

April and May 2017. Maintenance and safety checks of buildings and grounds, seasonal mowing, firewood cutting, splitting and stacking, storm clean-up, shelter house and toilet cleaning, litter pick-up and disposal, road grading, trail maintenance, equipment maintenance, scheduling shelter rentals and collecting shelter and camping fees, drinking water sampling . Shelter houses and Lodge are used every weekend by scouts, families and other groups. Natural Resource Center Educational Staff teaching school groups at Russell Woods and making classroom visits. PDRMA Risk Management and Loss Control review and preserve safety in progress for 2016 compliance.

Eagle Scout Project for Boy Scout Tyler Clark at Afton Forest Preserve. Tyler, Scouts and Families planted 40 trees and shrubs along Crego Rd. This project was the first step in re-vegetating the area along Crego Rd where non - native invasive shrubs were removed this winter.



Tyler Clark Tree Planting Eagle Scout Project at Afton.



Sandwich Peaceful Child Montessori School Day Camps at Sannauk Forest Preserve





On Earth Day, April 22nd, the Sycamore Lions performed their 22nd Annual Great Western Trail Clean-Up. 40 garbage bags of trash were gathered by the Lions and their helpers. Once completed, the DeKalb County Forest Preserve picked up and disposed of the trash. 12 members, one honorary member and 5 other Lion family members completed the job by noon. Pictured: in front - Honorary Lion Liam Berry, in back from left Lions Tony Sgarlata, Chuck Bergsmith, Duane Schoeder, Bill Gulke, Jerry Schultz, Pete Springmire, Joe Woodward, Ed Kuhn, Kevin Berry. Missing from photo are Lions Chuck Christensen, Ryan Genz, Aaron Gerdes and other Lion family member helpers. The Lions welcome help on this annual clean-up. Watch the papers next Spring for the date of the clean-up. And please, deposit all trash in the proper containers!

Best Regards,

Lion Ed Kuhn



Also....donated by the Sycamore Lions
a picnic shelter at
Sycamore Forest Preserve

April 2017-Completed Project List-Josh Clark & FP Staff

Central and Southern Preserves and Natural Resource Management

1. Switched over from fire season to weed season. Cleaned and stored fire equipment. Prepared backpack sprayers, boom sprayer for season. Inventoried herbicide and purchased new to replenish stock.
2. Water and electric lines were run to greenhouse/propagation area. Contractors brought in machines to level out the site and then added gravel to give a firm base. We hope to have the greenhouse installed by early June.
3. Began spraying reed canary grass in the wetland bank at Afton. This invasive grass is prevalent and difficult to eradicate.
4. Continued cleanup of park areas at Afton Forest Preserve.
5. Replaced damage signs at southern preserves.
6. Interviewed NREC internship candidates.
7. Replaced old gate and installed new information sign at parking lot #3 Afton.
8. Staff started mowing grass.
9. Added gravel and graded Merritt Prairie parking lot.

May 2017-Completed Project List-Josh Clark and FP Staff

Central and Southern Preserves Maintenance and Natural Resource Management

1. Stewards and Natural Resource staff rescued plants from Hopkins Park in DeKalb. This area is being developed for a sled hill and we were able to save some of the plants and move them to Swanson Grove to increase the density and diversity of the flora in the savanna there.
2. Continued spring weed control.
3. Built and installed screen doors on the shelters at Shabbona Forest Preserve.
4. Continued with the finishing touches on the greenhouse/propagation area at Afton. Grading and adding mulch as needed.
5. Fixed erosion on slopes of the compensatory storage area at Sycamore Forest Preserve by adding grass seed and erosion control mat.
6. Planted 2 Sycamore trees at Sycamore Forest Preserve near memorial bench.
7. Set up and coordinated d
8. Interns started working with us on May 15th.
9. Collected first seed of the year. Marsh Marigold, Jacobs Ladder, and Dutchman's Britches.

Cleaned up storm damage. Down trees at Afton and County Farm Woods

Projects April – May 2017

Bill Prain and FP staffNorthern Preserves

- Deadfall removal along trails, lanes and open areas
- road, shoulder and parking area stabilization and repair at Prairie Oaks, Potawatomi Woods, Russell Woods and Nehring
- Flood damage cleanup and repair at Potawatomi Woods
- Russell Woods bridge repairs
- Reactivate power equipment
- Pollinator display project construction
- Sycamore Forest Preserve road gate construction and contractor cleanup
- General supply and equipment organization
- Maintenance shed electrical repairs
- Administrative Priorities as called for (materials and supply ordering, pick up and delivery)
- Safety investigation reporting and training
- Skid loader repairs and maintenance
- Russell Woods Outhouse finish trim
- Sledding hill cleanup

Sycamore resident and forest preserve visitor /photographer Chuck Christensen took these Spring bird photos at Russell Woods and Prairie Oaks forest preserves



Above : Immature bald Eagle at Prairie Oaks
Below: Adult Bald Eagle at Russell Woods
..... by Chuck Christensen



Adventure Works completed a volunteer project at Afton and pictured is one of their team building exercises



Annual April "Russell Hustle" Run / Walk at Russell Woods

A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DEKALB COUNTY FOREST PRESERVES

JANUARY 2017

The mission of the DeKalb County Forest Preserve District is to acquire lands in order to preserve, protect, restore and restock the flora, the fauna and the natural beauties of such lands, in their natural state and condition, for the education and recreation of our citizens.

The following short paragraphs are an attempt to express a few of the details and a bit of the essence of the various DeKalb County Forest Preserves. We live in a thriving agricultural community that was, 160 years ago, an ocean of grass, with scattered islands of woods. These preserves serve as small living museums that give us the opportunity to study and reflect on the past, add serenity and beauty to our present, and plan thoughtfully for the future.

Adee's Woods: Even though it sits on a bluff 35 feet above Owens Creek, Adee's Woods is a rather moist 10-acre forested preserve. A single picnic table beckons anyone who enters the parking lot. In addition to some very large old oak trees, it contains a number of uncommon plants, especially spring flora including ferns, sedges and woodland forbs. Grazed in the distant past, but never row-crop farmed, a single trail winds south to the bluff overlooking the picturesque creek. Donated by the Adee family.

Afton Preserve: Afton, DeKalb County's largest forest preserve (316 acres), acquired as a worn-out farm in 1973, was developed as a forest preserve during the 1970's and 1980's. Since 1988, about 212 acres have been converted back to native plant communities - prairies, wetlands and woodlands. The 104 acres not in native plant communities offer many park-like features: lots of mowed open green space, evergreen and hardwood tree landscapes, a playground, numerous benches, observation deck, several open-air shelters, one enclosed shelter, dozens of picnic table sites and a network of *over 10 miles of hiking trails*, including almost a mile of handicapped access trails. Cornell University's Ornithological Lab, a premier bird research center, recognizes Afton as a national "hot spot" for bird watching, with over 230 species observed there in the last eight years.

Chief Shabbona: Hugging the northeastern border of Shabbona Lake State Park is Chief Shabbona Forest Preserve, once home to the namesake and his Potawatomi tribe. Three enclosed shelters with wood stoves host friend and family gatherings throughout the year. From north to south, along its one mile, 88-acre stretch, this preserve transforms from an Oak savanna to a Sugar Maple dominated forest. One of only a few sites in northern Illinois where the rare Oval ladies'-tresses Orchid has been observed, this gently rolling woodland also contains uncommon ferns and milkweeds, as well as a few of DeKalb County's last original Butternut trees that haven't yet succumbed to the Sirococcus virus. The increasingly uncommon Red-headed Woodpecker can be seen here on occasion, and the "crow sized" Pileated Woodpecker has been recently sighted at this preserve.

County Farm Woods: Tucked behind a shopping center along Sycamore Road, the smallest of our Forest Preserves (9 acres) was the wooded back yard, and a dump site, for the old County Nursing Home. With the nursing home and dump both removed, this little green oasis, now sandwiched between housing and commercial development, contains a few of DeKalb's oldest Oak trees and a "naturalized" retention pond. It can be accessed by a loop trail along the DeKalb Park District Nature Trail; when you visit, odds are good that you will can catch a glimpse of urban deer who frequent the site.

DeKalb / Sycamore Trail: This 6 mile asphalt paved trail connects to the DeKalb Park District trails and to the City of Sycamore. A shared street/bike route directs you to Sycamore Park, Sycamore Forest Preserve and the Great Western Trail.

The Great Western Trail: This fine trail, a favorite of bicyclists, joggers, hikers and snowmobilers connects with a system of other trails that run almost to Chicago! Only a hundred feet wide, it sits on the old *Great Western Railroad* right-of-way for 3.5 miles in DeKalb County and 14 miles in Kane County, from the new (2017) Sycamore Forest Preserve trail head. But don't let its narrow character fool you. It contains some of the best prairie remnants in the county; they have been used as a seed source in many of our prairie restorations.

Hoppe Heritage Farmstead/South Branch Prairie: This 60-acre site was home to the Hoppe family for over 140 years. It is now the location of the re-located and re-constructed 1845 Miller-Elwood log cabin, a significant historical artifact of the county's earliest settlers. The adjacent South Branch Prairie, which contains five native plant communities as well as the South Branch of the Kishwaukee River, has been recognized nationally by the Natural Resources Conservation Service as an especially high quality wetland restoration. A number of uncommon birds that require river, marsh or grassland habitat, including Sand Hill Cranes and Bald Eagles visit the site each year. We expect that many will eventually nest there, if we can convince dog owners to keep their pets on leash.

Knute Olson, Jr.: Donated to the district by - guess who? - Knute Olson, Jr! This former gravel quarry site has two nice woodlands – a floodplain forest and an upland forest – that regenerated after being heavily impacted by gravel mining a few decades ago. While some spoils mounds are still visible, they are heavily vegetated now with mostly native plants. Half of the 26-acre preserve was not quarried and remains a decent upland woods. Along the trail, two former gravel pits are now fish ponds where turtles sun themselves on bright summer days. The Kishwaukee River runs 1/3rd mile along the west edge of the site. It is a good spot for Smallmouth Bass and Pike fishing.

MacQueen: This 48-acre former Boy Scout camp still includes the dining hall lodge, three enclosed shelters with wood stoves, hiking /cross country trails and a dozen tent campsites. It is one of the most botanically rich and topographically varied forested preserves in our district. Showy Orchis, Glade Mallow, Cancer Root, ferns, and a nice array of other uncommon plants occur in the diverse upland and floodplain forests. A 100 foot bluff, too steep to walk, drops to the South Branch Kishwaukee River – a run where the river flows across limestone bedrock and the drops over THE GREAT KISHWAUKEE FALLS: an eroded fracture straight across the river's bed that allows the water to crash straight over the precipice before falling six inches to the bedrock below! (OK, maybe not spectacular, this *is* the Midwest, after all.) The state endangered Black Sandshell mussel has been found in this portion of the river and Bald Eagles nest less than a mile west, down the river.

Merritt Prairie : Jim and Helen Merritt, professors at NIU, donated this 40 acre site in 1989; 16 more acres added a few years later. This preserve is about as hilly as DeKalb County gets. There are 2.5 miles of hiking trails, but it might seem like a lot more with all the up and down included. The old one-room Pierce Town Hall building sits near the preserve entrance. Three quarters of the preserve are still cool-season grass pasture intermingled with patches of shrubs and thin patches of prairie species that were over-seeded in the brome-grass slopes. About ten acres of planted prairie and four acres of wetland mitigation expand the native structure and diversity.

P.A. Nehring Preserve: Another preserve nestled in DeKalb's urban setting, this 28-acre preserve is about half floodplain forest. Large Oak, Maple, Basswood, Cottonwood and Elm persist but, just as in most of Northern Illinois, the Emerald Ash borers killed all but the smallest Ash trees (formerly the most frequent large tree at this preserve) during the last decade. Many of their bare, forlorn branches still reach for the sky above the other tall trees. Despite that, there is a nice bloom of spring ground flora here, and a good 600 yard stretch of the Kishwaukee River on the west boundary. Two open, mowed picnic areas, one with an open-air shelter, allow for a contemplative lunch, a relaxing walk or an after-work wind-down just a couple blocks from the hubbub of DeKalb and Sycamore commercial districts.

Potawatomi Woods: At 300 acres, this is the second largest of our county forest preserves. A playground, trails and two open air shelters border the parking lot. An easy access canoe launch enters the river at the bridge to the adjoining Kishwaukee River State Fish and Wildlife Area. Prairie plantings and row-crop fields skirt the half-mile long paved handicapped access trail, which terminates at the sedge meadow overlook deck. The sedge meadow is the largest relatively intact prairie remnant in our preserves. Many uncommon plant species thrive there, and, along with lots of other reptiles and amphibians, the rare and elusive *Smooth Green Snake* makes this place its home. Most of the preserve is forested floodplain, including a scenic grove of Swamp White Oak trees. Endangered mussels live in the river, and Potawatomi Woods is a destination for Smallmouth Bass fishermen. A one mile hike will get you to a bridge across Kingsbury Creek, and into the MacQueen preserve.

Prairie Oaks: No other DeKalb forest preserve has quite the unique diversity of plant communities (and therefore animal habitats, too) as the Prairie Oaks Preserve. Savanna, upland forest, wet woods, streams, marshes, seeps, upland prairie, mesic prairie, wet prairie, dry prairie, sedge meadow... about every native community that occurs in our county, except the river, is represented here. The seeps have been restored with the re-introduction of a complex set of native grasses, sedges, rushes, bulrushes and forbs that thrive in each other's company. Red-headed Woodpeckers and Otters are seen here more frequently than in any other DeKalb preserve. There are a couple miles of mowed trails, 1.5 acres of mowed picnic areas with tables, occasional benches and a 750 foot handicapped access trail to an overlook. Intensive restoration work continues at this site and the recent 39-acre **Swanson Grove** addition. These two preserves and two more forest preserve sites along Haines Creek will, in the future, make up the **Haines Creek Conservation Corridor**.

Russell Woods: A forest preserve since 1942, the 126-acre Russell Woods has many valuable features. The Natural Resources Education Center houses the University of Illinois Extension *Outdoor Education Programs* that serve 5,000 children and adults every year on site and with classroom visits. The programs make good use of the surrounding forests, prairies and river. A diverse flora occurs in both the upland forest and the low wet woodland which is sixty feet down the bluff and across the river. The river itself is a prime fishing site, but is also so rich in other aquatic species, especially native freshwater mussels that this site is designated a "unique aquatic resource" by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Illinois Natural History Survey. The preserve has three enclosed shelters an open air shelter, a playground, a sledding hill, and 2 ½ miles of trails, including one that takes visitors to the adjoining Hoppe Heritage Farmstead and South Branch Prairie.

Sannauk: This preserve is situated right next to LaSalle County between the cities of Sandwich and Somonauk. Acquired as the very first forest preserve, it had been a golf course until sometime during the great depression. The woodlands, especially along Somonauk Creek, are diverse in structure and have one of the very best displays of spring flora. Skunk Cabbage, Turtlehead, Turk's Cap Lilies and a host of other uncommon lowland plants abound. The district's largest stand of Sycamore trees grow in Sannauk and, while not native to this region, a planting of Bald Cypress trees have persisted for several decades along the lower road. Sannauk has three enclosed and two open-air shelters, hiking trails, a playground, a sledding hill, and perhaps the most used fishing spot in the entire district – the bank of Somonauk Creek just above "Lake Holiday". A future trail connection west to the Village of Somonauk is planned.

Sycamore Forest Preserve: This new sixty acre preserve is scheduled to open in May 2017. The former Evergreen Village Mobile Home Park was subject to flooding almost every year, often more than once. A federal FEMA grant helped acquire the property, relocate residents, remove some roads, all the mobile homes and other structures and remove a sewage treatment plant. Floodplain prairie habitat was planted in the back 30 acres, and the front 30 acres will feature two open-air shelters, new asphalt roads parking and bike trail, picnic areas, hiking/cross-country ski trails and a fishing pond. The Great Western Trail has been extended another half mile west into this new preserve and will be the new trailhead area. The East Branch Kishwaukee River flows along the preserve's western flank.

Wilkinson-Renwick Marsh: DeKalb Forest Preserve District's only state-dedicated Natural Area is Wilkinson-Renwick Marsh. Cattail, Phragmites and Reed Canary Grass dominate the marsh, so why would this site earn the state's highest protection status? *Geologic Structure.* This is one of the very few undrained, unfilled, unfarmed prairie pothole marshes in the entire Grand Prairie Region. A chunk of glacier took a long time to melt, and left a hole in the ground. Later, two railroad lines crossed here; there was a railroad station (only the foundation remains) and livestock pens for transferring animals from one line to another. There is an observation deck at the marsh, a quarter mile handicapped access trail to the deck, another 1/3 mile of trails and really great birdwatching. About 3 ½ acres of restored prairie grows in the former cattle pen site.



Spring Redbud bloom at Sycamore Forest Preserve

