

Natural Resources Management Report

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

September 2016

Primary activities for the month of September included:

- 1. End of season plantings.** The first two weeks of September are generally the end of the planting season for herbaceous plants. This gives them a few weeks before the first frosts to “root in” and avoid frost heaving during the winter and spring. Our stewards helped us plant uncommon sedge meadow species at the new Swanson Grove component of the Prairie Oaks Preserve, and staff planted others at the north marsh edges of the South Branch Prairie. Our remaining tree and shrub stock will be planted in October by the “Jeff’s Trees” group of volunteers.
- 2. Seed collection.** September is one of our busiest seed collection months, with our stewards group doing the bulk of the collecting. We also had help from the NIU Biology Honors Students, a Boy Scout troop, and Kishwaukee College students. While rain chased us out of the prairie a time or two, we were able to collect prairie, woodland and wetland seed in the Afton Preserve, The Russell Woods Preserve, the MacQueen Preserve, and the South Branch Prairie. Our seed collection usually peaks in October.
- 3. Firebreaks and trail construction.** We made good use of our BrushCat mower and our chain saws to clear fire breaks and trails at the new Swanson Grove site. We hope to have other fire breaks cleared in preparation for fall burns in some of our preserves. Fall burns are always a challenge because after the leaves fall and the grass dries out comes... *November*... a damp and dreary month for burning.
- 4. Late season weed control.** While we did more weed control spraying this summer than ever before (thanks to our intrepid interns) the weeds, and the Thistles in particular, keep trying to come back to life. A late season spray is often particularly effective because the perennial weeds are pulling nutrients (and herbicides, too!) in to their root systems for overwintering and spring emergence.
- 5. Wetland Bank site visit.** The annual site visit and assessment by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency took place in September again this year. We provided a tour for the site visit team, and discussed the on-going management practices and planned repairs for the upcoming year. We routinely get good feedback from our team about our wetland bank. This year, the team also visited the South Branch Prairie, which has become an example of how to establish multiple wetland plant communities in formerly farmed flood plains.
- 6. Preparation for fall/winter seeding.** We have learned that the best time to plant native perennial plant seeds is during the fall or winter, just like Mother Nature does. We have also learned that it is important to plant in to sites that have had the weeds and the weed seed bank removed, over a period of years, if possible. So we have done just that, and have now, this month, tilled several sites at the South Branch Prairie and at the Prairie Oaks Preserve in preparation for late fall or winter planting.
- 7. Consultation/education.** We provided a tour and information for staff from the Byron Forest Preserve District regarding wetland restoration, and we did an educational program about freshwater mussels for the advanced biology class at Sycamore High School.



A *Plain Pocketbook*, one of ten mussel species that Sycamore H.S. students found during their training.



Forest Preserve staff Josh Clark and BrushCat mower tears into weedy brush under an Oak at the Swanson Grove oak savanna.