

# MIAMI WOODS & PRAIRE 2013 UPDATE

Including

ST PAUL WOODS WORKDAYS



How high can a deer browse?

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## MIAMI WOODS REPORT 2013

Miami Woods contains about 106 acres. Of that number approximately 5 acres consist of pavement and mowed turf grass. Of the remaining 101 acres, all are managed to control invasive herbaceous species, but about 10 acres of brush remain in visual buffers along streets. Except for those buffers, invasive woody species have been removed from all of Miami Woods. For further background on restoration in Miami Woods see the report: *Miami Woods and Prairie Ecological Restoration During 2009 & 2001 – 2009*. Work in the Miami Prairie by the North Branch Restoration Project began in 1977. Large scale removal of brush from woodland areas began in 2001.

During 2013 the native plant communities within Miami Woods continued to recover from decades of invasion by brush. However, recovery has been limited to species not eaten by deer. This has resulted in continuing recovery of grass and sedges, but not most broad-leafed species. Vegetation within the three deer exclosures constructed in earlier years continue to diversify and demonstrate the damage being done by the excessive deer population.

2013 workdays were devoted to pulling garlic mustard, gathering seed and removing brush to narrow some of the brushy buffer areas along streets. Most of the brush removal was concentrated in the badly degraded area between the parking lot and Caldwell Avenue. Elsewhere thinning of fire-sensitive trees is being continued to maintain the amount of sunlight reaching the herbaceous layer. As the need for brush clearing diminished, resources have been shifted to the east side of the river in St Paul Woods where restoration is in its early stages.

Herbaceous invasive species and seedlings of woody invasives are being controlled using herbicide applied by the site stewards. One exception is garlic mustard which is pulled by hand. The invasive celandine buttercup, *ranunculus ficaria*, is emerging as a major threat to the riparian wetland, and is not fully controlled.

Controlled burning was conducted in the spring by a Forest Preserve contractor which resulted in burning several woodland units for the first time in more than 10 years, an important milestone. Fire was reintroduced to the open areas beginning in 2008 after a hiatus of more than 10 years. The main prairie has been burned four times since 2008.

Seed from North Branch seed mixes continue to be dispersed in areas that have been burned and areas where brush has recently been removed.

The removal of invasive brush and the near absence of native shrubs in Miami Woods, in part due to browsing by deer, has resulted in very limited nesting habitat for shrub-land birds. In response, Audubon Chicago Region has obtained a grant to reintroduce native shrubs to provide habitat for use by migratory and nesting birds. The project is currently in the planning stage with implementation expected during 2014.

<u>2013 Activities</u>	<u>Workdays</u>	<u>Volunteers</u>	<u>Hours</u>
Garlic Mustard	5	123	231
Seed Gathering	3	67	167
Brush Cutting	10	90	326
Total	18	280	724

An additional 153 hours were devoted to educational activities, primarily river studies.

<u>2013 Places</u>	<u>Workdays</u>	<u>Volunteers</u>	<u>Hours</u>
Cathedral Oaks	6	49	109
Indigo Opening	1	35	95
Prairie	1	43	89
River North	1	36	39
River South	3	20	74
Shelter/Caldwell	4	74	240
Multi Unit	2	24	78
Total	18	280	724

Totals for the period from 2001 through 2013 are as follow.

Workdays 341

Volunteer visits 8,418

Hours

Garlic Mustard 3,321

Brush Cutting 17,546

Seed Gathering 2,202

Total Stewardship 22,917

Education 4,636

Stewardship + Edu 27,553

+

### **ST PAUL WOODS NORTH REPORT 2013**

During 2013 brush clearing increased in the north half of St Paul Woods as more resources were redeployed from Miami Woods where brush is now substantially under control. As in Miami Woods, recovery is limited by extreme browsing by deer. It is further limited by a prohibition on introduction of seed. However, substantial progress is being made in removal of invasive brush and the hope is that other aspects of restoration will be available in the future. Student groups that divide their visits between stewardship work and river studies are working near the riffle area in Grove #2 while other groups are working primarily in Grove #1 and working toward Grove #2. Herbicide is being used to gain control of herbaceous invasive species, with Canada thistle remaining the major problem.

Brush cutting began in 2011 and continued through 2013 as summarized below.

<u>2011</u>	<u>Days</u>	<u>Volunteers</u>	<u>Hours</u>
Brush Cutting	6	186	297
Education			313
<u>2012</u>			
Brush Cutting	14	344	644
Education			306
<u>2013</u>			
Brush Cutting	22	477	1,095
Education			533
<u>Total 2011-2013</u>			
Brush Cutting	42	1007	2,036
Education			1,152

Educational activity occurred during school visits where time was divided between restoration work and river study.

Brush cutting and garlic mustard control by the Hawthorn school and steward Chris Parson continues in the southern portion of St Paul.