

Natural Resources Management Activities

DeKalb County Forest Preserve District

March 2017

Primary activities for the month of March included:

1. Prescribed fire. While we were able to do some prescribed fires (about 20 acres) for the first time in February this year, March saw the bulk of our burns this season. We carried out prescribed fires in nine units, in four different preserves, for a total of 58.3 acres so far this year. Our seasoned crew and improved equipment made this an uneventful (always a good thing!) month for burning our prairies and woodlands. Stewards participated in some burns as fire-line scouts and mop-up crew. Some got a chance to practice ignition with a burn torch.

In all of our resource management tours and educational programs, we make the point that fire is an essential tool for shaping the native plant communities in the upper Midwest. Fire created the prairies and savannas of the upper Midwest, and was responsible for maintaining the lush grasslands that created the rich black soil that is the basis of our local agricultural economy. These fires were nearly all set intentionally by the Native Americans who used fire as a tool to manage the plants and animals of the Midwest to their advantage. And so we do, too.

2. Wrapping up brush season. The use of our Bobcat mounted brush cutting equipment gets tricky when the soil thaws, which happened in *February* this year, but we kept up our efforts as best we could and cleared more woody invasive plants, especially at the Afton preserve. More effort went in to removing parts of the old nursery just east of the maintenance buildings, much of it done with chain saws and pole pruners, with brush pile burning by our stewards and staff.

3. Digging, preparation and potting of early season rootstocks. Once the frost is out of the soil, our stewards jump in with many hands to help us dig, divide, clean and pot root divisions of uncommon plants that we can best establish from divisions, rather than seed. Last year we grew four species of Blazing Star species (*Liatris*) in beds. This month, we dug, cleaned, trimmed and then refrigerated these corms until we are ready to have them planted by the stewards and other volunteers in April.

4. Intern interviews. Interns are an integral part of our summer staff. These are students, usually from NIU, who are studying Biology, Environmental Sciences, Geography or other related fields who come as motivated and educated workers who help with our summer tasks. And, they learn a lot from us.

5. Miscellaneous tasks. During March we worked with our engineering contractor to refine some of the last details regarding the reconstruction of the wetland bank weirs. Scott Brown from Wendler Engineering is our contact person and has been quite attentive to details and the requirements of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers standards for wetland banks. Also in March, we worked out the elements of the contract for invasive species control that will be carried out in three of our preserves this year by Catalpa Grove Restoration Services. Al Roloff presented a program to high school students competing in the annual Envirothon sponsored by the state Soil and Water and Extension Services. Al and Terry Hannan organized the "Photos and Foam" presentation at Blumen Gardens by steward and photographer Tom Robbins. Tom displayed and discussed some of his beautiful photos of forest preserves in DeKalb County.



Stewards Julia Fauci, Karen Matz, EmmyLou Studier and Jan Grainger trim the corms of Blazing Stars.



A Sandhill Crane treads softly and quietly through the marsh at the South Branch Prairie during migration. These birds can be four to five feet tall. We hope that some decide to stay and nest.