

Natural Resources Management Activities

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

March 2015

Primary activities for the month of March included:

1. **Snowplowing.** This year, March *did* come in like a lion and go out like a lamb. Heavy snow in February accumulated throughout the month with almost a foot remaining by March first. Snowfall during that first week in March added to the accumulation on the ground and required additional plowing to keep the lanes, parking lots and trail heads clear. Then, in the second week, a warm spell quickly melted nearly all the snow and suddenly....
2. **Prescribed fire season began.** By the third week in March, the snow was gone and the lack of rain allowed us to proceed with our controlled fires. We burned fourteen units in four preserves (Afton, Macqueen, Potawatomie Woods and Hoppe) for a total of 64.3 acres. Why do we burn? Fire was *the* critical element in establishing and maintaining the prairies and savannas of the Midwest, and was even important in the maintenance of healthy forests and wetlands. Just like in many of the earth's other vast grasslands, humans started most of the annual prairie fires here in the Midwest. Why did the *Native Americans* intentionally set these fires? Annual burning, mostly in the fall, permitted easier passage through the tall prairie grasslands; it protected their villages from fire started by other villages or bands and it concentrated game in the river valleys and groves for easier hunting during the winter, when plant foods were less available.
3. **Brush cutting.** During March, we cut stands of Sandbar Willow, an invasive species, in an area of the Afton Forest Preserve that will be planted during April with a more diverse mix of trees and shrubs that like to have their roots in moist soil. This area will be a component of our forested wetland, an important part of our wetland bank.
4. **Stewards' activities:** Several of our stewards attended a frog monitoring workshop to learn the calls of these declining amphibians. Monitoring the species and distribution of frogs helps us determine the extent of their decline, and may help determine methods to slow it. Also during March, stewards used the telemetry equipment to confirm the current location of the endangered Blanding's Turtle, and they scattered the last of the wetland seed that had been stratified earlier this winter.
5. **Winter tree ID presentation.** As part of the Maple Syrup Festival at Russell Woods, Al Roloff hosted a winter tree identification activity. While perhaps a little more complex than identification based on leaf and flower structure, all the native trees can be successfully identified in winter with a little patience, a keen eye and a good field guide or two. Al is preparing a woody plant identification "key" for DeKalb County, which will be available by autumn of this year.
6. **Additional activities** included final frost seeding, equipment maintenance, and scheduling and coordination of four volunteer sessions for April plantings.



Flames remove the duff and burn off invasive shrubs in the prairie north of the Lily Pad pool at Afton.



Sand Hill Cranes migrate over the flames and smoke at an Afton prescribed fire.



A patchy, but effective burn meandered through the wetland mitigation bank at the Afton Preserve.



Terry Hannan ignites a leaf-litter burn through the rich woodlands at the MacQueen Preserve.