

PRAIRIE BREEZE NEWS
Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards – May 2020

NOTE: As of April 30, 2020, Cook County Forest Preserve District cancelled all volunteer activities through May 31, 2020 due to COVID-19.

WHAT WE DID THIS WINTER – Diana Granitto and Jenny Flexman

We had a productive brush-cutting season at Poplar Creek before the shut-down, making significant progress in three locations. (1) This was our fourth season working north of Shoe Factory Road, a promising high quality area that shares the gravel kame with the remnant Nature Preserve. (2) We also continued cutting in an area of the woodland we started last year, on the west side of the service road, which could eventually connect two prairie areas: PR2 (behind the dam) and PR3 to the south, opposite the swale that connects to Turtle Pond. (3) Near the back shelter we worked in a little potential wetland into which water drains from the large ephemeral pond.

At SRG this winter we began our first full-scale restoration of the eastern woods. We had done ten years of small weekday workdays in the highest quality spots, but this year we cleared invasive trees from 4.2 acres. That is a great effort in any year, but even better this year, considering we lost two workdays due to weather and two due to the virus. We started at the trail on the west side and cleared around a pond and most of the way around an ephemeral pond that has 100% native vegetation. We also got it all seeded! Our last workday of the season turned out to be the Fireside Lunch. Judging from the turnout, we will need to do more of those in the future! The last to leave were serenaded by Sandhill Cranes.

Speaking of the work we have done over the last 10 years, the clearing of buckthorn and garlic mustard in the Hepatica Woods seems to be paying off. The spring wildflowers are amazing this year including 30-40 blooming sharp-lobed hepatica. That's three times as many as I've ever seen there before. Thanks go to those who have worked there.

SOCIALIZING, THEN DISTANCING

PCPS always invites one and all to come together after workdays for lunch at Buona Beef if interested and able. On any given weekend we may only fill a four-top or we may shove numerous tables together banquet-style. The food is inexpensive, while the conversation is always rich. I suspect right now we are all missing the fellowship when sitting around those tables. However, these past months we have also held additional social diversions. In February, after the workday and right before Valentine's Day, volunteers came together at the Lucky Monk restaurant to write Love Letters. No, not what you are thinking. We wrote about our beautiful restoration sites and our passion for volunteering on these lands. We also ate, chatted, and some read their letters to the entire group. All the letters were subsequently sent to Kevin Morrison, our new Cook County Commissioner/Forest Preserve Board member. We hope he will visit our sites sometime this year.

We returned to the Lucky Monk on Friday March 13 for a group dinner organized by Diane Fram (our restaurant arranger extraordinaire). While the Stay At Home order wasn't announced for another week there was already worry about COVID-19. The anticipated headcount shrank, but a dozen healthy (at the time and we hope currently) volunteers and several spouses enjoyed

excellent food and good conversation. We even had our own private area behind a curtain and away from the busy main area.

Two days later another social event took place after the workday - Fireside Pizza and Beer (if desired) around a burning brushpile. While numbers were a bit smaller than usual the workday crew enjoyed the tasty fare which Kathleen Mueller dished out using plastic gloves for hygiene. The day was sunny and comfortable, and the pizza (from our local Rosati's) seemed exceptionally good after an energetic workday in a lovely, rather remote wooded area at Schaumburg Road Grasslands...a delightful event, but alas the last for a while.

But wait...has PCPS socializing ended? Well, not totally. Volunteers are still drawn to our prairies, now only for allowed exercise. According to reports there have been many accidental encounters...6 feet apart...on the trails at our restoration sites. While we can't work, we can walk and perhaps see a friendly face until workdays are reinstated.

KUDOS, KATHLEEN! – Diana Granitto

Valentine's Day letter writing at the Lucky Monk and Fireside Pizza at the workday were just two in a string of recruitment efforts Kathleen Mueller has initiated since she became our Field Organizer last December. She has expanded our presence on social media, developed a brochure and other communications, recruited volunteer photographers, and served on our Human Resources and Site Management committees. She also has explored partnering with groups such as Society for Ecological Restoration, FPCC's Conservation & Experiential Programming Department, and the Master Gardeners and Master Naturalist programs. Kathleen took on this role as a part-time staff member with Friends of the Forest Preserves through a collaboration between PCPS and Friends.

The good news is, as she embarks on her promising career, an outstanding opportunity has come her way. Kathleen has accepted a full-time job with the Illinois Stewardship Alliance as Northern Illinois Policy Organizer beginning May 11.

The other good news is, we have not lost her talents, enthusiasm and companionship! In these few months Kathleen has become so personally committed to PCPS that she plans to continue as a regular volunteer. Toward that end she has taken FPCC Brush Pile Burn Boss training as well as the Managing Invasives certification as an herbicide operator. But perhaps most telling is that in contemplating this life decision, she headed to Poplar Creek and walked the prairie for contemplation and inspiration.

WHAT'S IN A NAME? - Kirk Garanflo

Actaea pachypoda is intimidating! Doll's eyes or white baneberry is friendly!! Yet they are all names for the same species. The intimidation comes from the jumble of what appears to be meaningless words, but they do not have to be meaningless. There is a nice little book, slightly larger than the size of a pack of playing cards, which gives meaning to almost any Latin name that is used for a plant. It's the **New Pronouncing Dictionary of Plant Names**. I bought mine new many, many years ago for 75 cents; today on Amazon it ranges from \$8.50 used to \$143 for a souped-up and "improved" edition. The older edition at the \$8.50 route is a much better value. It can even be borrowed for free from a library.

Some names refer to places: virginiana = of or from Virginia.

Some names refer to shapes: ovalis = oval.

Some names refer to physical characteristics: latifolius = broad (lati) and leaf (folius);

angustifolius = narrow (angusti) and leaf (folius).

Once the meanings of “angusti” and “lati” and “folius” are understood, for example, then their use in other compound words becomes readily obvious and less intimidating.

Physical descriptions are particularly useful. *Pachypoda*, by the way, means “thick stalk.” White baneberry has a red-fruited variety, and red baneberry (*Actaea rubra*) has a white-fruited variety. One of the few ways to distinguish between them is the thickness or thinness of the flower stalk; the *pachypoda* stem is always “thick” and the *rubra* stem is always “thin.” *Rubra* (red) refers to the color of the fruit of the species when it was originally discovered and named before its white-fruited variety was discovered.

Begin learning the botanical/Latin names for the few species with which you are familiar. After a year at the rate of even only two species per week you will be well on your way to professional stature.

LASTING INFLUENCE

There is truth in the statement that doing restoration work and becoming connected with a restoration site can create an indelible stamp on those involved. Proof is the message we received on our Facebook page in late December 2019 from Mike Poremba, who moved out of the area many years ago and subsequently to Oregon.

“Wow, what a treat it was visiting The Shoe Factory Road Preserve today! I volunteered on prairie & woodlands restoration workdays here over 20 years ago. I was able to help break some of the very first drain tiles that lead to the filling of the pond [Lake Leaky]... On a visit home, I had to show my girlfriend the place that meant so much to me all those years ago. Wow, what fantastic improvements the Poplar Creek Prairie Stewards have continued to effect. The plant diversity is leaps & bounds beyond those early days (for me anyway)... Thanks to Rick McCandless [sic] for his tireless devotion to this place and the plants and animals who've returned because of it. Thanks also for mentoring a scrawny 20-something kid into a fervent supporter & advocate for native landscapes. I'm currently working to establish restoration guidelines where I work at the base of Lower Table Rock, adjacent to a Nature Conservancy/BLM site in beautiful Central Point, Oregon. Keep up the great work, Stewards!”

MULTI-TALENTED PRAIRIE MAVEN GOES EAST

Our warmest wishes to long-time volunteer Diane Benson and her husband Jeff Cour as they embark on their next adventure. Sadly for us, this means they are moving to Jeff's home state of Connecticut at the end of May, before we can all bid her farewell in person. Diane has rarely missed a workday no matter what time of year. She's been a partner and leader in every aspect of seed collecting, processing and planting. Right now there's no doubt she's hankering to get at the garlic mustard. She's been a Greeter for over 20 years. She's there for whatever needs doing, from helping secure our wooden sign in cement footings to making holiday cookie trays for distribution. And anyone who's watched her knows she builds a mean brush pile. We will miss Diane everywhere!

THIS AND THAT

Blue Mounds. Are those Mongolian yurts that you see in the distance dotting our restoration sites? No, they are unburned brushpiles covered with tarps adding a bit of interest to the scenery.

Woodland Guides by Field. To aid you when checking out the spring scenery use the two Woodland Spring Field Guides from the Field Museum. Each has a little different content and photos. See:

https://fieldguides.fieldmuseum.org/sites/default/files/rapid-color-guides-pdfs/575_usa_woodland_spring_flora.pdf

https://fieldguides.fieldmuseum.org/sites/default/files/rapid-color-guides-pdfs/513_Woodland%20Spring%20Flora_0.pdf

At Warp Speed. Aneta Tymanski is now a certified workday leader (WDL). Congratulations! She took all the required classes, training and monitoring very fast after attending her first workday in August 2019. We appreciate her focus and dedication.

Classes. Both Aneta and Kathleen Mueller took the FPCC Practical Herbiciding and Managing Invasives classes this winter. Koyo Masore took the Brushpile Burn Boss class. Cliff Trahan, Jeff Maddux and John Martin attended training, so they are now all able to officially drive on forest preserve property. We should all try taking some online classes with other activities curtailed.

Another Well Deserved Recognition. Congratulations to Agnes Wojnarski for receiving a 2020 Cook County Commission on Women's Issues Unsung Heroine Award (14th District) for her work as the chairman of the Prospect Heights Natural Resources Commission. She was nominated by Mayor Nick Helmer, who credited her and members of the commission with rooting out invasive species and returning open spaces to their natural splendor.

Capturing Our Moments. Thanks to our new volunteer photographer Patrick Williams, who will periodically help document our workdays. He previously took photos for Openlands workdays. Fortunately Patrick was able to come out from Chicago to attend his first workday at SRG right before the shutdown.

Breaking News! Nick Hall-Skank and Aneta Tymanski are now Apprentice Stewards! They both expressed their interest in this program to Jenny Flexman. What is an apprentice steward? Basically a route to learn to be a Site Steward, and to be certified by the District as qualified to be a Site Steward. The Apprentice Steward program consists of a combination of mentorship, ecological training, field work and self-study. The District doesn't have time requirements for the program, but they assume the process will take a year or two. Jenny will be primary mentor under the program and Diana Granitto has agreed to be an additional mentor for them.

We Are All A Big Team. On February 1 the Schaumburg High School boys' baseball team and head coach Cal Seeley attended a special workday at Poplar Creek Prairie. Little did all know then that the team would miss its spring competitive season working and playing together. However, that day the team put a lot of energy into their restoration activities which was encouraged by workday leader Jeff Maddux. Before providing instructions he got everyone clapping and then presented his own rap poem. It is a fitting way to close this issue of the Prairie Breeze. See below:

Clap your hands to keep time

Let's start out with a little rhyme

Some is sad
Some is happy
And it's all a little sappy

The world has lots of woe
Solutions are tough you know
I would like to solve it all
But that's an order a bit too tall

Native prairie - Not much left
Loss of flora right and left
This problem we can solve
If we work with resolve

What we can do today
Is clear the stuff in the way
And bring back what has gone away

We will in a rush
Cut the invading brush

Remove the barriers to the harriers
And the blockers to the bees

Clear the way for native grasses
Which grow tall above our ~~Asses~~/ Glasses

With your help we will achieve
A better place for all to be

Welcome

I'm no poet and I know it.