is sometimes called. It is a horrific invader of our moist prairies and wetlands, sometimes sending rhizomes as far as twenty feet in a single season. This aggressive invader can be twelve feet tall and has been increasing noticeably in the roadside ditches and in our wetland plantings throughout the county. At this late time in the growing season, these perennial plants are pulling nutrients down into their root systems for over-wintering, so it is a good time to treat them with a herbicide. A very high concentration of Glyphosate (Roundup or Rodeo) is required to knock it out, often requiring more than a single application. We have begun carrying small herbicide spray bottles with us even during other activities, in the event we come across this nasty invader.

2. Planting! During August we planted rare and conservative species in habitats ranging from steep, dry gravelly slopes, to right down in the shallows and mud flats of the river. This year, two factors helped us with our season-long planting effort. First, we had several thousand uncommon, rare or “difficult” species grown from seed for us by a native plant nursery. By difficult species, we mean native species that are hard to establish in a restored or re-created plant community *by planting seeds*: either the seeds don’t typically germinate well, or don’t compete well as small seedlings, or seed is so hard to get or quite expensive. In these cases, it is not efficient to try to establish these species by planting seeds; we need to install plants to insure we have those particular species in a particular plant community. However, since these seeds all have different germination “schedules”, some were ready to plant in May, but others took additional weeks or months before they were ready to be planted in the appropriate soil and moisture habitats.

The second factor that allowed us to keep planting successfully the entire season was the extended rainy season that maintained high water tables and moist soil all summer long. It was just good luck for us that we had such a moist summer in a year where we had plants coming to us the whole season long. Sometimes things just fall into place.

3. Seed collection. Seed collection really revved up in August. While September and October are our heaviest seed collection months, August is not too far behind, especially for a number of Sedges and Bulrushes that are key components of the basic graminoid matrix of the wetlands that we are nurturing. We gathered *bushels* of some of the bulrushes. And we will need that amount and more with the large wetland and wet prairie plantings that we have scheduled over the next two years. As always, our Stewards group has been *the key* to our success in gathering large volumes of the important species that we target for collection.

4. Orientation of our new Restoration Ecologist/Preserves Manager. During August, we visited all 16 of our preserves with Josh Clark, our new Restoration Ecologist, and we had Josh join our Steward's volunteer activities as well as our natural resources inventory/monitoring team. It didn't take long to realize that Josh was an excellent choice for this position. His broad base of experience and knowledge, his work ethic and his personality have already provided useful perspectives, additional options and a new level of energy to our efforts to achieve our mission.

5. Mussel survey and inventory. We continued our annual mussel inventory, this time in the MacQueen Preserve. We identified 10 live species there, and two other species from relict shells. Each year we attempt to survey another segment of the Kishwaukee River or the medium sized streams that flow through our preserves. The South Branch of the Kishwaukee River (which is primarily in DeKalb County) is one of the richest mussel streams in Northern Illinois.



Restoration Ecologist Josh Clark helps inventory plants in a wetland with a drift of Prairie Blazing Star.



Stewards plant Water Willow (an uncommon forb, not a woody plant) in the banks of the Kish.



Our natural resources inventory team sits on the fallen log of one of the last Butternut trees at Shabbona Forest Preserve. The team found four fern species at Shabbona that day.