

Natural Resources Management Report

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

May 2015

May is the month during which we finish the majority of our spring planting and swing in to high gear with our weed control. Primary activities for the month of May included:

1. Planting. Our stewards group and staff planted trees, shrubs, pots and plugs of sedges, forbs and rushes, and a rich seed mixture of uncommon and rare sedges and forbs of sedge meadow species. The trees and shrubs were planted in Russell Woods along the slope between the Kishwaukee River and the lane. Some were also planted at Prairie Oaks in the woodland where we removed invasive and weedy trees two years ago. Most of the potted plants, which were dug and divided back in March and early April, were planted in the prairie, wet prairie and sedge meadow at the South Branch Prairie at the Hoppe Preserve. The plugs were nursery-grown for us from seed we collected last fall. These were planted in at the Afton Wetland Bank, South Branch Prairie, and Prairie Oaks wetlands. The seed mixture, which had been stratifying in damp vermiculite since January, was planted in the South Branch Prairie by our stewards using the “scratch and step” method, in which they scratch up the soil with a rake in a thinly vegetated area, scatter the stratified seed and then step the seed into the soil for good seed/soil contact. Some of these seeds are already germinating.

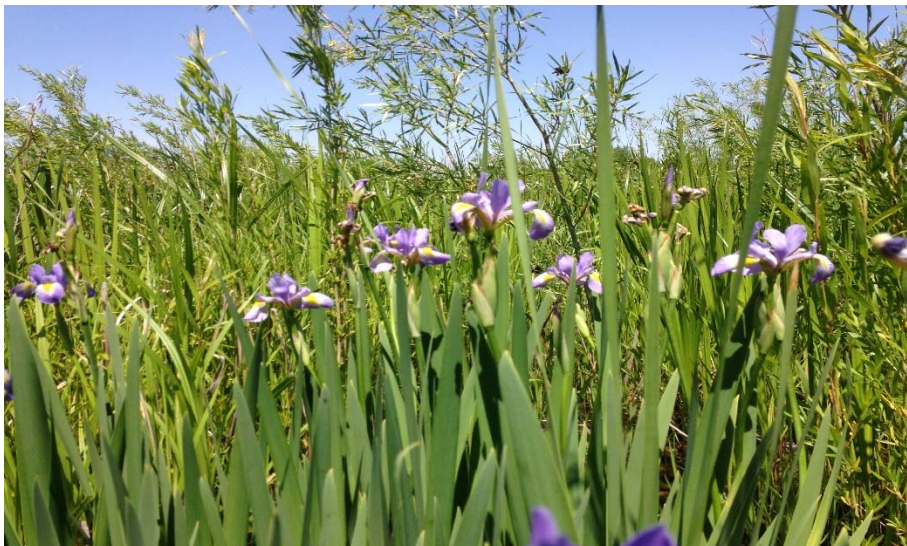
2. Weed control. Weed control during May is focused primarily on the pernicious Reed Canary Grass, an aggressive hybrid of native and non-native strains of the same species, *Phalaris arundinacea*. It forms vast stands in wetlands and increasingly, in upland areas, too. This year we have had contractors apply herbicides to this plant in large infestations at Afton and Merritt Preserves. Our staff has treated other infestations in these preserves and several others. We begin these treatments during May, and continue through the entire growing season, as needed. Also in May, we begin herbicide application on Canada Thistle, a federally designated noxious weed, in efforts to kill these plants before they flower and produce seed. Each site, and the various species of weeds (invasive and exotic species), require knowledgeable and thoughtful consideration of how we will control each infestation. At this point in time, herbicides are still the most effective and efficient method for control of most of the weeds we attempt to remove from our preserves.

3. Stewards activities. As mentioned above, our stewards group has been especially active this spring. Along with all the planting they did during May, some of the stewards assist each week with our formal inventory and monitoring of plants within our preserves. During May we conducted formal inventories at the Great Western Nature Trail, Potawatomie Woods, Chief Shabbona, and Prairie Oaks fen and woodland.

4. Tours and education. During May we hosted the *Wild Ones*, an organization dedicated to the use of more native plants in urban landscapes. Our tour and discussion took place at the wetlands at the South Branch Prairie on the Hoppe Preserve. A number of the participants were botanically knowledgeable and were enthused about the diversity of native species throughout the various plant community plantings at the site.



This lovely little flower is *Cardamine Jamesii*, Purple Spring Cress, known in our preserves only from Adee's Woods. It may bloom as early as the end of March up until early May, but whenever it happens, it is all at once, for only about a week, then the plant completely disappears until next year. We have gathered seeds of this species and scattered them in two other preserves that have the appropriate habitat. We do this with some of our other uncommon and rare species in order to expand the diversity of the preserves, and to preserve the local genotype in the event something happens to the population at the single site where this plant occurs.



Wild Iris present their strikingly beautiful and aromatic blooms to accent a clear blue sky at the Afton Wetland Bank during their May bloom period. The original seed for these plants came from the Potawatomie Woods sedge meadow.