

Natural Resources Management Activities

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

June 2014

Primary activities for the month of June included:

1. **Planting.** Our spring planting wrapped up in June with 500 plugs of Prairie Dropseed grass and 200 plugs of Tussock Sedge planted at the Prairie Oaks Preserve, hundreds of mixed sedge and forb plugs at the South Branch Prairie, and several hundred Iris and other wildflowers at the Afton Wetland Bank. Also, we gathered seeds of the early blooming Purple Cress and False Mermaid at Adee's Woods and then scattered them at Prairie Oaks and Russell Woods preserves.
2. **Seed Collection.** Along the with Purple Cress and False Mermaid, we also gathered seeds of other early flowering plants and either scattered the seeds right away, or processed them for planting in various restoration sites later in the season. Swamp Saxifrage, Marsh Marigold and eight species of sedges were gathered by staff and stewards during our June seed collections.
3. **The Blanding's Turtle experiment.** On June 23rd, staff and scientists from NIU captured the endangered Blanding's turtle (who was introduced last July into the Afton Wetland Bank by the Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources as an experiment) in order to replace the radio transmitter attached to his shell. Within a few days after his release back into the marshes at Afton, the signal had disappeared completely and the turtle was not re-located during the remainder of June. *See the Natural Resources Management Activities Report for July to learn the happy resolution to this quandary.*
4. **Invasive species control.** June is a busy month for invasive species control using herbicides. We do "clean-up" on the areas where we have earlier sprayed Reed Canary Grass, and then we focus on Canada Thistle, Nodding Thistle, Giant Reed, and Cattail. Depending on the severity of the infestation and the surrounding vegetation, we may treat these "weeds" with a boom or wand sprayer, a back-pack sprayer, a wick or a glove soaked in herbicide. This is a labor intensive activity no matter how we do it. Luckily, our stewards and interns were available to help this month.
5. **Education and tours.** During June we provided a tour of the South Branch Prairie for a watershed planning group sponsored by the DeKalb County Community Foundation and the local Soil and Water Conservation office. The South Branch Prairie is a good example of what can be accomplished with the Wetland Reserve Program: soil conservation, flood water storage, wildlife habitat as well as education and recreational opportunities. The DeKalb Kiwanis Club

also visited the Hoppe Preserve and South Branch Prairie for a tour of the Miller Elwood cabin and the prairie/wetland complex. On June 10th, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) held a nationwide training for wetland delineation at the South Branch Prairie. The soils, plant diversity and varying soil saturation make this an ideal site for this kind of training. The NRCS was grateful for the assistance we provided their trainers and trainees regarding the plant species at the site and, as a result of the positive discussion among NRCS conservationists and trainers who attended the program, a similar state-wide training has been scheduled there for July.



Swamp Lousewort (*Pedicularis lanceolata*) is a rare, semi-parasitic plant of fens, seeps and sedge meadows. It is one of over 70 wetland species that grow in the rich alluvial soils of the South Branch Prairie.

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July 2014

Primary activities for the month of July included:

Invasive species (weed) control. During July we continued our invasive species control efforts with additional herbicide applications and mowing. Canada Thistle, Sweet Clover, Giant Reed and Cattail were our primary targets this month. Tall Goldenrod, a native plant of prairies, has become an invasive pest, as well. With all the rain we had in June, the weeds were able to flourish in the month of July. In areas with significant invasive infestations, we sprayed the patches and plan to over-seed in the fall to maintain species diversity. When we mow, we monitor the re-emerging vegetation and try to spot-spray just the invasive pests, if possible. In areas where we have primarily desirable native species, we carefully spot spray or use a wick or glove on the weeds. Invasive species control is a critical element of ecological restoration, particularly during the early establishment stages, but we must be continually vigilant and persistent in all our high priority areas.

Stewards' activities. During July our stewards group helped us collect seed at Afton, the South Branch Prairie and Prairie Oaks. We gathered Bicknell's sedge, Red Bulrush and Spiderwort at Afton, Great Bulrush at South Branch Prairie, and Porcupine Sedge and Brown Fox Sedge at Prairie Oaks. All of these species will be planted this fall in our wetland and prairie areas to increase density and/or diversity of native plants in our preserves.

Education and Tours. The biologist for the NRCS in northern Illinois, Ellen Starr, organized a wetland training program for soil conservationists and soil scientists at the South Branch Prairie that took place on July 30. A dozen of their staff members joined Al Roloff and our intern Alyse Olson to explore and learn the various plant communities and plant species that have been developed and planted there. The NRCS played a significant role in assisting DeKalb County to acquire the land and establish the four plant communities on the site. We were able to help them distinguish the marsh, sedge meadow, wet prairie and mesic prairie components of the site, and identify individual plant species. With only two and a half growing seasons, the South Branch Prairie is a very rich and diverse complex of plants and plant communities, and has attracted the attention of various agencies and organizations that have an interest in restoring or preserving lands that help provide flood water storage, soil conservation, aquifer recharge, wildlife habitat, recreational and educational opportunities.

The Blanding's Turtle. After driving a number of country roads and checking downstream all the way to Hinckley, we were still unable to locate the Blanding's Turtle (using radio telemetry) for almost a month. Al Roloff has some contacts with a crop dusting company and, as a last-ditch effort, suggested trying to track the turtle from the air in a helicopter or airplane. Dan Ludwig, our Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) regional biologist (who brought us the turtle) decided to first contact the Cook County

Forest Preserve District, which has a pilot who does that occasionally. Dan convinced the Cook County pilot to swing out over DeKalb County the next time they went up, and sure enough, they found the turtle! He had gone two miles through cornfields and found a farm pond near Perry Road that seems to have provided a suitable temporary home. The IDNR will determine what to do with him after consulting their scientists. He is unlikely to stay in any one location without female Blanding's Turtles. IDNR and the state Endangered Species Board has been discussing the possible introduction of two hand-reared female turtles to Afton. We will keep you updated.



The Blanding's Turtle just after his re-capture for replacement of the telemetry transmitter that had been epoxied to his shell (just barely visible toward the top rear of his shell) for a year. The jaw structure on this species makes it appear that they are always smiling. A key identification characteristic is the bright yellow chin and throat. This turtle could be up to 80 years old!