

Natural Resource Management Activities

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

March 2014

Primary activities for the month of March included:

1. **The end of snow plowing season.** Hopefully. Our new snow plow came in handy this year, well into March. It is in storage now and we look forward to keeping it there for the rest of this year, although, remember the April snowstorm of 1975? Was it nine or ten inches of heavy wet snow?
2. **Wetland Bank Application.** We organized and submitted initial responses to the US Army Corps of Engineers and USEPA comments on our wetland bank application. Additional negotiations regarding site design issues are continuing.
3. **Seed stratification early in the month, seed planting late in the month.** We prepared our seed mixes while there was still snow on the soil and frost down deeper than in quite a while. As soon as the snow was mostly gone, we began scattering seed on the cold moist soil in order to continue the stratification process that we began artificially in refrigerators earlier in the winter. Much of the seed was scattered in areas where we needed to increase the density or diversity of the native plants in the particular sites.
4. **Root divisions and transplanting.** As soon as the frost had left the top few inches of soil, we began digging our spring species for division and transplanting. Each year we continue this process with species that are either difficult to establish from seed, or are species where we want to establish a certain number of plants in a particular site. Usually we do this earlier in March, but this year we were two or three weeks later because of so much snow and frost in the soil. Marsh Marigold, Sweet Flag, Shooting Stars and Turk's Cap Lilies were our first out of the soil this season. Others will follow in April.
5. **Turtle Monitoring.** In discussions with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, who released the endangered Blanding's Turtle at the Afton Wetland Bank, we learned that turtles often become active during March, even when there is ice on the surface of ponds and streams. We began our turtle monitoring in early March and will continue tracking our little reptilian friend as he awakens from hibernation and begins his spring activities. We locate the turtle before we begin our prescribed fires, just to be safe.
6. **Spring Prescribed Fires.** Our spring fires, a critical management tool for all our plant communities, began late this season. During March, we were able to burn units of the Wetland Bank at the Afton Preserve where the snow had melted from the surface and the moisture had drained away. Our hope is that we don't have too many days of temperatures in the 70's early on. This would "green up" the vegetation too soon and shorten our burn season again. The last two years have had very short burn seasons in both the spring and fall.



Stewards scattering savanna seeds at the Prairie Oaks preserve, March 26th 2014.



Prescribed fire at the Afton Wetland Bank, March 25th.