

BRUSH PILES

NORTH BRANCH RESTORATION PROJECT

SUMMER 2005

ON COLLECTING SEEDS FOR THE NORTH BRANCH RESTORATION PROJECT

By Paul Dolinko

There's so much to say. Should I mention how wonderful it is to walk about the prairie and woodlands when they appear spectacular, rather than just cutting buckthorn in some degraded parts? Just learning, is part of it -- like I did originally -- to be able to identify garlic mustard and white sweet clover before knowing about the wonderful native wildflowers. Should I tell about the pleasure in recognizing plants when they are just emerging, when they flower, and then again when they go to seed -- or to learn where in the North Branch certain plants are concentrated?

There is the pleasure in realizing how much one has learned from one year to the next that aids in coping with the frustration in also realizing how much one forgets. The forgetting is much more palatable when one realizes that the relearning is much faster and gradually more information is retained from one year to the next. One gets to appreciate the opportunity to learn from Joan Meersman and other experts who are eager to share their knowledge.

An important pleasure involves enjoying the camaraderie of the group who go out on Wednesday mornings to collect seed. Perhaps it should also be mentioned that while we are having so much fun, we are also doing a really good deed, helping to restore native grasses and wildflowers to places where they've been shaded out.

I have trouble understanding why more people don't participate on Wednesday mornings from about 9 to 12 as we go to the various North Branch sites after the seeds are ready to be picked. Perhaps some jealous souls can't participate because they are employed. If someone is interested in participating, then they need only call Joan Meersman on Tuesday night to learn at which site we will be collecting seeds. There is no commitment to participate regularly, but just as available.

Of course there is nothing wrong in cutting buckthorn, getting rid of garlic mustard, white sweet clover, and other plants that hurt the natural ecosystem. Seed processing and other important activities of the North Branch Restoration Project could also be praised if I had not been asked to write about seed collecting. But that would be another story.

To reach Joan dial (773) 763-5055.



GOOD RIDDANCE TO A DITCH

By Christiane Rey and Laurel Ross

Resting on ground moraine left behind by the retreating glacier several thousand years ago, Somme Prairie Nature Preserve appears to be, at first glance, a pretty flat stretch of land. In summer, it is graced by a sea of tall grasses and flowers but in the naked winter months or after a fire, one can see that a meandering swale crosses the site half way down its length. In Somme's agricultural past, a ditch was dug in the lowest part of the swale by heaping the soil on either side.

With the passing of years, erosion deepened the ditch and many volunteers who have come to Winter and Spring workdays know the sometimes-hazardous stretch where trail met ditch. Upstream to the west, in what I like to call the Grande Prairie, lies a lovely sedge meadow. To the east, the ditch made its way to the West Fork of the North Branch.

Several years ago, at the end of a workday, steward Laurel Ross was musing about the original condition of the site and the conversation turned to speculation about how nice it would be to restore the hydrology of the sedge meadow. Dennis Dreher, a regular at Somme's workdays and an engineer by training, suggested that it would be a simple matter to push the piled soil back into the ditch, thus halting the artificial draining. This obviously exceeded the capability of volunteers but Dennis thought that this project could serve as a model

for the many ditches and erosion spots that plague our forest preserves.

Laurel and Dennis worked hard with staff from the Forest Preserve District to secure a small grant from the Wetlands Fund administered by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

This Spring, four years after the initial idea was born and after a number of small and large bureaucratic hurdles, the project was finally on track to be completed. Laurel, Dennis and I held our breaths, hoping for a spell of dry weather, without which the heavy equipment might have left irreparable tracks.

In late March we received a call that the work would begin and amazingly it was completed in a couple days. The top layer of the heaped banks were carefully removed and deposited in the ditch on top of check dams to stop the flow of water and the erosion. Erosion blankets were spread on the raw soil on both sides. Laurel and I, accompanied by Nancy Freehafer, were there a couple days later, sowing wet-loving native seed mixes. A week later we seeded with fast-growing annual rye to hold the soil until the natives become established.

Now, observation, maintenance, and patience, are in order, until we can begin to assess the effects of the work on the hydrology of the site. We are very optimistic and so happy that the project was done. It took many people for it to happen and we wish to thank them all.



BOLORIA MEADOWS- SPECIAL WORKDAY
Saturday, August 20, 10:00am

North Branch stewards and volunteers are invited by Dennis Dreher to a field trip and workday at Boloria Meadows in McHenry County. Boloria was recently dedicated as an Illinois Nature Preserve because of the presence of a high quality fen. Boloria also has sedge meadow, savanna, and woodland communities. This site was acquired by the Boone Creek Watershed Alliance in 2003 and is in the very early stages of restoration.

If you are interested in venturing out to this intriguing site contact Dennis Dreher for directions and times. (dwdreher@earthlink.net or 773/327-2303).



Meadow Fritillary (*Boloria bellona*)

***SAVE THE DATE! SEPTEMBER 24TH –
NATIONAL PUBLIC LANDS DAY***

National Public Lands Day is the nation's largest hands-on volunteer effort to improve and enhance the public lands that Americans treasure. It is a day sponsored by Federal agencies and private organizations to encourage citizens to get out and do hands-on work on public lands. (This is right up our alley, isn't it?!)

For the seventh year now, this holiday will be observed at workdays on sites throughout Chicago Wilderness. New visitors will work with experienced volunteers, see the beauty of a high quality natural area and learn about how citizens are being good stewards of the land. We encourage experienced North Branch volunteers to attend this workday and help welcome visitors, who may become new volunteers, as well!

So please put the date on your calendar now and plan to join the celebration at the North Branch workday (site to be announced in the next issue of Brush Piles). Hope to see you on Saturday, September 24th, 2005!

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SAVE A TREE ... ?

... and some postage too! Our land mail list continues to grow and while we are very pleased that so many people are interested, it does take resources – time, money, paper and ink. We care about the environment and would like to conserve these resources as much as possible.

Would you be willing to receive Brushpiles, our quarterly newsletter, electronically? We can email you a “.pdf” file that can be read and printed by the free program Adobe Acrobat Reader (download from <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>). If you're interested, please send a brief message to publications@northbranchrestoration.org and we will put you on the email list. **Be assured that we will continue to send printed copies for those who want to receive our newsletter in the mail!**

Thanks! *The Brushpiles Crew*

NBRP Workday Schedule - Spring 2005

JUNE

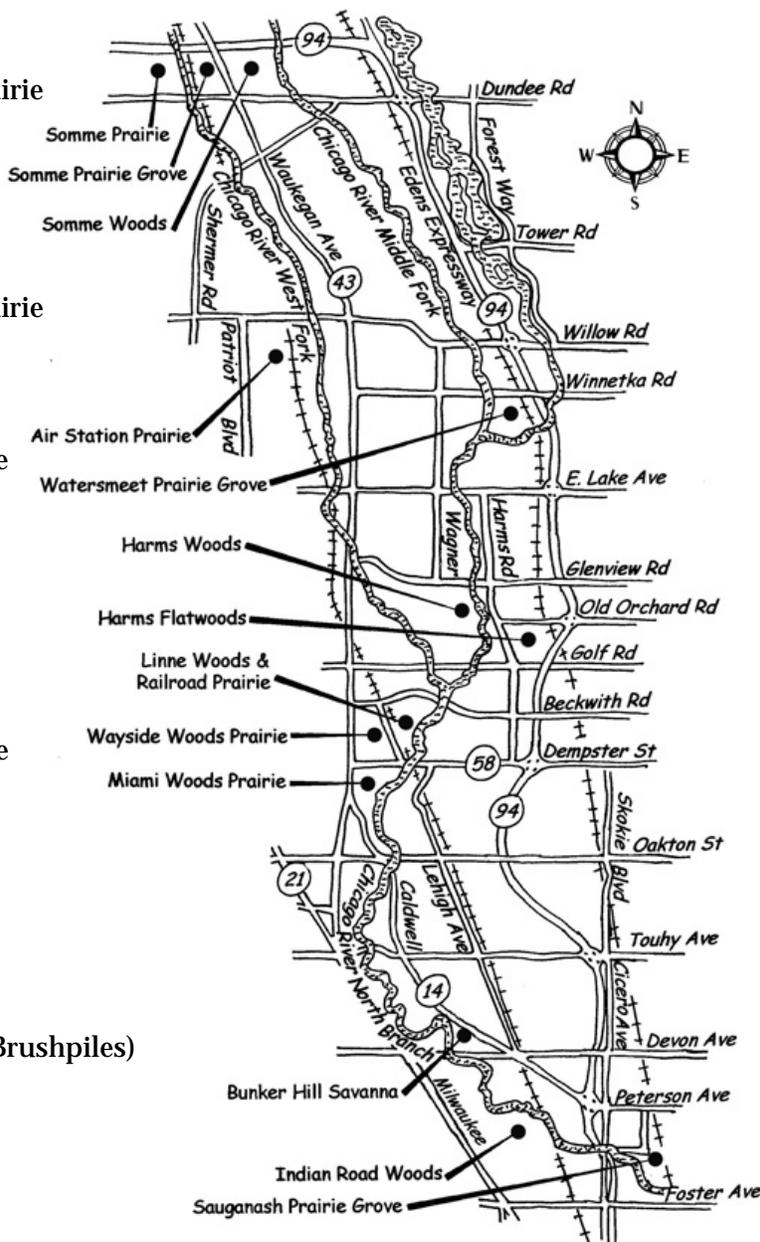
- 4 Saturday 9am - noon Wayside Woods/Linne RR Prairie
- 5 Sunday 9am - noon Somme Woods
- 11 Saturday 9am - noon Watersmeet Prairie Grove
- 12 Sunday 9am - noon Miami Woods Prairie
- 18 Saturday 9am - noon Linne Woods North
- 19 Sunday 9am - noon Watersmeet Prairie Grove
- 26 Sunday 9am - noon Wayside Woods/Linne RR Prairie

JULY

- 2 Saturday 9am - noon Watersmeet Prairie Grove
- 3 Sunday 9am - noon Somme Prairie Nature Preserve
- 9 Saturday 9am - noon Linne Prairie
- 10 Sunday 9am - noon Somme Prairie Grove
- 16 Saturday 9am - noon Watersmeet Prairie Grove
- 17 Sunday 9am - noon Bunker Hill/Oxbow
- 17 Sunday 1pm - 4pm Harms Woods
- 23 Saturday 9am - noon Linne Woods North
- 24 Sunday 9am - noon Air Station Prairie
- 30 Saturday 9am - noon Somme Prairie Nature Preserve
- 31 Sunday 9am - noon Watersmeet Prairie Grove

AUGUST

- 6 Saturday 9am - noon Watersmeet Prairie Grove
- 7 Sunday 9am - noon Somme Woods
- 13 Saturday 9am - noon Linne Prairie
- 14 Sunday 9am - noon Miami Woods Prairie
- 20 Saturday 10am - ?? Boloria Meadows (see note in Brushpiles)
- 21 Sunday 9am - noon Somme Prairie Grove
- 28 Sunday 9am - noon Watersmeet Prairie Grove



BUFFALO GROVE PRAIRIE

**Sundays - June 5, July 3, Aug 14
9:00 am - Noon.**

Work on Sundays at this piece of virgin prairie located on Hastings Road. It is off Lake-Cook about a mile west of Milwaukee (watch for Hastings on the north after going under the railroad overpass). Turn north on Hastings, then right into the second parking lot. The prairie is under the Com Ed power lines. Call Bev Hansen at 847-272-6211 for more information.

SKOKIE LAGOONS

**Saturdays - June 11, July 9, Aug 13
10:00 am - 1:00 pm.**

Meet at the Tower Road parking lot (east of the lagoon bridge - not the boat launch). There will be a sign with directions to the work site in the picnic field adjacent to the parking lot. Come dressed for the weather. We will provide waders, gloves and tools. For more information contact Jerry Garden at 773-545-4632 or jerrygarden@sprynet.com.

GLENBROOK PRAIRIE

**Thursdays - June 9, July 14, Aug 11
6:00 until dark**

Remarkable changes have occurred at the preserve. It is located at the northwest corner of the Glenbrook North HS, west of Shermer and north of Willow Roads. Park in the north parking lot by the tennis courts and walk along the north side of the football field until you see us. Call Rob on his cell phone (847-337-0471) if you're running late or get lost finding the place.

NBRP Sites, Stewards, & Directions

DIRECTIONS:

Air Station Prairie, Glenview

Kent & Jerry Fuller – From the Edens Expressway; go west on Willow Road, past Waukegan Road and over the RR overpass. Turn south at the new traffic signals for Patriot Blvd. (The new main road through the redeveloped Naval Air Station). Turn east on Compass to the gate at the south end of the prairie. Patriot Blvd. is also accessible from the south via Lake Ave.

Bunker Hill Savanna/Oxbow, Chicago

Jane & John Balaban – Off Caldwell between Devon and Touhy; entrance located just opposite Tonty Street. For Bunker Hill Meet in first section of parking lot; for Oxbow, follow road until it turns north, then park along the west side.

Harms Flatwoods, Glenview

Neil Peck & Terry Schilling – Meet at the Forest Preserve Grove parking lot on the west side of Harms Road, directly west of Old Orchard Road.

Harms Woods, Glenview

Jane & John Balaban – Meet at the Forest Preserve Grove parking lot on the west side of Harms Road, just south of Glenview Road and north of Old Orchard Road.

Linne Prairie, Morton Grove

Mary Busch & John Thill (847-966-0231) – Meet at the Wayside Woods Prairie parking lot on Lehigh Ave, a few blocks east of Waukegan Road and just north of Dempster.

Linne Woods North, Morton Grove

John & Marian Thill (847-966-0231, mjthill@icsp.net) – From Edens go west on Dempster street about 1.5 miles. The forest preserve entrance will be on the north side of the street directly across from McDonalds. Follow the winding road all the way back until it dead-ends at the turn-around circle.

Miami Woods Prairie, Niles/Morton Grove

Kent & Jerry Fuller – Located on the east side of Caldwell, two blocks north of Oakton. Meet in the parking lot for Miami Woods.

Sauganash Prairie Grove, Chicago

Larry Hodak & Pete Leki (watersschool@yahoo.com) – Meet at the edge of the Forest Preserve along the south side of Bryn Mawr at Kilbourn, which is south of Peterson and east of Cicero.

Somme Prairie Grove, Northbrook

Stephen Packard (847-509-0431, spackard@audubon.org) – From the Edens Expressway; take Dundee Road two miles west to Waukegan Road. Go north a few hundred feet on Waukegan and turn left into the unpaved parking area by the sign “Somme Woods Prairie.”

Somme Prairie Nature Preserve, Northbrook

Laurel Ross (312-665-7432, lross@fieldmuseum.org) & Christiane Rey (773-478-2019) – From the Edens Expressway, take Dundee Road 2½ miles west (past Waukegan) to Western. Turn north and park in the post office parking lot.

Somme Woods, Northbrook

Linda Masters (847-509-0431, masters2001@comcast.net) – From the Edens Expressway, take Dundee Road two miles west and turn right into Somme Woods parking lot (just before the light at Waukegan Road).

Watersmeet Prairie Grove, Northfield

John Berg (Kerg111@aol.com) – From Lake Avenue and Wagner Road, turn north on Wagner to Winnetka Road. Turn east on Winnetka for ¾ mile. Park on the north side of the street or a side street.

Wayside Woods Prairie/Linne RR Prairie, Morton Grove

Gladys Bryer & Bob Bluestone – Meet at Wayside Woods Prairie parking lot on Lehigh Ave, a few blocks east of Waukegan Road and just north of Dempster.



Rhonda Shereck

THE COLORFUL PEOPLE

Breezy day,
Sun shining on a dreamy land.
A team of colorful people—
Young and old,
Artists, musicians, writers,
Engineers, scientists, teachers and students,
Businessmen and women—
Loppers in hand,
Saws on arms,
Cut brush,
Clear weeds,
Restore a woodland
Where fairies reside.

Through the air
Come sweet words
Of love and friendship.
They are like brothers and sisters.
Sweat fertilizing soil,
Growing jewels:
Flowers, grasses, trees,
Their soul food.

T.T. Chen
Fall 2002

North Branch Restoration Project
P.O. Box 2154
Northbrook, IL 60062-3707

The North Branch Restoration Project is a cooperative effort involving the Nature Conservancy, the Chicago Audubon Society, and the Sierra Club. We manage the sites as volunteers for the Forest Preserve District of Cook County and other local agencies. The Project works to restore and manage the few remaining woodlands and prairies along the North Branch of the Chicago River. Our goal is to restore conditions that will allow these natural wild communities to flourish as a permanent part of the metropolitan area.

www.northbranchrestoration.org

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