

Natural Resources Management Activities

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

October 2013

Primary activities for the month of October included:

1. Seed collection. October is our most productive month for seed collection. Seed collection starts in June, but the bulk of material we gather is ready in September and, especially, October. This season, we have collected over fifty species of native prairie, wetland and woodland seeds. The bulk of this seed was collected by volunteers: our stewards group, NIU organizations, Scouts and citizens-at-large. The stewards help us during the week, and our other volunteers help on the weekends.

Some seed species have already been dried and processed, but most will be completed during November. Some seeds, however, would die if they were to dry out completely before being planted. These are kept in plastic bags, refrigerated or planted soon after harvest.

What is “processing”? After the seed is cut, stripped, plucked, shaken from the plant or, like some nuts, gathered on the ground, most is allowed to dry for a period of time. We do this in paper sacks of various sizes, on screens, in tubs, or on the floor of our shed. Much of the seed still has some of the stem, seed capsule, “fruit”, or other components of the plant attached. Frequently, the seed is still in a tough capsule or cluster that must be broken apart.

In order to most efficiently sow the seeds in a mixture with other seeds from the same plant community, we often need to remove these other components. This is sometimes done by working the seed and other material through different sizes of screens. Winnowing (using moving air to separate seed from duff) is an ancient and still effective method for cleaning some seeds. The toughest seed clusters must sometimes be “stomped” or run through a mechanical mill (we use a small leaf shredder) to separate seed from duff and chaff.

The best time to plant native plant seed is the fall or early winter. Some will be used to add diversity to existing plant communities; some will be used in to expand our native plant habitats. Our volunteers will also play an important part in this activity. Next month we will report on the total number of species, volume and value of the seed collected this season.

2. Late season planting. Last year, with the drought, we did very little late season planting. This year, our volunteers and staff planted several hundred trees, shrubs and potted forbs in October. Again this year, the *Jeff's Trees* group (about fifty friends and family of the late Jeff Arnold) planted Oak saplings at the Afton preserve. Staff planted Oak trees at the Merritt and Prairie Oaks preserves. Staff also planted root divisions and potted forbs at the Prairie Oaks preserve.

3. Tours and educational programs. Two sections of students from the Conservation Biology class (BIOS 406/506) at NIU visited the Afton Preserve during this month. We discussed the principles of ecological restoration and the methods of recreating and restoring native habitats. We have hosted the NIU Conservation Biology classes since the 1990's. In December, we will meet with NIU staff from the Biological Sciences and Environmental Studies programs to discuss expansion of mutually beneficial activities between NIU and the Forest Preserve District.

4. **Wetland Bank expansion.** Terry Hannan, Al Roloff and Jeff Plapp, our consulting engineer, have continued to work with the new staff at the Rock Island District Army Corps of Engineers on our application to expand the wetland bank in to the Afton South Prairie. Significant progress was made with the posting of the public notice for the project.



NIU students gathering seed at the Afton Preserve. Professor Ken Gasser (with the circular emblem on his sweatshirt) has brought NIU biology honors students to volunteer seed collections for over 10 years.



Some of the beautiful Bottle Gentians were still blooming at Potawatomi Woods in early October.