

PRAIRIE BREEZE NEWS
Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards – January 2019

IT IS TIME FOR THE WILD THINGS CONFERENCE
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 23 IN ROSEMONT

There is still time to register for Wild Things at www.wildthingscommunity.org. As usual besides the keynote presentation, there is a huge variety of inspiring and informative program offerings – over 10 presentations at each of the seven scheduled sessions – something for everyone! The 2019 venue at Stephens Convention Center in Rosemont offers plenty of space for attendees and is closer to our suburban homes. Checkout the website where all is revealed and explained.

Spend the day with a like-minded community of people (from 9am to 5pm) by joining this always excellent, biennial conservation forum with numerous programs of interest to local restorationists. Let Jan Ahrensfeld know if you are attending (jahrensfeld@sbcglobal.net). She will spread the word, so you can look for your fellow Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards. And, yes, a workday is also scheduled for that day, if that is more your interest.

HEAD STEWARD'S REFLECTIONS, JANUARY, 2019 – John Navin

As we boldly march towards our 30th anniversary, we all should ponder what we have accomplished over these last three decades! Think back to your first attended workdays and try to visualize what the site looked like and what challenges seemed possible. The accomplishments are too numerous and extraordinary to mention in totality but definitely give yourselves a well-deserved “well done.” Hundreds of pounds of rare native seed collected and planted is expected rather than hoped for. Lake Leaky has been transformed from a mud puddle into a mandatory location for both visiting and reflection, at least for this volunteer who always happens to end along its shores regardless of my intentions for the day.

Late last fall, stewards began a full scale effort to clear the cut off nature preserve parcel north of Shoe Factory Road. What would have been considered a pipe dream not too many years ago has gone from a fanciful aspiration to an objective. While the time frame is always in flux, the ultimate result is never in doubt with the Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards!

As my leadership role starts moving to its inevitable conclusion, let me repeat my heartfelt appreciation to all of you for allowing me to be the face of Poplar Creek for the last decade. Never doubt that my greatest fear wasn't failure but somehow letting you all down. You deserve only the best!

WANTED: GREETER

We are in need of a friendly and outgoing person to join our Greeter team. Each Greeter carries out greeting duties at assigned workdays approximately every 2 months. Basically Greeters arrive early, insure everyone fills out the sign-in sheet, provides break time water and snacks (reimbursable) and, along with the workday leaders, makes sure that any new or recently new volunteers are welcomed and comfortable with workday activities. If you are interested in helping and/or have questions, please contact Jan Ahrensfeld, 847-358-0019 or jahrensfeld@sbcglobal.net

BIRD MONITORING, 2018 – Steve Bayer

Carl R. Hansen Woods is truly thriving with the help of our wonderful stewards and volunteers. As a bird monitor and frequent visitor this year, I have had the pleasure of observing some beautiful passerine species commonly found in beautiful Illinois prairies, such as Swamp Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Grasshopper Sparrow, Eastern Bluebird, Bobolink, American Goldfinch, Red-winged Blackbird, Eastern Meadowlark, and many others.

Waterfowl have appreciated the sediment settling in well enough to provide a full year of water at Lake Leaky. Although we didn't have a return of the Eared Grebe (from September 2017), the Pied-billed Grebes have truly made a home of this lovely piece of land. Other regular waterfowl visitors include the Hooded Merganser, Mallard, Canada Goose and Blue-winged Teal.

Looking for a thrilling bird sighting? Head out to Carl R. Hansen Woods in the early morning to see the resident Northern Harrier kiting above the path (i.e. service road) north of Turtle Pond. Other raptors observed include Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, and American kestrel. Great Blue Herons, Green Herons and Sandhill Cranes are also exciting hunters along the shore areas.

SCHAUMBURG ROAD GRASSLANDS UPDATE - Jenny Flexman

The big goal this winter is to continue working in the Western Woods. We are hoping to finish up the large hill that we started on last year. However, we will need some frozen ground to work on the steep parts of the hill. As you walk back to the worksite you will observe the work of the weekday workday crew (mostly, Merv, John Martin, and Jenny). They have been clearing towards the southeast corner of the Western Woods, on the north side of the farm ponds, where we are freeing another stand of small oaks.

The other winter priority is to continue our assault on the invasive autumn olives. Over the past two years we have been trying to cut or herbicide all the autumn olive in the areas we've worked on, and, in order to remove seed sources, all the olive at or near the edges of where we are working. This is about complete, except for the edges of Field 4, and all the shrubland. We will work on the edge of Field 4 during weekday workdays. Interns are slated to come out soon to start cutting autumn olive in the shrubland/Field 5. Field 5 will be a multi-year effort.

BURN SEASONS – Jenny Flexman

A wet summer and fall left us with a lot of green vegetation this fall. The lack of dry vegetation combined with a snowy November wiped out the fall burn season. The District did get one day of burning in during December. Perhaps we will get lucky like last year and get a very warm spell in February in which to burn. Otherwise, we will all be hoping for a very long spring burn season!

CLEARING THE NORTHWEST TRIANGLE **TALES FROM OUR “RAMBOS OF THE BRAMBLES”**

TOM KASTNER:

Cliff and I walked or drove past this area about 100 times on our way to other worksites over the past two years. It always bugged me that we did not go back to this area after mostly clearing it 5-7 years ago. After walking by the Northwest Triangle for the 101st time, while Cliff was brush-cutting further south along the western trail, I decided to start cutting down a small buckthorn

grove that was sticking out like a sore thumb. I figured that I could take it out in a few hours, and then we could move on to another site.

As it turned out, taking out the small buckthorn grove revealed a line of hidden junk (buckthorn, brambles, multiflora rose, cherry, honeysuckle, reed canary, and all kinds of other nasty stuff) that led about 100 yards north to Shoe Factory Road. So, in ensuing workdays, while Cliff was digging up roots, I slowly expanded the line of defense between the prairie and the junk.

In creating a perimeter between the prairie and the junky Northwest Triangle, it simply showcased how terrible the Triangle looked. So, the next step was to dive in and tackle that hornet's nest of nature's garbage. About 80% of the junk in the Triangle was buckthorn and cherry 'Hydra Offshoots;' each tree that had been cut in the past had sprouted into 10-20 offshoots. These were easy to cut, but a pain in the neck to haul away and stack. Amidst all the offshoots were plenty of junk with thorns, and I could almost hear them shriek in pain as I cut and hauled them away (It could actually have been me shrieking, when you get into an invasive plant cutting frenzy it is hard to tell what's going on).

Eventually we cleared everything and created four massive piles, one of which has been burned so far. Out of the 20 trees in the area (of which a few are cherries, but most are box elders), I cut four before the muffler on the chainsaw fell off. I believe we are near the end of Phase 1 of this project that is projected to have 25 Phases over 10 years, but at least we can walk by the area with our heads high and shoulders sore and it doesn't look like nature's dumpster fire anymore.

CLIFF TRAHAN:

The small triangular area bounded by the western horse trail and Shoe Factory Road at the bottom of the western slope of the Nature Preserve has been occupied by a number of trees, honeysuckle, multiflora rose, dogwoods and buckthorn. The area is also littered with a decent amount of reed canary grass. Tom Kastner and I have been working the area for a number of months. Initially, Tom used a chain saw to cut buckthorn, honeysuckle and dogwood closest to the horse trail and made paths for him and me into the targeted area. While Tom continued cutting the woody material, I brush cut to clear a portion of the most southern area and then dug up the bigger cut stumps. Eventually I was able to dig out lots of cut stumps and clear a big swath of ground, which was reseeded with seeds provided by Rick and John. Over a period of time Tom managed to clear all the invasive growth and then started cutting box elders before the chain saw had to be repaired.

Tom managed to make a number of big brush piles, of which one was burned. The one big brush pile burned was done after a modest snowfall. John N., Merv, and I attended to this task while Tom tried cutting trees. The humidity was high and snow covered the pile. John and I used a broom to sweep snow off the pile. John kept saying out loud that the attempt to burn the pile looked like a lost cause. Our first attempt to start the pile burning failed. John doubled up on letting everyone, within hearing distance, know it really looked like a lost cause to burn the pile. After the failed attempt John, Merv and I sought out dry, dead wood along the trail which was placed together into the pile. Newspapers were stuffed in as well. While John took his matches out to start the burn he prefaced the activity with "I believe this is a lost cause"! Lo and behold the pile burned! What a challenge!! It was worth the effort. The other piles are waiting for the District to burn due to their size and close proximity to Shoe Factory Road.

We also hope the District takes down the trees standing near Shoe Factory Road. Then Tom and I will continue working this area getting rid of the reed canary, raspberry brambles and other

things. We want to make sure the whole area is herbicided once or twice to keep regrowth in check. In the future it would be nice to plant some *Corylus americana* shrubs near Shoe Factory Road and other parts of this area. [Note: Cleared "Triangle" picture at end of newsletter].

NEW VENUE FOR SEED PROCESSING – Diana Granitto

Our seed processing operation keeps expanding with bigger harvests, more equipment, and crowds of volunteers. We found the extra space we needed for our November 17 event at the Forest Preserve District's Northwest Resource management facility in Elk Grove Village. This was a great success, providing improved logistics, smooth workflow, and amenities such as kitchen space and indoor restrooms. Thanks to Kris DaPra, John McCabe and all the NWRM crew for hosting us and setting everything up. We'll be seeing you again next November!

That wasn't the end of the seed season, though. In December a small crew headed to Dick Jamieson's place to mix the seed with rice hulls and weigh the mixes. The tally: enough to plant at least 20 acres. Thank you, Dick, for offering your garage – and for the pie and coffee at break time!

We also got a head start on planting when a few people showed up at a canceled December workday. We scattered 24 lbs. of Canada rye into the newly cleared three acres southeast of the preserve. Thanks to Spring Creek for letting us collect this grass, which will provide fuel for much-needed fire in that area.

THIS AND THAT

Party Time: The Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards held their annual holiday party on Saturday, December 15th at the Flexman house in Sleepy Hollow. The weather behaved, the food was exceptionally good with a wider variety of dishes than in the past and lots of excellent conversations. Thanks to Jenny for an entertaining slide show. Everyone enjoyed seeing Jill, who returned from Oregon for the holidays and Nick who was back from University of Montana after finals. As usual attendees came from near and far suburbs but this year we also had a guest from Taiwan!

Cookie Time: On December 17th the Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards delivered a large platter of homemade holiday cookies to the workers at the FPD Northwest Resource Management facility as a thanks for all the help they provide to us all year long.

Team Time: A big thanks to the busload of students from Schaumburg High School who attended our workday on January 12. Tim Heisler, the school's Environmental Club sponsor brought the SHS baseball team, who pitched in hauling, cutting and building brushpiles on a very chilly day. Thank goodness we were somewhat protected in the woods near the parking lot at the main prairie. A special shout out goes to the lone member of the environmental club to attend. SHE worked just as hard as the guys.

Turtle Time: On a very cold January 24 three PCPSers, Jan Ahrensfield, Jim Robinson and Agnes Wojnarski attended a program on the plight of the Blanding's turtle and the work being done locally to prevent this species from going extinct. Using lively visuals Dan Thompson, a wildlife ecologist with the DuPage County FPD, gave an entertaining presentation where lots of basic turtle info was conveyed. The "Nature Speaks" series is co-sponsored with the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission. Check the library website calendar for future programs. They are always excellent.

Serious Learner Time: Jerry Wilhelm and Laura Rericha are teaching an intensive six-part lecture/field seminar on bees, ants, plant/flower ecology/identification, soils, geology, habitats, etc., beginning in March (on Saturdays). The first part of the seminar consists of three five-hour lectures at the Brushwood Center at Ryerson, followed by three eight-hour field sessions in locations throughout the region. The classroom sessions will tie together what we will show students in the field. For descriptions, details and costs go to the following link: <http://www.conservationresearchinstitute.org/educational-offerings.html>.

Say What! Jenny Flexman, Jenny Vogt and Diana Granitto drove up to Minnesota the week of January 21 on a birding trip. Along Lake Superior near Duluth and the Sax-Zim Bog west of Duluth are popular birding locations at this time of the year. Braving the cold they were rewarded by spotting many birds and exited just in time to avoid the minus zero temperatures. PCPS have very hardy volunteers.

