

Brush Piles



NBPP's Refrigerator Door Companion

Fall 1996

PEOPLE AND PLACES

North Branch Volunteer Barbara Sutcliffe will be reporting on our sites and their stewards for Brush Piles. For this issue, she interviewed Stewards Larry Hodak and Pete Leki of Sauganash Prairie Grove.

LARRY HODAK, STEWARD SAUGANASH PRAIRIE GROVE

Larry has been committed to the North Branch Prairie Project since its beginnings in the 1970s. In fact, he was part of the original group of North Branchers who worked with the Cook County Forest Preserve District to develop the idea of volunteers helping to manage the Preserve's natural ecosystems. Larry, with co-stewards Pete Leki and Paul Comstock, has been steward for the 25-acre Sauganash Prairie Grove for 16 years.

Larry explained to us that Sauganash was chosen "because one of the early amateur botanists of the site discovered swamp saxifrage and other rare native plants that had not been found (that we knew of) on the North Branch. The site was overgrown with a thick brush and in very poor condition."

"With a lot of work," Larry continued, "the ecology of the site is really improving. One reason we have so much good stuff left is that it really isn't much of a recreation area. We're on the other side of the river from all the parking lots. It's such a wet site that the mosquitoes are a natural defense."

The Sauganash site, because of its proximity to the city, gets a lot of abuse. "We've had graffiti on the trees and stolen cars parked on the site. It's a party site, and there is the Deep Tunnel project. A housing development has been proposed just east of the forest preserve, but we remain optimistic," Larry told *Brush Piles*. "Last spring there was a wildfire near the railroad tracks. Someone set a brush pile on fire, and the fire spread to the sedge meadow, and it actually did a lot of good; the area was full of sedges. We have very good spring flora, especially in the savanna areas, and geraniums are spectacular. We've had an abundance of false foxglove, especially in the burned area."

"One advantage of being so close to the city is that we get a lot of school groups coming out to help. It's a Mighty Acorn site and Water School kids come out, as well as Near North Montessori. Pete Leki is the president of the local school council at Waters. These kids have done a lot of work out there, and we're happy to have their help. They amaze me, especially the city kids that don't have any experience with anything that resembles a natural area at all. They're almost afraid of it—as if they might get eaten by the deer."

PETE LEKI, CO-STEWARD SAUGANASH PRAIRIE GROVE

When *Brush Piles* asked Pete how he became a North Branch volunteer, he replied, "I live by the river and I would walk along and see these plants growing there and would wonder what they were and where they came from. One of the people I asked was a friend who turned out to be a North Branch member. I got involved through my friend."

Pete has managed the site for three years. He explained, "Larry Hodak started managing the site 16 years ago, and it was in very poor condition then. The land had originally been farmed. Two pre-Columbian Indian sites have been found in the area."

"How is the condition of the site now compared with when you became co-steward?" *Brush Piles* asked Pete. "We have two new areas that have been opened up that are just spectacular, areas that were overgrown and completely shaded out. With help, mainly from the school children that have worked on our site, we've cleared two large areas that are now open savanna and are sprouting grasses that were planted last year by some of the children. The effect is not only from the adult volunteers but from the influx of kids. This is a Mighty Acorn program, and we've got about 180 kids from Water School and another 200 from Near North Montessori going out there every season, and they do just a tremendous job. They clear land and plant; they're amazing!"

"We were worried about damage to the site from trampling, but the amount of benefit is overwhelming compared with any damage that they might do, especially when you compare it with people who do mistreat the area."

"We also have a lot of adult volunteer repeaters, and we make every effort to get more of the neighbors out there. We get visitors from other countries. It's great to be able to work next to somebody from India or Africa; these people are wonderful to be out there with us."

"Are the local people supportive?" *Brush Piles* asked. Pete told us, "They're very happy about it—supportive and involved. For example, a developer recently attempted to develop the northeast corner of our site. It turned out to be owned by the railroad which sold it to the developer, who wanted to build 13

Continued on page 4

Continued on page 4

LARRY HODAK

Continued from page 1

"We're a little worried that our organization seems to be getting older and so we're very happy to see all these youngsters getting involved."

Brush Piles asked Larry what about restoration gives him the most satisfaction. He answered, "The occasional thrill you get walking through and discovering a plant that was either on the site to begin with and we had never found before or finding a new species from our seed mixes. A couple of years ago we discovered bellwort on the site, and there are sedges blooming as a result of our sowing seed mixes. The savannas are opening up; we're establishing a real turf in some of these areas. Knowing that you are directly responsible for that is the only thing you need to get by."

"I look forward to *Brush Piles*. It's a really well written document and it's important. I'm really proud of it, and glad I'm associated with a group that puts out a document like that. I've been involved so long with the project, that I forget new people coming in don't have the same background and same set of experiences. You have to keep retelling the story in different ways."

PETE LEKI

Continued from page 1

houses right on our site. The local people were furious and organized an enormous meeting to prevent it from happening. We're now at the point that the community plans to buy the site and give it to the Forest Preserve District to be preserved."

We asked Pete to tell *Brush Pile* readers what this work means to him. Pete explained, "The meaning of the plants surviving there—for me, it's like all of a sudden running into a community of people who used to live there, into a village that's hurt but still surviving 500 years later. It's just a miracle."

Permit Holder:

The Nature Conservancy
8 S. Michigan Avenue
Chicago, IL 60603

North Branch Prairie Project

P.O. Box 74
Northbrook, IL 60065

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

*The North Branch
Prairie Project is
a cooperative effort
involving The Nature
Conservancy, the
Chicago Audubon
Society, and the Sierra
Club, Chicago Group.*

*We manage these sites
as volunteers for the
Forest Preserve District
of Cook County and
the Volunteer
Stewardship Network.*

That's how I feel about it. Its survival gives me great hope that we can at least know what our land is supposed to look like.

"I used to stand in front of my house and think, what was it like here? I couldn't understand and I didn't even know who to ask. I would ask different people and they didn't know, or they would give me contradictory answers like, 'it was a forest,' 'it was a prairie,' or 'don't you know Chicago was a swamp?'" As it turned out, it was a mixture of those things, but the predominant thing about the prairie and the oak woods is that we still have time to fix them."

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY HOSTS PRAIRIE FESTIVAL ON SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 28

Join The Nature Conservancy in a fall celebration of Illinois' natural heritage at the second annual Prairie Festival on Saturday, September 28, from 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m. at the Poplar Creek Forest Preserve near Hoffman Estates in northwest suburban Chicago. Enjoy lively activities for the whole family including nature walks, children's activities, live animals, nature-related merchandise, live folk and bluegrass bands and much more.

The Prairie Festival is a benefit for The Nature Conservancy of Illinois and is sponsored by the Ronald McDonald House Charities, Sara Lee Corporation, Stein Roe & Farnham and Tellabs, Inc. Last year's Prairie Festival drew over 1,000 people and raised \$97,000 for The Nature Conservancy.

The Prairie Festival is open to the public at The Poplar Creek Forest Preserve in northwestern Cook County. From the I-90 Northwest Tollway take the Route 59 exit and travel south 1.1 miles to the Festival entrance. A \$5 donations (\$10 family) covers all nature walks and activities. Free parking is available and the site is wheelchair accessible. For more information, call The Nature Conservancy of Illinois at 312/346-8166.

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit No. 6632
Chicago, Illinois

NORTH BRANCH PRAIRIE PROJECT FALL WORKDAYS AND ACTIVITIES SCHEDULE

The NORTH BRANCH PRAIRIE PROJECT is working to restore and manage the few remaining prairie and oak savanna remnants along the North Branch of the Chicago River in the Cook County Forest Preserves. These areas, once part of a vast grassland ecosystem, are under tremendous pressure from urban development and non-native species. We are working to restore conditions that will allow these natural

FALL 1996

September 1	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Sauganash Prairie Grove
September 8	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Harms Woods
September 8	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	Harms Woods
September 7 & 8	Saturday	before noon	Workday and
	Sunday	after lunch	Nachusa Campout
September 14	Saturday	9:30 a.m.	Watersmeet Prairie Grove
September 14	Saturday	2:00-4:00 p.m.	Midewin Prairie Tour
September 15	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Bunker Hill Prairie
September 15	Sunday	1:30 p.m.	Bunker Hill Prairie
September 22	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Somme Nature Preserve
September 28	Saturday	9:00 a.m.	Wayside/Railroad Prairie/Linne Woods
September 28	Saturday	All day	Prairie Festival at Poplar Creek
September 29	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Miami Woods
October 1	Tuesday	7:00 p.m.	Women's Potluck
October 6	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Wayside/Railroad Prairie/Linne Woods
October 8	Tuesday	7:30 p.m.	Coordinating Committee
October 12	Saturday	9:30 a.m.	Watersmeet Prairie Grove
October 13	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Sauganash Prairie Grove
October 14	Monday	9:00 a.m.	Somme Woods (Columbus Day)
October 20	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Bunker Hill and Oxbow Prairies
October 23-26			Prairie Conferences
October 26	Saturday	9:30 a.m.	Watersmeet Prairie Grove
October 27	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Somme Prairie Grove
November 3	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Miami Woods/Indigo
November 9	Saturday	9:30 a.m.	Watersmeet Prairie Grove
November 10	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Watersmeet Prairie Grove
November 17	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Harms Woods
November 23	Saturday	All Day	Seed Processing at Emily Oaks
November 24	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Harms Flatwoods
November 30	Saturday	9:00 a.m.	Oxbow Prairie (Bunker Hill)
December 1	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Somme Prairie Grove
December 7	Saturday	9:00 a.m.	Harms Woods
December 8	Sunday	9:00 a.m.	Miami Woods/Indigo

Directions

BUNKER HILL/OXBOW (Chicago)—Meet at the Bunker Hill Forest Preserve parking lot on the west side of Caldwell Ave. about 1/4 mile north of Devon Ave.

EMILY OAKS NATURE CENTER (Skokie)—From intersection of Skokie Blvd. and Howard St., go east on Howard to first residential street, Knox. Go north on Knox to Brummel. Turn left on Brummel and go one block to Nature Center parking lot.

GLENBROOK HIGH SCHOOL (Northbrook)—North of Willow Rd. on the west side of Shermer Road. Enter the parking lot at the north driveway and park by the tennis courts.

HARMS FLATWOODS (Glenview)—Meet at Forest Preserve Grove parking lot on the west side of Harms Rd., just south of Old Orchard Rd.

wild communities to flourish as a permanent part of the metropolitan area.

In the fall we collect seeds. Always wear long pants and shirts with sleeves. Bring some water. Sun protection is important. The workday hotline is 312/878-3877.

We picnic after working, so bring a lunch and something to share.

NORTH BRANCH WORKGROUPS

The North Branch workgroups listed below need volunteers. Contact the chairperson for more information or attend a workgroup meeting.

Ecological Management

Jane and John Balaban, 847/679-4289.

Education/Volunteer Development:

Joanne Softcheck, 312/878-3877

Publications/Publicity:

Barbara Sutcliffe, 312/775-7934

Science:

Drew Ullberg, 847/991-3671

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SEED COLLECTING

Sundays in Autumn

Seed must be collected when and where it ripens. When it is time to gather, additional workdays will be scheduled, usually on Sunday afternoons. Please call the workday hotline, 312/878-3877, for locations and dates.

SEED PROCESSING DAY

Saturday, November 23, 9:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.

A time to sow and a time to reap. And before we sow again we process seeds, the highlight of the season and one of our most important events! Come whenever you can and stay as long as you wish. Bring friends. Bring snacks to share. Wear clothing for the weather—we work outdoors.

CAMPOUT AT NACHUSA

Saturday, September 7 before noon, to Sunday, after lunch

We will meet steward Bill Kleiman for a workday at 2:00 on Saturday. We will sleep on the prairie amidst the waving grasses and under the big sky. We need to know who is coming. Please call Barbara Sutcliffe at 312/775-7934 if you are interested.

MIDEWIN NATIONAL TALLGRASS PRAIRIE TOUR

Saturday, September 14, 2:00-4:00 p.m.

HARMS WOODS (Glenview)—Meet at Forest Preserve Grove parking lot on the west side of Harms Rd., just south of Glenview Rd.

INDIAN ROAD WOODS (Chicago)—Meet at parking lot adjacent to Indian Road (the first picnic grove north of Elston Avenue, on Central Avenue.)

MIAMI-INDIGO (Morton Grove-Niles)—Meet at Miami Woods Prairie Forest Preserve parking lot on the east side of Caldwell Ave., two blocks north of Oakton Ave.

PERKINS WOODS (Evanston)—From I94 exit at Old Orchard Rd., east to Crawford St., south on Crawford to Grant St., east on Grant to Ewing St., site is at the corner of Grant and Ewing.

SAUGANASH PRAIRIE (Chicago)—Meet at the edge of the Forest Preserve along the south side of Bryn Mawr Ave. at Kilbourn Ave. (south of Peterson Ave. and east of Cicero Ave.)

SOMME NATURE PRESERVE (Northbrook)—Meet in the Post Office parking lot, Dundee and Western Avenues.

SOMME PRAIRIE GROVE, WOODS, AND SEDGE MEADOW (Northbrook)—Take Dundee Rd. two miles west from the Edens Expressway to Waukegan Rd. Go north a few hundred feet on Waukegan and meet at the unpaved parking area on the west side of the road.

WATERSMEET/SKOKIE SEDGE MEADOWS (Northfield)—Exit the Edens Expressway at Lake Avenue West. Go west to Wagner Rd., turn north then take Wagner to Winnetka Rd. Go east on Winnetka 3/4 mile. Park on the south side of the street.

WAYSIDE/RR PRAIRIE (Morton Grove)—Meet at Wayside Woods Prairie Forest Preserve parking lot on Lehigh Ave. (a few blocks east of Waukegan Rd. and just north of Dempster St.)

BUFFALO GROVE PRAIRIE FALL WORKDAY SCHEDULE

The Buffalo Grove Prairie Guardians are volunteers working to restore the native Illinois prairie near Lake-Cook Road on the Commonwealth Edison easement. We invite you to join us as we continue in our efforts to eliminate weeds, collect and sow seeds, cut brush, and handle general site maintenance. Be sure to dress for the outdoors and for the weather. Wear long slacks, sturdy shoes and socks, sun protection, insect repellent in warm seasons, and work gloves if you have them. Tools, camaraderie, homemade goodies and beverages will be provided.

**All work days are on Sundays from 9:00 a.m. to noon.
September 8 • October 6 • November 3 • December 1**

DIRECTIONS: Take Lake-Cook Road to Hastings Road (first street west of the railroad overpass and one mile west of the Milwaukee Road overpass). Turn north on Hastings into the second parking lot on the right (one lot past the Computer Discount Warehouse.) Park at east end of the lot nearest the prairie.

CONTACT: Call Lee at 847/677-7001 with questions.

To contribute to *Brush Piles*.

Your photos and cartoons would look great on these pages. Your features, anecdotes, essays, announcements, requests, poems, comments, and letters are also welcome. To discuss your ideas, call Barbara Rose, 312/248-4817 or Leslie Borns 312/751-1497 *before* the deadline. Deadline for the Winter 1996 issue is **November 1** (for December, January, February).

You've heard about the designation of the Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie—here's your special chance to see what all the excitement is about! Tour the 19,000 acre prairie and learn about plans for its restoration, a project involving the USDA Forest Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Illinois DNR, Openlands Project and The Nature Conservancy, among others. To register, call Betty at 312/346-8166, ext. 10. Space is limited to 30 people. Directions to the tour will be provided to everyone registered.

SECOND ANNUAL PRAIRIE FESTIVAL

Saturday, September 28, 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Poplar Creek Forest Preserve in northwest Cook County will again host this popular event. This is an outstanding opportunity to recruit new restorationists. Volunteers for this event are wanted. Call Mary Ann Skvara at 708/246-9561 to learn about the choice of activities. (See story on page 4.)

WOMEN OF THE NORTH BRANCH

Tuesday, October 1, 1996, 7:00 p.m.

Great food and great conversation are the norm when women get together. An ongoing quest is to explore the myriad ways to creatively express what restoration work means to us and our communities. Join us for our next event, a potluck at the home of Debra Shore. For more information and directions, call Debra, 847/869-3545.

COORDINATING COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday, October 8, 1996, 7:30 p.m.

We will plan the annual volunteer awards and potluck dinner. To participate, call Barbara Rose, 312/248-4817.

READING GROUP

We are taking time to reflect and regroup. If you would like to participate in a reading and/or discussion group, call Nancy Freehafer at 312/342-6665.

MIGHTY ACORNS

Children are fine stewards when led by dedicated and skilled adults. Help teach school groups. Call Diane Reckless at The Nature Conservancy, 312/346-8166.

NOT TO BE MISSED: PRAIRIE CONFERENCES

October 23-26, 1996

Pheasant Run Resort and Conference Center, St. Charles, Illinois
All North Branchers will want to participate! The Joint 23rd Natural Areas, Indiana Dunes Ecosystems, and 15th North American Prairie Conferences. The meetings are designed to promote a better understanding of our natural heritage through scientific presentations, informal discussions, and the publication of conference proceedings. Calendar it now and look for more information soon.

Brush Piles Crew

Editing: Leslie Borns, Lisa Ferro, Barbara Rose, Joanne Softcheck, Barbara Sutcliffe
Layout/Production: Kathy and Chuck Lapinsky