

Natural Resources Management Report

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

February 2016

Primary activities for the month of February included:

1. Continued removal of invasive brush. As a result of the reduced snow cover and warmer temperatures, the winter of 2015 and 2016 has been a very good season for brush removal. During February, we returned to the Great Western Nature Trail to complete the brush removal work at the Larson Road Prairie. This site is our highest quality remnant of native prairie plants. It has been a good source of local genotype seed for our best restoration projects. By removing the brush that has been out-competing the prairie species, we give these uncommon and rare prairie plants a better chance to thrive and produce more seed.

On the areas of the trail that were accessible by machine, we used the BrushCat mower. The BrushCat is a tracked Bobcat loader with an attached mower, something like a giant lawnmower deck, which is designed to cut and shred woody plant stems and trunks up to four inches in diameter. It is a tremendous work-saver because we don't have to bend over to cut brush by hand, and we don't need to haul and burn (or chip) the trunks and branches. Only in the ditches, between trees or along the slopes do we still have to use the hand held saws and our backs.

We also did more brush removal at Afton in the Bicentennial Woods, the low areas south of Bicentennial Woods and in the former tree nursery near the maintenance buildings. Josh Clark mowed brush in much of the western prairies at the Merritt Preserve, removing lots of Honeysuckle and Mulberry shrubs.

2. Continued "frost" seeding. While we completed our big 30 acre planting at the Sycamore Forest Preserve last month, we still had seeding to complete by hand in smaller areas in several other preserves. The remaining snowfalls and spring rains will work this seed in to the soil and will allow it to germinate on "Mother Nature's" schedule when the soil warms later in the spring and early summer. In the South Branch Prairie, we scattered seed in wet prairie areas that needed more diversity and density. We hand-scattered seed in the small patches in the Afton Wetland Bank where we had sprayed out Sweet Clover and Canada Thistle last summer. And we scattered seed in a sedge meadow restoration area on the east bank of Haines Creek at the Prairie Oaks Forest Preserve.

3. Stewards' activities. Our stewards' group remained active during the month of February by dragging brush and burning brush piles on days when the weather was decent. Everyone seems to enjoy the fires; see the attached photos. On those days that were inclement, they worked in the remodeled shop at Afton, building birdhouses and propagation trays for growing seedlings. These will be planted in specific restoration sites later in the season. Access to the remodeled shop has been a great advantage for our stewards in the winter when the weather is not conducive to working outside.

4. Illinois Association of Conservation Districts (IACD) Conference. Al Roloff and Josh Clark attended this conference whose members are made up of the smaller conservation and forest preserves. It was a very worthwhile event and addressed topics such as partnering with other organizations, next

generation science standards, tools of the trade, using volunteers, managing invasive species, monitoring threatened and endangered species, prescribed fire and a host of others.

5. Other activities included developing a plan with the *Openlands* staff for assessing quality of headwaters streams, equipment maintenance, Floristic Quality Assessments, and snowplowing.



Stewards burn a large brush pile at the former nursery site in the Afton Preserve.



The BrushCat blades shatter stems, causing the root crown to desiccate in the winter air, and die.



Stewards construct propagation trays for growing uncommon native plants.



A bucket of seed sits ready to be scattered at the Afton Wetland Bank.