

Natural Resources Management Activities

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

December 2014

Primary activities for the month of December included:

1. Completion of 2014 collected seed processing and inventory. The last of the seed (that was collected in our preserves this year) was processed and a complete inventory was made. A total of 84 species of prairie, woodland and wetland plant seeds were harvested. Almost 130 pounds were processed, with a retail value of \$22,060 if we had purchased this seed from one of our regular seed supply nurseries. See the attached spread sheet.

This is a new record for number of species, weight, and value. While we have had the help of citizen volunteers for our weekend seed collection work-days for a number of years, the last two years have provided a significant increase – due to the effort of our **Stewards Group**. Every week, six to ten stewards join us on Wednesday mornings for a few hours of ecological education and restoration, and in the fall, this is primarily seed collection.

2. Winter seeding. (Yes, planting seed in the winter). We use this seed (above) in new plantings in the fall, or, during the winter, for over-seeding in established plant communities. Over-seeding (or frost seeding, as it is sometimes called when carried out in the winter) is the process of adding additional seed to previously seeded areas or to native plant community remnants that are deemed to need increased *density, diversity or nativity* (native versus non-native plants) in certain areas. This method mimics the natural seeding process of seeds falling from seed capsules on plants during the fall and winter, and then settling into the soil by the action of snow, rain and freeze/thaw cycles. Most native plant seeds need a few months of these conditions to break dormancy in order to germinate in the spring or early summer.

During December, we (stewards and/or staff) over-seeded the 5-acre Southeast Savanna Unit at the Prairie Oaks Forest Preserve. We planted three wetland units, about 4 acres total, in the Afton Wetland Bank, and about 3 acres in the sedge meadow units at the South Branch Prairie. This is all done by hand-scattering seed mixed with a carrier (we use sawdust) while walking back and forth in designated areas. We will continue this process in January as the weather permits and supplies last.

3. Brush removal. The removal of native and non-native invasive brush and small trees is a primary winter activity in our preserves. December was just about perfect for this kind of work, with no snow but frozen soil surfaces. We use two primary methods: (1) a bobcat mounted rotary mower, our “Brush-cat” in open areas, like our prairies, and (2) in tighter quarters in the woodlands, hand-held brush-cutters are operated by staff, with stewards dragging, piling and burning the brush. Honesuckle, Multiflora Rose and Buckthorn are our primary targets in the woodlands. Honesuckle, Autumn Olive and Mulberry are the main culprits in the prairies. We will continue brush removal in our highest priority units until burn season begins in March or early April.