

**PRAIRIE BREEZE NEWS**  
**Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards – May 2019**

**HISTORIC EVENT – LAKE LEAKY**

On Friday, May 3 a small work group at the prairie saw an historic event. John Navin announced, “Lake Leaky was OVERFLOWING into the cement chimney our entire time out there. We know it works although we couldn't see where it discharges on the other side [of the dam].” Seeing the dam spillway in operation sending water towards Poplar Creek was a Lake Leaky milestone. Kirk Garanflo followed up by stating, “I went down the south side of the dam and followed the outflow downstream through the woodland until it went beyond the southern horse trail and discharged into Poplar Creek. The creek, by the way, was over its banks, was at least 100 feet wide at this point, and was flowing very, very rapidly.”

The earthen dam was built by the Cook County Forest Preserve District with perhaps the intent of creating a recreational lake. Until recent years the area behind the dam never continuously held water throughout the entire year. In the fall volunteers could walk across the “lakebed” noting many crawfish holes along the way. As a result the Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards began calling the body of water Lake Leaky. This moniker was eventually adopted by the FPDCC. Perhaps we need to rethink its name?

On Saturday, May 4 as volunteers walked over the dam, water was still running into the overflow spillway. Monitoring lake levels should be an interesting activity for the rest of the year.

**ANOTHER HISTORIC EVENT**

On April 14 Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards cancelled their annual Brushcutters/Spring Brunch for the first time! Being an outdoors affair we simply couldn't compete with the 7-8 inches of snow that fell. At 9am the weather was misty, but no snow in the air. Some of us began to wonder if we had made a “wrong call.” However, shortly thereafter the snow started to come down – fast and heavy. Over the years, the PCPS brunch date has gradually moved from late winter to early spring in order to make our meal together a more comfortable event. Alas, this action hasn't really helped that much. Yes, some years we have basked in the sun after eating or taken a pleasant walk in the woods, but other years we have dodged raindrops under the shelter, or chilly winds using upended tables or hanging tarps for protection. Scheduled for mid-April, who would have thought that snow could befoul our brunch this year. We have decided not to schedule a brunch redo in May. We look forward to next year and hope that the weather is delightful for our 2020 gathering regardless of the date selected!

**THE BLACK LOCUS EXPERIMENT – Cliff Trahan**

Tom Kastner and I put a number of workdays in along the east-west trail that runs along the prairie and in front of the Nature Preserve. In the spring and summer of 2018 after the 7 acres were cleared, Mother Nature brought us a surprise consisting of a huge tract of Black Locust growth. Tom and I named it the Black Locust Grove. There are hundreds of juvenile trees taunting us as we walk along the trail. The grove is the product of a seed bank left over the years before the big locust trees were cleared and the roots of trees cut down. The roots of the locust tree can be quite large in size and branch out in different directions. To me it appeared the initial foliar spraying did not affect these roots and so the roots sent up clonal growth several feet in height.

Remembering the difficulty with the getting rid of the black locust by the trail bordering PR 2, I started an experiment to see if attacking the big roots by digging to expose the huge roots, then cutting openings in these roots with an axe followed by herbiciding the roots all along the exposed parts and in the cut cavities will reduce or stop regrowth due to the roots but not the seed bank. Next spring and summer will tell me if it was worthwhile. I also dug up the small roots of juvenile locust trees and want to see if this was effective in reducing regrowth. Tom and John Navin used the usual procedure of cutting and spraying juvenile locust trees as a control to my experiment. Whatever technique is most effective will be used in the future and in the mean while the Grove is still there making us cringe as we walk by.

### **SEED LONGEVITY – Kirk Garanflo**

Why it is so difficult to get rid of some weeds, and why are we so lucky to find that some magnificent plant species are still with us? The answers are the same: seed longevity. In 1879 Professor W. J. Beal must have asked the same questions, because he began an experiment that continues to this day!

In each of 20 bottles he placed a mixture of sand and 50 seeds of each of 21 varieties of plants commonly found then, and then buried the bottles unstoppered with the intension of extracting one every five years, and trying to discover what would germinate. He succeeded beyond his wildest dreams.

At five years 13 species germinated, at 10 years 12 species did, at 20 years 11 species did, and at 120 years 3 species germinated; one of those last three is the weed moth mullein (*Verbascum blattaria*), which just happens to be growing along the eastern edge of our drainage into Lake Leaky!

One conclusion that may be drawn from Beal's experiment is that the seeds of some species can remain viable for many years buried in the wild and only require some disturbance, perhaps a vole or a rabbit or a coyote digging, to bring them to the surface in order for them to germinate. This is one possible explanation for the sudden appearance of an unexpected species at Poplar Creek or at Schaumburg Road Grasslands (SRG).

In 2016 at SRG I was walking through the absolute middle of Field 1, a previously farmed plot that has lain fallow for probably 40 years, when I looked down to find a single, flowering spike of October Ladies' Tresses (*Spiranthes ovalis*). Whether it was newly emerged thanks to some vole or simply present for years but hidden by the surrounding four-foot tall vegetation, who can say for sure. Finding something unexpected is one of the joys of restoration work, and that orchid as well as some other species here is part of the joy.

The 120-year summary of Beal's experiment can be found on-line at <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/a344/a6781834a78138fda70a12e1e3518840951b.pdf>

### **SRG UPDATE – Jenny Flexman**

I'm not sure how we did it, but we have finished cutting on and around the hill in the Western Woods. And what a large hill it is! We didn't quite realize how big of a hill was lurking in the buckthorn. Next year we should finish heading west. Then it will be time to head to the Eastern Woods.

We also seeded all of the areas that were cleared in the Western Woods this year. Although I have not yet GPS'd it, based on the number of 50 foot squares we seeded, it appears to come out to 4.2 acres. A banner year.

Those of you who stayed home on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April due to the six inches of new snow on the ground missed a glorious day. Although it was 45 degrees, with no wind and a perfectly blue sky, the sun made it feel like it was 70 out. And the fresh snow was beautiful, and disappearing quickly! Eleven of us seeded in the western woods and seeded four acres of Field 3. Field 3 has now been fully seeded. On May 12 we are scheduled to finish up seeding for the year by doing four more acres in the southeast corner of Field 4.

### **WILD THINGS IN REVIEW**

Over a dozen Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards attended the biennial Wild Things conference on February 23. Unlike the simultaneous workday that was cancelled due to heavy rains, attendees were protected at the event's new location, the Rosemont Conference Center with a covered walkway between the garage and center. Attendees enjoyed the spaciousness with plenty of small meeting rooms and an ample area for the opening session and eating at lunchtime.

Most of those surveyed enjoyed the programs they attended, but were not as enthusiastic about the keynote speaker from Arizona. In a session entitled "Restoring Landscapes at Scale" FPCC's Chip O'Leary and Troy Showerman noted that Poplar Creek Prairie is one of the top 20 restoration sites in Cook County that are priority locations. Agnes Wojnarski participated in two program about the restoration work carried out in Prospect Heights.

The centralized suburban location was convenient for our membership. Jim Robinson attended Wild Things for the first time primarily due to its new, handy location. As a newbie, he found all the sessions interesting. When asked to pick a favorite, Jim said, "Hard to pick a favorite, but what seems to have created a lasting impression were the split sessions on streams." There were more split sessions this year (more conservationists desiring to share their knowledge and insights), an encouraging number of younger people and a noticeable number of family groups.

### **THIS AND THAT**

On a chilly and snowy February weekend, students from the Schaumburg High School Environmental Club and the Red Cross Club attended our workday at Schaumburg Road Grasslands. Since no sports teams came this time, the number of much appreciated "log haulers" was reduced, however the group built several excellent brushpiles.

In March Lee Ramsey spent time in Oregon. He attended a party given by the Corvallis Audubon Society for his brother's birthday, but, not unsurprisingly, Lee also found time to do a little birding.

Congrats to Dave Webb who now has his Illinois herbiciding license. Thanks for taking the test. PCPS is always in need of herbicides, and an added benefit is mentioning that you are licensed with the Illinois Department of Agriculture - it is always a conversation-stopper at cocktail parties.

Thanks to the students from Steinmetz High School in Chicago who braved our very erratic winter weather to come work at Schaumburg Road Grasslands. They are always very helpful and enthusiastic. Some students have now come out all four years of high school!

Jeff Maddux was asked to direct volunteers and supervise one of the multiple brushpiles at The Sierra Club NW Earth Day restoration event in Deer Grove East on April 14. A large area near the airplane field was cleared. Cook County Commissioner Scott Britton and U.S. Rep Sean Casten participated. Jeff brought a bunch of PCPS loppers and saws for use at this annual event. At the end of the day, our equipment, wrapped with pieces of floral tape were extremely easy to identify compared to other restoration groups' equipment marked in a variety of spots with magic markers. Also attending the event were Barbara Hill, Tom Borchard, Linda Sullivan and Jan Ahrensfield.

In mid-April a small group of volunteers planted almost 200 extremely hearty transplants at the Carl Hansen site. These plants were "leftovers" from Agnes Wojnarski's 2018 propagation projects; they sat outside all winter. Using an auger in burned prairie areas, the task was completed quickly. Thanks to a very rainy spring, John Navin said that our new plants are flourishing.

In late April volunteer Holly Gannon brought students from her Schaumburg High School AP Environmental Sciences class to Poplar Creek Prairie. They did both hands-on work and toured our site with John Navin.

Already into our seeding season, the snow on our April 28<sup>th</sup> workday at SRG was quite a surprise. Seeding was not hampered since, as the snow melted the seeds would sink right into the soil. However, the challenge was identifying the individual seeding areas. Prior to the snow Jenny Flexman used WHITE flags to mark the squares!

This spring two corporate groups came to help at our restoration sites. Wells Fargo Bank employees made their annual visit and were exceptionally good workers this year, according to John Navin. The Poplar Creek Prairie worksite was selected by the volunteer organizer from Fusion Risk Management, headquartered in Rolling Meadows, because of our location close to RM. However, the fun and friendly volunteers who attended our May 4<sup>th</sup> workday, cutting brush separate from our regulars who were seeding, all came from Chicago or a suburb close to the city! Tom Peters, who managed the burning brushpile for the Fusion group was greatly disappointed when he learned that Greeter Kathryn Dietrich's home baked goods snacks went with the regular work group. The Fusion volunteers got healthy carrots and nuts...and, yes, a few double-stuffed Oreo cookies.

There may be even more noise ahead along our western borders. The Canadian National Railway is asking the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for a permit to construct a 4.27-mile-long second track adjoining the existing mainline track between Shoe Factory Road and Spaulding Road (south of Schaumburg/Irving Park Roads), according to the *Daily Herald*. The Army Corp is involved because of CN's plan to mitigate impacts to Poplar Creek and its tributaries, which connect to the Fox River downstream, requires government approval under the Clean Water Act. After years of minimal use and quiet, many long freights appeared on the line when the CN merged with the EJ&E Railroad in 2008. The CN must hold a public meeting at a date yet to be announced.