

Natural Resources Management Activities

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

September 2013

Primary activities for the month of September included:

1. Seed collection. Seed collection swings in to high gear during September and October and becomes one of our primary activities. Why do we spend staff and volunteer time collecting seed when most species that we plant are available through commercial suppliers? In fact, we do buy much of the seed that is used to establish our larger plantings such as those we have done during the last two years at the South Branch Prairie and Prairie Oaks Preserves. But commercially available native plant seed is expensive (think of what you pay for *one-tenth of a gram* of common vegetable garden seed). Here are several good reasons for us to harvest seed ourselves, from our own preserves:

a. Cost. Even after staff costs are factored in, the seed we gather locally, by hand, is still much cheaper than seed purchased from commercial sources.

b. Community involvement. Volunteers want to help improve our preserves in some tangible way. Seed collection provides not only an enjoyable outdoor experience and an opportunity to contribute a valuable service, but is also always a part of an educational experience.

c. Ecological restoration principles call for local genotype seed, if available. Relatively intact plant communities should be restored with locally collected seed, if possible. We attempt to increase species diversity in relatively intact native plant communities by using local plant seed that is best adapted to local soils, climate and hydrology.

d. Wise use of resources. Each year, our plants produce much more seed than is needed to regenerate our plant communities and provide food for wildlife. By harvesting some of this seed as a crop for our ongoing projects, we do not waste this valuable resource, but instead use it to preserve and restore other native part communities within our holdings, which is part of our mission.

2. Continued invasive species control. Activities were primarily wicking of cattails and Giant Reed in wetlands at Afton and Prairie Oaks. This is a time-consuming method, but is the only effective method to control these two vigorous invasive plants. We will continue at the South Branch Prairie in October until the frosts begin.

3. Attendance and presentation at the Northern Illinois Mussel Roundtable. Al Roloff attended the two-day roundtable at the Smeja Foundation Site at the mouth of the Kishwaukee River, south of Rockford. Mussel experts from throughout northern and central Illinois came together to survey the Kishwaukee River and Rock River mussel populations at that site, and present findings from other sites in northern Illinois. Al provided a power-point presentation with the data and conclusions from surveys conducted at ten sites in the DeKalb County segment of the South Branch of the Kishwaukee River. Data showed that scattered mussel populations are diverse (fourteen live species) in the river north of Sycamore, where there is less channelization of the river and its tributaries.

4. Other activities in September included: A tour of Prairie Oaks for a NRCS National Review team, mowing weeds and nurse crops at Prairie Oaks, and coordination of Stewards Group activities.