

Natural Resources Management Report

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

November 2016

Primary activities for the month of November included:

1. Fall burns and preparation for spring burns. Prescribed fire is a critical component for establishment and maintenance of native plant communities in the upper Midwest. Most of our fires are in the spring, but we burn as much as we can in the variable conditions that we encounter each fall. This year, even with more sun than usual, the hard frosts and sub-freezing temperatures *were almost a month later than usual*, making fall burns smoky and more difficult. But we did get a few done; our largest was 4.25 acres at the central knoll at the Afton Wetland Bank. We also burned 1.5 acres of woodland, 1.1 acres of wetland and .25 acre of mesic prairie at the Swanson Grove site. Every acre we burn in the fall saves us that much time and effort next spring.

2. Brush control. Once the mosquitoes are gone and most of the leaves have fallen, brush control season kicks in. We started in October by cutting the fire breaks in the new areas at the Prairie Oaks "Swanson Grove" site, and we continued in November by removing invasive brush under the huge Oaks just in from the fire breaks. By the end of the month, we had nearly all of the invasive brush cut out of the western savanna area and ready to be stacked in to piles for burning later in the winter. As the winter progresses, we will move our efforts (and our heavy machinery) to other preserves to continue the process. Contractors with even heavier equipment will remove brush and invasive *trees* from parts of the South Branch Prairie, the Great Western Trail, and the Sycamore Forest Preserve later this winter.

3. Seed processing and inventory. Our seed collection is finished for this year, it has all been dried and much of it has been processed and inventoried. We expect to complete the entire seed inventory in the first week or two of December. Once this is done, we can determine how much additional seed we need to purchase in order to finish our fall/winter seed planting projects.

4. Planting. Fall and winter are the best time to plant native perennial plant seeds. In fact, one of our greatest successes, as far as early establishment of a native plant community, was planted with a drop seeder last January in the middle of the winter, on frozen soil with two inches of snow.

Since we *did* finish processing and inventory for all of our *woodland* seed this month, we began planting that. We had forty species of woodland and savanna seeds that were combined in to two slightly different mixes. The first mix was used to plant seven acres of the western Oak savanna woodland at Swanson Grove. This seeding was hand-scattered by our stewards group and student volunteers from the NIU Biological Sciences department. The other mix will be used to plant the northwest forest of the Sannauk Preserve where, during the last five years, we lost all of the Ash trees (half of the over-story trees) to the Emerald Ash Borers.

5. Preparation and coordination for repairs at the wetland bank. If you have visited the Afton preserve recently, you likely noticed that the marsh pools are significantly smaller. We drew down the standing water to repair eroded berms and weirs. We need a lower water table in order to carry out our repairs. Lower water levels also allow us to control pests and plant seed in mud flats that are normally under water. These pools and water table will be restored after spring repairs are complete.



Restoration ecologist Josh Clark lights a fire line in the Afton wetland bank November 15th.



The draw-down of water levels in the marsh pools will allow seeding in the mud flats. Our goal is to have emergent species growing up through the water surface in most of the pool area: a true marsh.