

Executive Committee

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Newsletter #111

Summer 2012

President's Corner

I've come to the conclusion that the weather is always a bit weird in one way or another, but this last season has really been exceptional. The mild winter made working easier, though. Read on and you'll see that we have accomplished quite a lot so far this year. We don't have many work days in the heat of the summer, but this is a good time to get out for a visit and see the results of all your work. I hope to see you out at the preserve on a field trip or just on a casual visit.

Steve

Eagle Scout Project

Over the years, the West Chicago Prairie has benefited from a number of Scout projects. For most of the projects, a scout group comes and works with us on one of our work days. But we've also had about 20 Eagle Scout projects. These are organized and led by the scout, and are meant to demonstrate his leadership skills.

Our latest Eagle Scout is David Hung of Troop 133 from Naperville. His project was to clear out another section of the MacQueen Woodland, adjacent to the area the Forest Preserve District worked on in early 2011. This is a wooded area that was being choked by honeysuckle and buckthorn understory. In March I met David at the preserve and talked about the proposed project. The trickiest part of the project for me was to estimate how big a section I should assign to him, without overwhelming him. He then had to make a plan and get it approved by his organization and by me. Once he had his approvals, he had to get all the pieces in place and carry out the project. To clearly delineate his project, our crew of Wednesday stewards cleared an area around his section. He and his crew did the actual clearing on May 5. He got about 15 volunteers to help on him and they worked from 9:00 to almost 3:00, with a pizza lunch break that his dad provided. They got all the brush cut and stacked from the proposed area; a great accomplishment. We'll get the area herbicided and next winter the Forest Preserve District (FPD) will burn off the piles.

Many thanks to David and his crew for the latest of these scout projects to help restore our preserve.

Recent Accomplishments

Clearing. We had three major clearing projects this season. First, we finished the clearing that we started last fall in the West End Prairie. There is a very nice native area here, and we don't want to let it get overtaken by brush from the edges. Next we moved on to the area north of the Prairie Path, and had a couple of work days there. We don't get into this area very often because it frequently too wet to access. But we cleared a large area here and made five big brush piles for the FPD to remove. One of our work days in this area was just after a rare (for this year) snowfall, so it was a bit of a trudge hauling the brush. Lastly, we cleared a nasty knot of mostly buckthorn from the east end of the South Savanna. When we last cleared that savanna, we didn't get to this area because it was too wet, but this spring we were able to work there. Malcolm Boyle (3), Patricia Ebelt (2), Linda Fisher (2), Scott Hensey (2), Mark Hubble, Karolina and Martin Machnica, Ed Max, Michele and Patrick (son) Nitzki, Monica (2) and Steve (3) Sentoff, and David, Meg, Nick and Andy Sima, along with 14 students from Bartlett H. S. contributed to the three clearing projects, as did our intrepid Wednesday crew.

Mowing. This spring the weather cooperated and we were able to mow about half of the West Savanna. This area was getting filled with

blackberries and raspberries, making it very difficult to work in the savanna. We need to control the Reed-Canary Grass and Oriental Bittersweet in this area, so the mowing the berries will provide better access to herbicide these invasives. On three Wednesdays in March, Malcolm Boyle, Bill Dawe, Scott Hensey and Steve Sentoff were out mowing.

Seeding. On January 7, Malcolm Boyle, Linda Fisher, Kathy Haben, Paul Heidebrecht, Roger Kotecki, Wes Ludwig, Jeff, Patrice and Luke Madden, Al Murphy, Maureen Navadomskis plus three children, Darell Robey, Steve Sentoff, Tracey Uhren and Dave Zawislak raked seed into the area recently cleared in the West End Prairie. Species raked in (of varying amounts) were: Dropseed, Yellow Coneflower, Ohio Horsemint, Pale Purple Coneflower, Virginia Mountain Mint, Culver's Root, Wild Bergamot, Spiderwort, Indian Grass, Tall Coreopsis and Stiff Goldenrod. This was an exceptionally mild day, more like April than January, and we got a number of new people due to a nice article in the Daily Herald covering our work and mentioning this work day. Then on March 31, Malcolm Boyle, Anita Healy, Scott Hensey, Ruth Norton, Monica and Steve Sentoff and 14 students from Bartlett H. S. raked seed into Restoration Area 10, southeast of the parking lot. Another great turn-out, with lots of work getting done.

Nachusa Grasslands

On February 18, Malcolm Boyle, Scott Hensey, Wes Herwig (from the Nachusa volunteers), Rob Kaiser and Steve Sentoff cleared along the creek at the north end of our adopted Kittentail Knob unit at Nachusa. A few of us had gone out a couple of weeks earlier to survey the site, and decided that this was the highest priority area to work on. It was a bit of nasty brush, mostly honeysuckle with some buckthorn and cherry in it. Clearly it was protected from the fires by being in the ravine of the creek. We built a nice, compact fire and burned the brush as we went. We herbicided all the stumps with the herbicide provided by The Nature Conservancy. It was quite a nice day, unseasonably mild (like most of this winter); we used two of the ATVs from the Nachusa equipment - the lanes were too soft for trucks. The unit is really looking good; between the work we've done, and the work of the Nachusa crew, the natural character is really coming through. No small credit is due to the prescribed fires on the site - Kittentail Knob has been burned 14 times in the past 17 years, most recently last fall.

Nature Preserve Buffer

You're all probably aware that the Truitt-Hoff Nature Preserve was dedicated at the West

Chicago Prairie in 2006. This is the highest quality section of the preserve, about 115 acres. Nature Preserve status gives us recognition that this is considered to be among the most significant natural areas of Illinois, and provides an additional layer of protection to the area. A Management Plan has been documented and the Forest Preserve District and the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission (INPC) have agreed to it. Any changes to the plan need both parties' approval, pretty much assuring that the natural resources will be protected. In 2007, most of the remainder of the preserve received Nature Preserve Buffer status. This means that, although the area may not be as high quality, it serves as an important buffer to protect the adjacent Nature Preserve.

In 2010, the FPD acquired an addition of about 41 acres in the southwest corner of the preserve. Of course, this was not included in the 2007 Buffer, but on May 1, the Forest Preserve District approved the dedication of most of this section, and the approval from the INPC followed on May 8.

There was a bit of unexpected controversy at the FPD meeting. The approval of the section at West Chicago was bundled with approvals for other Nature Preserve dedications of sections at other preserves: Meacham Grove, Pratt's Wayne Woods, Swift Prairie and DesPlaines Riverway, and some people questioned whether we wanted to reserve all these areas for nature. In the end, though, the Commissioners unanimously agreed to protect all the areas.

A Birder's Diary

By Marilyn Bell

March 10, 2012 Whoosh! It's windier than I like on this first-of-the-year return to the Prairie, but the RED-WINGED BLACKBIRDS, scattered here and there, mostly high in the trees scouting for arriving females, don't seem to mind. SANDHILL CRANES are taking advantage of the winds, their bugling song carrying afar as first a pair and then thirty birds pass overhead. Two pair of CANADA GEESE look ready to nest, the male protective over the female. A boldly marked FOX SPARROW is just passing through, but even just peeking from behind a bush, it's a beautiful sight! Three or four pair of BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEES bouncing along, a pair of WOOD DUCKS flying by and the sound of a RED-BELLIED WOODPECKER's spring song indicates spring is definitely in the air. Even so, winter visitors, DARK-EYED JUNCOS and AMERICAN TREE SPARROWS, linger. A male EASTERN BLUEBIRD is in the East Woodland, while a female catches bugs in MacQueen Woods. I wonder if they'll find each other.

March 29, 2012 BROWN-HEADED COWBIRDS? Not a very welcome sight. There's a female atop the plum clone where a pair of

SONG SPARROWS are preparing a nest site below. Look at her peering down. She's obviously contemplating a deposit of her own. Nest-building is in today as a BLACK-CAPPED CHICKADEE and a female EASTERN BLUEBIRD, bills filled with grasses, disappear into separate tree cavities. What a strange sight! Stretched out flat over the top of a muskrat den and its own nest, I presume, is a CANADA GOOSE looking like just an empty skin eying me! The iridescent blue of a TREE SWALLOW catches my eye as it perches quietly, and not usual, in a tree. Perhaps a nest is in progress. The songs of a NORTHERN FLICKER and a BROWN THRASHER fill the air. They'll be busy at nests before long too. But not this pretty little GOLDEN-CROWNED KINGLET. It has more traveling to do before nesting begins.

April 11, 2012 High in the oaks the trill of a SWAMP SPARROW reaches me, but the bird remains out of sight in the cattails. A handsome male EASTERN TOWHEE repeatedly invites some female to "Drink your tea." May she come soon. I tiptoe carefully to the edge of Heron Pond, knowing waterfowl hide quickly, and catch sight of a pair of HOODED MERGANSERS. Maybe we'll see young ones soon, just as we have in the last couple of years. And, look at this: Two MALLARDS and a KILLDEER find a small fluddle to their liking. Even better, in a very large fluddle are three pair of beautiful GREEN-WINGED TEAL. In the water or air, on the ground or on plant life, fascinating bird-life can be found.

April 29, 2012 It's eyes-to-the-skies today, as a single SANDHILL CRANE flies low over the south restoration area observing something; maybe a good nesting site? Heading toward Heron Pond, a GREEN HERON's distinctive shape is visible and a WOOD DUCK pair turns toward the north marsh. How about that pair of DOUBLE-CRESTED CORMORANTS? Surely Heron Pond isn't deep enough for them! Lower, the strong melody of a HOUSE WREN says we're baaack! Such a big song for such a little bird. Pretty strange, that female AMERICAN KESTREL, our smallest falcon, is just sitting on an old

stump with no inclination to move, though I'm closer than is usually tolerated. I hope it's okay. High in the oaks I spot the first spring group of warblers. Just two species though, YELLOW-RUMPED and PALM. At least it's a start, and I'm hoping for more soon.

[May 5, 2012 Editor's note: Marilyn couldn't make the Spring Bird Count Day, and I can't write as well as she can. But in spite of the misty weather we had that day, I can report that we still recorded 44 species and 337 individual birds, including a couple species that had arrived in just the last couple days.]

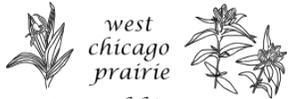
Registration

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@wcp.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.



The West Chicago Prairie Stewardship Group is
an affiliate of The Conservation Foundation



west
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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 10	8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Field Trip Summer resident birds and early prairie flowers.
Saturday	July 21	8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Restoration Work Day Removal of invading sumac; also a good time to visit, with many species in bloom.
Saturday	August 11	8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.	Field Trip Good displays of many blooming prairie species.
Saturday	August 25	12:00 noon - 3:00 p.m.	Annual Meeting and Picnic Join us for a potluck picnic, followed by our annual meeting and a field trip.

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.