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Newsletter #108

Summer 2011

President's Corner

It's been a cold, crazy spring, but finally some of the prairie plants have come up and started to bloom. We've completed our big clearing and seeding projects for the season, and are now into weeding season. Let's hope the weather doesn't decide to suddenly be oppressively hot and humid.

Now is a great time to come on out and visit the preserve, while it's still nice and not buggy—I hope to see you ought there sometime soon.

Steve

Recent Acquisition

The big news is that the West Chicago Prairie is now bigger than ever. Late last year the Forest Preserve District (FPD) completed the purchase of another section, just over 41 acres, which puts us at more than 360 acres total. This section is due south of the parking lot, and was owned by the Union Pacific Railroad. You can see it on the map of preserve that I've included at the end of the newsletter.

The purchase has been in the works for some time, but the railroad had built a berm in the past for disposal of some material. The FPD didn't want the disposal site, and wanted to make sure that there weren't any hazardous materials on the neighboring area to be bought. It took a while to get the area tested and to get the results back, which turned out OK. Eliminating the berm left us with the rather odd shape that you can see in the map.

The new acquisition contains some nice wetlands, which are a continuation of the wetland already on the preserve at the southwest corner. Also in the new unit is a degraded area largely filled with buckthorn, and a small pond. Management of the area will concentrate on the higher quality wetland for the near future. The more degraded area will have a lower priority. In particular, we don't want to clear these areas until we have eliminated the Reed-Canary Grass that is nearby. Otherwise, we could just be creating an open area for the Reed-Canary Grass to spread into, making the problem worse.

Many thanks to the FPD for protecting this additional property.

Recent Accomplishments

Clearing As usual, our major work during the winter is clearing. Last fall we worked near the parking lot, and in the new year, we moved on to an area near the MacQueen Woods. You may remember that ComEd had a contractor come in last year and clear under the power lines along the Geneva Spur of the Prairie Path, adjoining the preserve. To the west of the MacQueen Woods there was a narrow strip of mostly buckthorn that they left since it wasn't on their easement. This had to go. We had several work days in this area, which we hadn't worked in before. It was quite a nasty thicket. The stewardship group cut all the brush and the buckthorns, and made five brush piles. We cleared all the area from the MacQueen Trail west. Once we completed this, the Forest Preserve District crew burned off the piles and took out a few trees too large for us to tackle.

When the FPD crew was out, they noted that there were a few oaks near the cleared area, and decided that this was an opportunity to free them up, so the crew continued clearing to the east of the area we did. So now there's quite a large section that's improved.

The clearing crew for this project included: Malcolm Boyle (4), Steve Carrow, Linda Fisher, Jacqui Gleason, Darlene Gray, Joe Hall, Scott Hensey (5), Rob Kaiser, Roger Kotecki (2), Dylan Laroche, Monica and Steve (5) Sentoff, Alexa Schwers, Bill Sipek and Sean Todd. Thanks for all your help; everyone who uses the Prairie Path

will see your work and will now have a much better view of the prairie.

As an additional project, on February 19, Malcolm Boyle, Dennis Clark, Scott Hensey, Ivan Ishkov, Rob Kaiser, Alexey Logarta, Alex Lozano and Steve Sentoff cut, stacked and herbicided resprouts (mostly gray dogwood and buckthorn) in Restoration Area 14, the area just to the north of the main entrance road to the parking lot. This is an extension to the clearing done in the fall.

Seeding We had two major seeding work days this spring. The first on March 12, when Mary Lou Alonzo, David Cruz, Jacqui Gleason, Ted Grudzinski, Paul Heidebrecht, Scott Hensey, Ivan Ishkov, Rob Kaiser, Steve Sentoff and Tracey Uhren raked in seed into the Railroad Savanna and the Southeast Prairie, just to the south. This area was cleared in the winter of 2009-2010, and we collected seed last fall especially to put in here. Species were Wingstem, Pale Indian Plantain, Woodland Joe-Pye Weed, Wood Betony and a mix of savanna grasses.

The second was on March 27, when an even-larger group of Nancy Allured, Malcolm Boyle, Meaghan Brown, Ally and Phil Dent, Patricia Ebelt, Scott Hensey, Mark Hubble, Roger Kotecki, Ruth Norton and Monica and Steve Sentoff raked seed into the area by the parking lot that we cleared this winter. We put all the prairie species we collected in the fall into this area, including Mountain Mint, Little Bluestem, Prairie Gayfeather, Wild Quinine, Indian Grass, Yellow Coneflower, Golden Alexanders, Sky-blue Aster, Culver's Root, Tall Blue Lettuce, Wild Bergamot, Tall Coreopsis and Pale Purple Coneflower. We had a lot of seed, but because we had lots of people, and a very short walk to the work area, we were able to get all the seed in.

As a bonus, the Daily Herald sent a reporter and a photographer, so we got some nice press coverage for our volunteer activities.

Trail Clean Up In association with the Illinois Prairie Path's annual trail clean-up day, a small, but stalwart, crew consisting of Malcolm Boyle, Linda Fisher, Scott Hensey and Monica and Steve Sentoff picked up trash along the section of the path adjoining the preserve. We've been doing this for a number of years now, and it's clear that we're getting ahead of the problem, since the amount that we find has dropped off considerably.

Butternut Canker Disease

One of the tree species we have on the preserve is Butternut, also known as White Walnut. Unfortunately, this species is being killed by a fungus that was introduced into the United States probably in the late 1960s. The fungus enters the buds or stems and spores are carried down the trunk by rain, causing cankers and eventually girdling and killing the tree.

Many of our trees have succumbed to it already and most, if not all, are showing signs of the disease. One group of these trees in the preserve is in the cleared area of the MacQueen Woods. There isn't much that can be done to treat the trees, but perhaps clearing around them and getting them some more air and light may help.

Major Donation

Many thanks to Herb Demmel for an exceedingly generous donation to the Stewardship Group. This was more money than we spend in a typical year, and so we're trying to identify an appropriate special project to fund with this donation.

Wild Things Conference

Every two years the conservation community in Chicago region holds its "Wild Things Conference" to meet other volunteers and exchange information. The most recent one was held March 5th and was a major success with over 1100 participants and 124 presenters. Several of us from the Stewardship Group attended, and as always, learned a few new things to apply to our work. I hope that more of you will have the opportunity to attend in the future. I'll keep you informed about upcoming events in the newsletter. Many thanks to all the people who put this event together.

Google Earth

One of the sessions I attended at the Wild Things Conference was an introduction to Google Earth. Perhaps some of you have used it. I'm sure almost everyone has used Google Maps by now; Google Earth is a much more expanded application, where you can create and save geographic information to use and exchange with others. It doesn't have all the features of the high-end Geographic Information Systems tools, but it does a nice job and it's free. It's what I used to create the map of the preserve at the end of this newsletter.

We can import and export data from GPS units, and exchange data with the FPD. All the information that we used to store by drawing on print-outs of the aerial photos can now be done digitally. This will be a great help in the future.

Registration

It's time to renew our membership records, and there's a registration form included with this newsletter. [For those of you getting the newsletter electronically, the registration form is on the More Information page of our web site, or directly at www.wcpsg.org/registration.pdf.] Our by-laws state that anyone can be a member just by registering, so it's an easy and painless process. No dues are required for membership, but all members are encouraged to donate time, money, skills and/or equipment to further the purposes of the stewardship group. If our

records show that you've participated in some activity in the last year, you will automatically be continued as a member. If your phone number or address, or any of the other information has changed, please fill out the registration form and send it back to us by mail. Or you can send the same information in an e-mail to info@wcpsg.org, and we can take care of it that way. This helps us keep our records up-to-date. And don't forget to tell us if you'd like to switch to electronic delivery from the newsletter, if you're still getting paper mail.

We're quite a frugal organization, but we always need a few dollars to keep our equipment running. If you'd like to make a (tax-deductible) donation, please make your check out to The Conservation Foundation, our parent

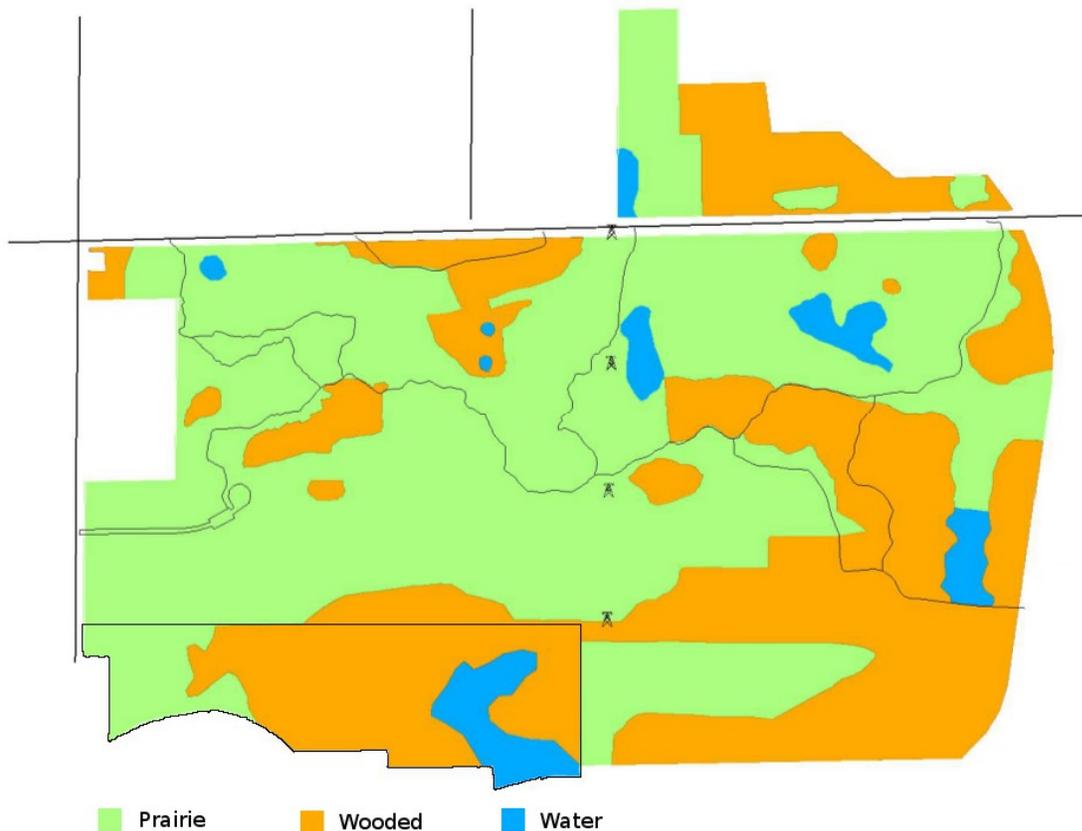
organization, and send it to the address on the registration form. It will get credited to our account. Thanks.

Save the Date

Our next Annual Meeting will be Saturday, August 20th this year, a bit earlier than in recent years. It was so cold and breezy last year that everyone was wishing for coffee and tea, rather than soft drinks, so we thought we'd move the date back a little. Of course, with Chicago weather, we can never tell.

A Birder's Diary

I know many of you look for Marilyn Bell's birding column, which didn't make it into this newsletter due to space considerations. Don't worry, though, it will return in future issues.



West Chicago Prairie Forest Preserve
2010 Acquisition outlined in lower left



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Schedule of Upcoming Events

Except as noted below, all events start from the WCP parking lot located on the east side of Industrial Drive between Western and Downs.

Sunday	June 12	8:00 - 11:00	Field Trip <i>Summer resident birds, plus good displays of Spiderwort, Spiked Lobelia, White Wild Indigo, Wild Roses, Marsh Phlox and others.</i>
Saturday	July 16	8:00 - 11:00	Restoration Work Day <i>Removal of Sweet Clover.</i>
Saturday	July 23	8:00 - 11:00	Restoration Work Day <i>Removal of Sweet Clover. Also a good time to visit, with many species in bloom.</i>
Saturday	August 6	8:00 - 11:00	Field Trip <i>Good displays of Prairie Dock, False Dragonhead, Nodding Onion, Tall Coreopsis, Prairie Sunflower, Blazing Star and others.</i>
Saturday	August 20	12:00 noon - 3:00	Annual Meeting and Picnic <i>Join us for a potluck picnic, followed by our annual meeting and a field trip.</i>
Saturday	August 27	9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon	Restoration Work Day <i>General seed collection, mostly forbs.</i>
Saturday	September 10	9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon	Restoration Work Day <i>General seed collection, mostly forbs.</i>
Sunday	September 25	9:00 a.m. - 12:00 noon	Restoration Work Day <i>General seed collection, mostly forbs.</i>

Other workdays may be scheduled, depending on the field conditions. Reservations are not required unless you are coming with a group of 10 or more. Special field trips can be arranged for groups.