

Natural Resources Management Activities

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

May 2016

Primary activities for the month of May included:

1. Planting. It is during May that our planting of plugs and potted material, such as grasses, sedges and forbs, really kicks in to high gear. By the end of May we had planted nearly 1,000 plants including 100 *Prairie Indian Plantains* that we raised in plots for root divisions. These plantains are rare plants that don't produce much fertile seed, but each season their roots produce several additional sprouts that will detach readily from the main root, making it easy to divide them in to individual plants. So, earlier this spring, as soon as the frost was out of the soil, we dug their roots, divided them and potted them in quart and gallon pots. By mid-May these root divisions had filled the pots, and their leaves and stems were sprouted six or eight inches out of the potting soil. We planted these 100 gems in the wet prairie soil at the South Branch Prairie, but we always save some to replant in our beds so that we maintain a source for future divisions.

2. Weed control. During May, our weed control season overlaps the planting season. The best time to spray many of the worst invasive species is May, when their leaves, stems and buds are still young and tender. Reed Canary Grass (RCG) is one of the worst invaders of our wetland areas; Canada Thistle and Sweet Clover are two of the primary targets in the more upland areas. This year we have four seasonal employees helping us with our spraying, which is mostly done with backpack sprayers. With all this good help, we have been able to complete our first "sweeps" for RCG and Thistles at the Afton Wetland Bank and the South Branch Prairie earlier than ever. Weed control will continue at these sites and others during the growing season as conditions and infestations require.

3. Seed collection. It might seem pretty early (it actually was a little early this year) but seed collection *started in May* this year! We collected the seeds of Purple Spring Cress and False Mermaid on May 16th and Marsh Marigold on May 31st. These early flowering plants can be challenging to collect because they ripen and seeds fall so quickly that we have to watch carefully or we miss our chance. Also, some of these seeds need to be sown again quickly or they lose viability if they dry out too much. As I write this report (June 9th) we have now collected 14 species of seed, mostly sedges, which are the critical components of our wetland plantings. We will need lots and lots of these seeds for the new wetland bank that will be constructed next year.

4. Stewards. Our stewards group had another busy month: they spruced up and re-mulched the landscape (which they designed and installed) at the Resource Center in Russell Woods, they planted rare *Cacalias* in the wet prairie on one day and then sedges and uncommon forbs on another day in the South Branch Prairie, and they removed Poison Parsnip at the Afton Prairie with our new "parsnip predator" tools. We average six to ten stewards each Wednesday morning, sometimes a dozen. Two of our stewards also help with our plant inventory efforts on Thursday mornings. These folks have become just a tremendous, knowledgeable and reliable resource every Wednesday over the last four years.

5. Education and presentations. On May 2nd, Al Roloff presented the wetland and woodland courses (at the South Branch Prairie and at Russell Woods) for the University of Illinois Extension's Master Naturalist Training program. Also early in May, Al did a presentation about the Miller-Elwood cabin and the South

Branch Prairie to the DeKalb County Retired Teachers Association. Later in the month, Al lead a tour and seed planting activity for 40 students from Chicago's Kelly High School.

On May 19th, Al presented a program for 24 staff members of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS, a component of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture) on the South Branch Prairie Wetland Reserve Program Project, which has been recognized as a high quality "success story" among the NRCS partnership projects. He discussed the planning and implementation of the project, the ongoing monitoring and maintenance activities, and the benefits of partnerships like this between a local and federal agency. This is the second time in three years that the NRCS has asked our Forest Preserve District to provide the site and training for one of their national training events.



Just in time for Mother's Day weekend tours, our Stewards Group planted, mulched and cleaned up their landscape project around the Natural Resources Center at the Russell Woods Preserve. The stewards helped grow many of the plants that were installed by them around the building.



Here is a bed of the rare Indian Plantain plants that were planted in a wet prairie by our stewards at the South Branch Prairie during the month of May.



Students from Kelly High School in Chicago tour the marshes and prairies at Afton.



The streambank stabilization at the Kishwaukee River project in the South Branch Prairie is stable and greening up despite the high water and flooding all month long.



Wild Iris bloom on the edge of the marsh in the South Branch Prairie in late May.