

Brush Piles

NBRP's Refrigerator Door Companion

Fall 1998

AN EXPLORATION OF RESTORATION ISSUES

[In the last issue we explored the use of herbicides. In this second article of the series we look at fire.]

WHY FIRE?

By Jane Balaban

Q Why do you burn natural areas?

A Fire helps keep the prairies and woodlands healthy. For thousands of years, since the glaciers receded northward, fire has been a natural part of our landscape. Lightning started some fires; native Americans started many more. The plants and animals of northeastern Illinois' natural communities have been selected by their ability to live with fire. Their deep roots, thick bark, fleet feet, burrowing or climbing habits make them well suited to fire-formed habitat. When fires are suppressed, as they have been here for the last hundred years or so, conditions are suddenly changed. The prairies become brush-choked and overgrown. The beautiful blazing stars, smooth phlox, shooting stars and other native wildflowers are gradually and perceptibly replaced by solid stands of weedy species, such as buckthorn, multiflora rose, white sweet clover or teasel. In the woodlands, the sun-loving native

*Fire helps keep the
prairies and
woodlands healthy.*

Protection Agency. The conditions, such as wind direction and speed, humidity and air temperature, under which a burn may take place are strictly defined in the burn plan. Prescribed burns may not take place except within those limits. Smoke is an important concern and smoke control is always included in the burn plan, because many natural areas adjoin homes, businesses and busy streets.

Q Is it safe to burn in the Forest Preserves?

A Yes, when the burns are conducted by trained personnel in the manner prescribed in an approved burn plan. In 35 years of using prescribed fire, the Forest Preserve District of Cook County (FPDCC) has not had a single instance of fire or smoke damage to people or property.

*Fire is a powerful
force and must always
be treated with respect.*

(Vandals or careless visitors sometimes do set wildfires and, unfortunately, these may result in smoke damage to nearby structures.) Fire is a powerful force and must always be treated with respect. The Cook County Department of the

wildflowers and grasses are no longer able to thrive or reproduce in the dense shade of a thick understory. As the native starry campion, Short's Aster and fire pink die out, Eurasian weeds such as garlic mustard and buckthorn replace them and broad-leafed shade-tolerant natives like poison ivy, enchanters nightshade, and Virginia creeper. There is so little light in the densest buckthorn "deserts" that nothing can grow on the ground to hold the soil. As a result, the soil erodes away.

Q What happens after you burn?

A Brush that choked the prairies is reduced by fire. Nutrients are returned to the soil and the native grasses and wildflowers respond with vigorous new growth. Species that were thought to be lost will often reappear after fire. In the woodlands, the fires thin the brush and saplings that were turning the woods into thickets. As more sunlight reaches the ground, sedges, grasses and flowers once again form a healthy turf, holding the soil in place. Regular prescribed burning increases the diversity and abundance of our native plants. Indigenous animals like birds, butterflies, and mammals thrive in the improved habitat.

Q What is a "prescribed burn"?

A A prescribed burn is the careful, well-planned and safely executed use of fire to help natural areas. Land managers all over the country recognize fire as one of their most effective management tools. Before a burn is prescribed at any site, a thorough plan must be prepared, reviewed and approved by the landowner. Permits are obtained from agencies such as the Cook County Department of the Environment and the Illinois Environmental

Environment; Forest Preserve Police, Maintenance and Conservation officials, and local fire and police departments are notified at least a day ahead when a prescribed burn is planned. They are contacted again on the morning of a planned burn and once more after it's completed.

Continued on page 4

ALERT: ALL GARDENERS AND SEED COLLECTORS!!

The big seed processing day is coming November 21st. It's time to keep your eyes on those seeds. Here's what to do (or call Joan Meersman, 773 763 5055, and ask for her expert advice!)

- Watch for color changes and other signs of ripening. The plants will indicate when the seeds are ripe.
- Clean your seeds from the chaff as best you can.
- Label them clearly with their name and yours.
- Send them in early. Don't hold on to five bags of ten different species just because one species has ten more seeds to deliver to you soon or because you are waiting for that last aster or goldenrod species to get ripe.
- Be sure to send your seeds a week or so before the November 21. (It is too much work when all the seeds come in at the last minute.) You can mail or deliver your seeds to Joan as soon as you have a good collection or as soon as the bulk of your seeds are in. Joan's address is 6715 N Oketo, Chicago, Illinois 60631-1332.

If Joan's is inconvenient, call and see if we can make other arrangements through someone nearby.

- And then come and visit them at the big seed-processing jamboree!

*... native grasses and
wildflowers respond
with vigorous growth.*

(continued from page 1)

Q Aren't animals killed?

A Our region's native species have lived with fire for ten thousand years. Their very presence here as part of natural communities shows they have developed successful strategies for dealing with fire. Will the fire catch an occasional animal? Possibly--but refuge is found in the mosaic of burned and unburned ground which results from carefully controlled fires. An individual animal may be harmed, yet overall, its species is benefited. *The goal of management is the continued health and viability of the entire ecosystem.*

Q Can harm to animals be prevented?

A Careful planning certainly minimizes the potential for harm. Management sites are broken up into small burn units and only some are burned each year. The unburned areas provide a refuge for insects and other animals. Burns are timed to avoid nesting periods. The Bird Conservation Network is working closely with land managers and stewards to identify critical time periods. Improved habitat results from management and benefits all the creatures that depend on healthy natural areas for their continued existence.

*Improved habitat
benefits all the
creatures that
depend on healthy
natural areas for
their continued
existence.*

Q When do you burn? How often?

A Fall and spring are the prime times to conduct burns. Oak leaves usually drop in October and provide the major fuel for woodland burns, so woodland sites take priority in the fall. Most prairie plants are adapted to our region's variable

weather and wait until later in spring to begin their growth. Thus early spring burns are often planned for prairies and savannas--early enough to avoid spring nesting birds such as woodcocks. Other factors, such as weather conditions and how long since an area has been burned, enter into the decision about when and where to burn. In general, one area may be burned every 3 to 5 years. (Some small areas may be burned annually to study the response of natives to more frequent, less intense fires, mimicking the historic pattern set by native Americans.)

Q Who conducts the burns?

A Only District staff and volunteers who are trained and qualified are allowed to participate in burns. The burn leader notifies appropriate agencies and officials of the burn, makes sure all conditions of the burn plan are met, and directs the crew leaders during the actual burn. Each crew leader is in communication with the burn leader and monitors and directs the crew. The crew leader assigns specific tasks to each member.

Q How do you let people know when you are going to burn in Forest Preserves?

A The FPDCC mails letters to nearby neighbors of managed sites, notifying them that an area of Forest Preserve near them may have a prescribed burn. Signs are posted at the site at least 30 days before a prescribed burn. On the day of the burn, warning signs are placed at important access points and the Forest Preserve Police are on site. Neighbors with special needs may also be notified by phone or leaflet.

Additional questions may be addressed to the FPDCC
Land Manager's office at (630) 257-2045

WEB OF LIFE, CONTINUED

- This site is a good place to find national news about river issues.
- http://www.dwdmndn.er.usgs.gov/na_wqa/uirb/index.html For more detail about water quality issues in the Chicago area, point your browser here, the US Geological Survey's Upper Illinois River Basin NAWQA -- Illinois, Indiana, and Wisconsin web site. Thanks to the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, the North Branch is part of the Upper Illinois River Basin. That meant that it could have been a national American Heritage river, as supported by Governor Edgar and promoted by former Lieutenant Governor Kustra. But thanks to downstate Congressman Jim Shymkus, the Illinois

River basin was removed from the list, depriving us of potential federal help to continue cleaning up the waterway. We could use the help. One piece of bad news I found was that pentachlorophenol found in the North Branch Chicago River at Niles, Illinois has been measured as high as 0.18 mg/L, well above the Maximum Contaminant Load level.

- <http://www.chiwild.org/events/ecotext.html> Check out this Chicago Wilderness: Geographic Information Systems page if you're interested in helping monitor the water quality of area rivers with the Illinois RiverWatch program.

- <http://www.chiwild.org/events/ecorvr.html> contains the schedule for training sessions.

- molzahn@fmppr.fmnh.org is Chris Molzahn's email address to use if you're

interested in becoming an EcoWatch Citizen Scientist, participating in RiverWatch, ForestWatch, PrairieWatch, WetlandWatch, or UrbanWatch. You can contact Chris at 312-922-9410 x598.

- <http://dnr.state.il.us/inringif.htm> for more information about the state's Critical Trends Assessment Project of Illinois Natural Resources Information Network.

Next time we'll wade in to the water and take a closer look at the many denizens that live on and under the surface

North Branch Restoration Project

P.O. Box 74

Northbrook, IL 60065

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

*The North Branch Restoration 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.*

NORTH BRANCH RESTORATION PROJECT

WEB OF LIVE

By Terry Schilling

As Webmaster for the North Branch Restoration Project site, I get inquiries from people regarding all sorts of things. Lately, there seems to have been a spate of requests for information about the North Branch itself. Our name leads some people to think that we are actually working in the river, instead of along it. (The other North Branch Restoration Project (of the Potomac River) does do that kind of work.) One recent request for information was for a school class doing research on the river's water quality. Rob Moore (Executive Director of the Central States Education Center and administrator of the "PrairieRivers" listserv) was able to point me in the right direction--the Illinois EPA's "305b Report". (A copy can be had by calling Joel Cross at IEPA (217-782-3397) and requesting a copy of the most recent report, 1995-1996 305(b).)

Here is a guide to web sites with lots of information on Chicago area rivers.

<http://www.epa.state.il.us/index.html>) at

<http://www.epa.state.il.us/water/water-quality/fact-sheet-01.html>. A page on the IEPA site, called "Great Lakes/Calumet River Watersheds" discusses water quality of the rivers near Chicago in a general way.

- <http://www.ripco.com/~jwn/> is a wonderful labor of love giving the visitor insight into the recreational possibilities of almost all of our navigable rivers and lakes. John Nelson's "Chicago Area Paddling/Fishing Page" is a great resource for those in the Chicago area. Clicking on the North Branch on the map on the home page brings you to a brief story of a canoe trip starting (and ending) at Indian Road Woods, with a few photos that you can view full screen if you'd like. There's also the link to the "water quality" site mentioned above, plus

a link to the South Branch page - the infamous "Bubbly Creek". The photos there make me appreciate the natural areas along the North Branch all the more. There's also a link to a listing of dams and locks on local waterways. I must say I never knew that there is a 38-foot high dam at Dayton on the lower Fox River! "Sailing", "Canoeing", "Rowing", "Pedalboats", "Fishing", and "Whitewater" are categories that pull up links to pages for lakes and rivers that are appropriate for each activity. You'll also find information regarding boat rentals, races and events, instruction, camping, clubs and trip reports. Up to date reports on river levels can be had from the Chicago Area River Conditions site (also on the links page):

<http://aspl.sbs.ohio->

state.edu/text/wxascii/rivercond/riverUS11.KCHI. So for coverage of all the places to paddle, row, sail or fish, from Arrowhead Lake to Wolf Lake, and from the Calumet River to the Vermilion River, check out John's site.

- <http://cpl.lib.uic.edu/> Some interesting historical facts about the Chicago River can be found on this Chicago Public Library site. "Chicago: 1900 Flow of Chicago River Reversed,"

004chicago/timeline/riverflow.html, deals with that most famous of events. Another item I learned was that the South Branch downtown wasn't channelized until 1928 because it was such a big project! See

chicago/timeline/riverstrght.html

<http://www.amrivers.org/> From this American Rivers site, I learned that the Riverside Neighbors Community and Waters Elementary School and NBRP's own Pete Leki received its 1996 National Urban River Restoration Award for "River Stewardship & Educational Achievement."

(Continued on back page)

NORTH BRANCH RESTORATION PROJECT FALL WORKDAYS AND ACTIVITIES SCHEDULE

The NORTH BRANCH RESTORATION PROJECT is working to restore and manage the few remaining savannas, woodlands, forests and prairies along the North Branch of the Chicago River in the Cook County Forest Preserves. These areas, once part of a vast wilderness, are now under tremendous pressure from urban development and non-native species. We are working to restore conditions that will allow these natural wild communities to flourish as a permanent part of the metropolitan area.

In the fall we cut brush and collect seeds. Always wear long pants and shirts with sleeves. Bring some water. Sun protection is important. The workday hotline is 773/878-3877.

WORKDAYS: Meet for lunch on Sunday workdays at 12:30 at parking lot picnic area.

Sep 6
Sept 13

Sunday
Sunday

9:00 a.m.
9:00 a.m.

Harms Woods
Somma Brook & C

ANNOUNCEMENTS

SEED SEASON IS ALMOST OVER Wednesday mornings, 9:00 a.m. to Noon Locations vary [call hotline (773) 878-3877]

If your Wednesday mornings are free, consider joining volunteers Joan Meersman and Paul Dolinko, seed collectors extraordinaire, as they collect precious native seed to use in restoring the North Branch Forest Preserves. It is a great way to learn to recognize the wildflowers even when they are not flowering while helping our prairies and woodlands stay healthy. The location varies from week to week depending on which species are ripe, so it's also a great way to get to know the different North Branch sites.

FOURTH ANNUAL NATURE CONSERVANCY FESTIVAL Sunday, September 13, Noon to 5 p.m.

Join The Nature Conservancy in a fall celebration of Illinois' natural heritage at Ryerson Conservation Area near Deerfield in Lake County, Illinois. Enjoy activities and entertainment for the whole family including nature walks, storytelling, prairie animals, folk music and more. The entrance is on Riverwoods Road, 1 1/2 miles south of Half Day Road (Route 22) and 2 miles north of Deerfield Road, just west of the I-94 tollway. Free parking is available and the site is wheelchair accessible.

ECOLOGICAL MANAGEMENT WORKGROUP MEETING September 16 and November 12, 7:30 p.m.

Call Jane Balaban at (847) 679-4289 for information and directions.

WOMEN OF THE NORTH BRANCH POTLUCK

Wednesday, October 21, 7:00 p.m.

As women in the restoration movement, we explore topics of interest to all of us. Nothing to join, no fees to pay--just bring food to share and an inquiring mind. Call Cynthia Gehrie at (847) 446-5972 for directions. Are you a woman and a NBRP volunteer? You are invited!

SEED PROCESSING DAY Saturday, November 21, 9:00 a.m. until done Emily Oaks Nature Center

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. We will share a pizza supper before we leave.

SKOKIE LAGOONS WORKDAY SCHEDULE September 12 - October 10 - November 14

The Chicago Audubon Society, in conjunction with the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, is sponsoring wetland restoration workdays at the Skokie Lagoons. The initial focus is to control erosion and provide bird habitat by planting and maintaining vegetation at the water's edge. Workdays are on every second Saturday of the month, from March through November. Meet at the Tower Road parking lot (just east of the bridge) at 8:30 a.m. for a bird walk (bring binoculars), and at 10:30 a.m. for the workday. Call the CAS office at 773-539-6793 for more details.

ANNUAL POTLUCK DINNER Saturday, January 16, 6:30 p.m.

North Branch Prairie Project's annual celebration will be held on January 16 at the Edgebrook Community Center, 6100 North Central. We'll acknowledge special volunteers for their outstanding contributions. We have much to celebrate. Everyone is welcome. Come at 6:30 p.m. and bring a dish and beverage to share. Please call Nancy Freehafer at 312/342-6665 for information and directions.

NORTH BRANCH RESTORATION PROJECT FALL WORKDAYS AND ACTIVITIES SCHEDULE

The NORTH BRANCH RESTORATION PROJECT is working to restore and manage the few remaining savannas, woodlands, forests and prairies along the North Branch of the Chicago River in the Cook County Forest Preserves. These areas, once part of a vast wilderness, are now under tremendous pressure from urban development and non-native species. We are working to restore conditions that will allow these natural wild communities to flourish as a permanent part of the metropolitan area.

In the fall we cut brush and collect seeds. Always wear long pants and shirts with sleeves. Bring some water. Sun protection is important. The workday hotline is 773/878-3877.

WORKDAYS: Meet for lunch on Sunday workdays at 12:30 at parking lot picnic area.

| | | | |
|---------|--------|-----------|-----------------------|
| Sept 6 | Sunday | 9:00 a.m. | Harms Woods |
| Sept 13 | Sunday | 9:00 a.m. | Somme Prairie Grove |
| Sept 20 | Sunday | 9:00 a.m. | Somme Nature Preserve |
| Sept 27 | Sunday | 9:00 a.m. | Wayside/Linne Prairie |
| Oct 4 | Sunday | 9:00 a.m. | Harms Woods |

SEED COLLECTING

| | | | |
|--------|----------|-----------|-------------------------------|
| Oct 11 | Sunday | 9:00 a.m. | Somme Nature Preserve |
| Oct 18 | Sunday | 9:00 a.m. | Somme Prairie Grove |
| Oct 25 | Sunday | 9:00 a.m. | Wayside/Linne Prairie |
| Nov 1 | Sunday | 9:00 a.m. | Harms Woods |
| Nov 8 | Sunday | 9:00 a.m. | Harms Flatwoods |
| Nov 15 | Sunday | 9:00 a.m. | Somme Nature Preserve |
| Nov 21 | Saturday | All day | SEED PROCESSING AT EMILY OAKS |
| Nov 22 | Sunday | 9:00 a.m. | Somme Woods |
| Nov 29 | Sunday | 9:00 a.m. | Somme Prairie Grove |

Directions

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.

HARMS FLATWOODS (Glenview)--Meet at Forest Preserve Grove parking lot on the west side of Harms Road. Just drive west on Old Orchard Road into the lot.

HARMS WOODS (Glenview)--Meet at Forest Preserve Grove parking lot on the west side of Harms Road, just north of Old Orchard Road and south of Glenview Road.

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

SOMME PRAIRIE GROVE (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.

SOMME WOODS (Northbrook)--Entrance on the north side of Dundee Road, just east of Waukegan Road.

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 Ave.)

ACTIVITIES: See "Announcements"

| | | | |
|--------------|-----------|---------------|------------------------------|
| September 13 | Sunday | Noon to 5p.m. | TNC Fall Festival at Ryerson |
| September 16 | Wednesday | 7:00 p.m. | Ecological Management |
| October 21 | Wednesday | 7:00 p.m. | Women's Potluck |
| November 12 | Thursday | 7:00 p.m. | Ecological Management |
| January 16 | Saturday | 6:30 p.m. | Annual Potluck Dinner |

BUFFALO GROVE PRAIRIE SUMMER 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 workdays are on Sundays from 9:00 a.m. to noon.

October 4 * November 1 * December 13

LOCATION: Take Lake-Cook Road to Hastings Road (first street west of the railroad overpass and about one mile west of the Milwaukee Road overpass) Turn north on Hastings into the second parking lot on the right. Park at the east end of the lot near the prairie.

CONTACT: Call Bev Hanson at (847) 272-6211 with questions.

So That the Prairie May Live Long and Prosper

(Motto of the Buffalo Grove Prairie Guardians)

NORTH BRANCH WORKGROUPS

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

Ecological Management: Jane and John Balaban, (847/679-4289)

Publications/Publicity: Barbara Rose, (773) 248-4817

Education/Volunteer Development: Debra Shore, (847) 869-3545. Joanne Softcheck, (773) 878-3877

Science: (Linda Masters, 847) 509-0431

*A project of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County and
The Nature Conservancy*

Forest Preserve District of Cook County

John H. Stroger, Jr., President

Joseph N. Nevius, General Superintendent

The Forest Preserve District of Cook County does not discriminate on the basis of disability in admission or access to, or treatment or employment in District programs or services. Persons believing they have been discriminated against on the basis of color, race, national origin, sex, or disability, may file a complaint alleging discrimination with either the Forest Preserve District of Cook County or the Office of Equal Opportunity, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, Washington, D.C.

**Brush
Piles**

NORTH BRANCH RESTORATION PROJECT