

Executive Committee

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M. F. Boyle, Sec./Treas.
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Newsletter #113

Winter 2013

President's Corner

I'm writing this just after returning from the annual Christmas Bird Count. Wouldn't you know it? After a fall of dry conditions (too dry!), the day of the count turned out to be windy and rainy, generally crummy birding weather. All the sensible birds were hunkered down where they could be dry and warm, and the sensible birders were too. There were just two of us die-hards to do the monitoring, and we recorded only about half what we normally see at this time of year. Hot soup and tea were very welcome on our return.

But there will be lots of good days this winter, so pick a better day than we did and take a walk out on the preserve to see it in its peaceful hues of grays and browns. See you soon.

Steve

Annual Meeting

Our 28th annual meeting was held on August 25. Once again, we started with a great potluck picnic at the Preserve. The weather was a bit warm, but much better than the cold meeting we had a few years ago. As usual, the Forest Preserve District set up a tent shelter for us, and we had a fine meeting. We'll continue scheduling the meeting in the late summer which seems to be working well.

Scott Hensey presented the Treasurer's Report, and we were especially frugal this year. We spent only \$305 in the preceding year with most of it going to maintain our equipment. Our mail expense continues to decline in spite of increasing postal rates since many of you now receive the newsletters by email. We received \$395 from our donors last year so we actually added to our already healthy balance for future operations. The work we can do is much more limited by the volunteer hours than by money.

The next order of business was the nomination and election of officers. Bill Dawe and JoAnn Monge decided to retire from the board after long, distinguished terms of service. So this year's candidates were

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| President | Steve Sentoff |
| Vice President | Scott Hensey |
| Sec./Treasurer | Malcolm Boyle |
| Board Members | Jim Dohren, Linda Fisher, Herman Jensen, Rob Kaiser |

The entire slate was approved by acclamation.

Next was the report on the volunteer work for the year: a total of 1337 hours, including 74.5 hours at Nachusa Grasslands. The total was up some from last year mainly due to hours contributed by outside groups. In particular we got 86 hours from Bartlett H.S. students and 80 hours from David Hung's Eagle Scout project, along with notable contributions from the Alpha Phi Omega fraternity from NIU and the DUUgooders from the DuPage Unitarian Universalist Church in Naperville. The largest categories of work included clearing with 535 hrs., monitoring with 155, and seed collecting and sowing with 238. Another excellent year.

As usual, most of the work is continuing to push back the invasives. We had several major clearing projects last season. One was in the northwest corner which was badly overrun with buckthorn, sumac, dogwood and blackberry. We cut, stacked and herbicided the stubs in the winter, then seeded into the clearing, and also herbicided a couple of Reed-Canary Grass patches later in the spring when they started to sprout. Another major clearing was north of the Prairie Path, in the area we call the North Wet Prairie. As you can tell from the name, this area is often wet, and hard to work in. But because of the warm winter with little snow, we could get in here and we decided to take advantage of it. This area has some particularly conservative plants in it, so it was good to have a chance to work here. We built some very large piles for

the Forest Preserve District to burn off, but the lack of snow cover meant they didn't get an opportunity to do that. We continued our assault on the Oriental Bittersweet, and did our usual management of Knapweed, Garden Heliotrope, Dame's Rocket, etc. We have to continue our vigilance, but we do seem to be making progress against these invaders.

We had one scheduled work day this year at the Kittentail Knob unit which we have adopted at Nachusa Grasslands, along with one planning and preparation trip. The unit is looking excellent—it was hard to find much work to do. Along with our work over the years, the unit has been burned 14 of the last 17 seasons by the Nachusa staff, which has made a fantastic difference.

The report for upcoming plans was that the coming year will be more of our usual activities, mostly brush removal: cutting, stacking and herbiciding. We'll also want to collect as much seed as possible, especially savanna species, so that we can reseed areas that have been cleared.

We also reported the addition of a section of the preserve to the Nature Preserve Buffer. Recall that the highest quality section of the preserve (115 acres) was dedicated as the Truitt-Hoff Nature Preserve in 2006. In 2007 the rest of the preserve was dedicated as Nature Preserve Buffer, which has lower quality, but serves to protect the adjacent Nature Preserve. Since that dedication, another 41 acres were acquired for the West Chicago Prairie, and in May that area also received Nature Preserve Buffer status. The net result is that the whole preserve now enjoys a level of state protection.

We handed out certificates to volunteers that earned them this year, and two special achievement awards for many years of service to the retiring board members. We then took a walk around the West Loop Trail to finish off the meeting.

Recent Accomplishments

As usual, we've been out this fall, doing our typical jobs for this time of the year. The unusually dry conditions gave us a few opportunities to work in some less accessible areas.

Seed Collecting. We had several seed collecting work days this fall, on a rather crazy schedule due to the drought. On September 8, Al and Sandy Bemis, Malcolm Boyle, Scott Hensey, Rob Kaiser, Ruth Norton and Monica and Steve Sentoff, plus four members from the Latter Day Saints church in Naperville collected seed across the prairie on what could not have been a nicer day—sunny, low humidity, temperature in the 60s and a bit of a breeze. Then on September 23, Gloria Gonzales, Scott Hensey, Mark Hubble and Monica and Steve Sentoff

collected seed on another nice fall day. Collections on these days were mainly prairie species that we use to fill in cleared spots and add diversity to our restoration fields. In addition, several of the work days of our Wednesday work crew (Malcolm Boyle, Jim Dohren, Scott Hensey and Steve Sentoff) were devoted to seed collecting. These work days gathered some of the seed only available in small quantities, and also focused on savanna species which we especially want to seed into the MacQueen Woodland area cleared in conjunction with the Eagle Scout project of last spring.

Clearing. Once we had gotten about all the seed that we could, we started into our regular clearing season. We certainly don't have to worry about ever running out of work in this department.

We've done three major projects this fall. The first was sumac reduction in the West Loop Prairie and in Restoration Area 3 (in the northeast corner of the preserve). As you know, sumac is a native, but it can get pretty thick and overrun the prairie. We try to keep it at the edges of the preserve, to use it as a buffer, and out of the main prairie areas.

The next project was clearing in the North Wet Prairie, in the section just north of the Prairie Path. This was a continuation of last winter's work in the unit, and was possible due to the fact that the area was still so dry. This work was done by Malcolm Boyle, Patricia Ebelt, Linda Fisher, Rob Kaiser and Steve Sentoff on our scheduled work day of October 6, plus several of our Wednesday work days. We built two more big brush piles in this area. These join the brush piles of last year in this area, which didn't get burned last year, due to lack of snow cover. Hopefully all the piles will get burned off this year.

Lastly, we did a big clearing project right by the entrance drive by the parking lot. This 2.8 acre section was acquired in 2004. It had been cleared once by the Forest Preserve District, but had become badly overgrown by brush, mainly buckthorn and gray dogwood. We thought we should work in this area because it's an area that everyone who comes to the parking lot sees and also because there was some soil and concrete dumped into this site in the past. We'd like to have this material removed by the Forest Preserve District when they can do it, and the brush had to be removed as a prerequisite. The first work day in this area was a specially-arranged one for the Wheaton-Warrenville H.S. "Tiger Day of Caring," when the sports teams do volunteer work in the community. Unfortunately, this work day was cut short by a very impressive thunderstorm. There had been rain earlier, but we had good weather when we started. Soon, however, the skies darkened. Eventually we decided to retreat to the cars, which were

nearby since we were working so close to the parking lot. No sooner than we got in, the rain came in a torrent, and we eventually decided that there was nothing more that we could do that day. We continued the work on October 20, when Malcolm Boyle, Patricia Ebel, Rob Kaiser and Steve Sentoff plus five students from Illinois Benedictine cut, stacked and herbicided brush in the area. Then on November 3, we had the biggest work day I've ever led. For some reason, everyone seemed to want to help us that day. We had two different Cub Scout groups, with total of 13 adults and 19 children, plus four students from Illinois Benedictine, two students from Bartlett H.S., four members from an organization called Invisible Children, along with regulars Malcolm Boyle, Chris Chereck (in from out of town and making a special guest appearance), Scott Hensey, Rob Kaiser and Steve Sentoff. We split into two teams: scouts plus their adults, and everyone else. The non-scout group did our normal job of cutting (with brushsaws), stacking and herbiciding, continuing the work of October 20. This was larger material, and on the old fill that is in this unit. We put the scout group to work on an adjacent section, which was mostly gray dogwood with some buckthorn. They worked with just the hand tools. With so many people, we got an amazing amount accomplished. It was lucky that we had an appropriate project, and were able to borrow enough tools from the FPD. We stopped a bit early to have some time to take a short walk into the West Loop, for anyone who wanted an opportunity to see some more of the preserve.

Wild Things Conference

Every two years a number of conservation and stewardship groups in the Chicago region organize the "Wild Things Conference." This is an excellent one-day event filled with lectures and poster sessions. The next conference is coming this February 2 at the UIC campus in Chicago. All the details are available at the web site: www.habitatproject.org/WildThings2013/,

and you can register there online. The hardest thing is to decide which of all the available programs you'd like to hear. I'll be attending, and still have a couple seats available in my car, if you'd like to carpool to the event.

2013 Schedule of Events

Our 2013 schedule is now available. For those of you who receive this newsletter in the mail, a copy is enclosed. For those getting an electronic copy, you can print a copy of the schedule from our website. Those of you who use electronic calendars on your computer or on some hand-held device can subscribe to an electronic version available at <http://www.wcpsg.org/webcal/WCPSPG.ics>. I keep this updated, so it always has the latest and greatest information.

Birder's Diary

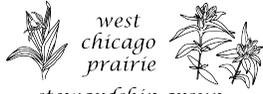
For several years, Marilyn Bell has been providing a regular column on her birding observations on the preserve, and from your comments, I know that many of you have enjoyed it. Marilyn has now decided to retire this regular feature. I want to thank her for her support. She has promised that if something really interesting comes up, she'll still keep us informed, so stay tuned for any future news.

Thirty Year Anniversary

It seems as though we just celebrated our 25th anniversary, but checking the calendar, I see that we've made it to 30 now. Mel Hoff was appointed steward for the West Chicago Prairie November 18, 1982 and formed the stewardship group shortly thereafter. We don't have any special events planned; we'll just keep up the good work. Although we don't have precise records of the total volunteer hours from the early days of the group, by my estimate we recently passed the 50,000 hour milestone! Quite an accomplishment, and the preserve really looks different for all your work. Congratulate yourselves for a job well done.



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



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Winter Rules

The preserve is open every day from dawn to dusk, but the parking lot is closed from December through February, except when we open it for scheduled work days. If you want to visit in winter, the best access is from the end of MacQueen Dr. Don't park on Industrial Dr.; you may get a ticket.