

SEED PROCESSING REPORT

On Sunday afternoon, November 22nd, 15 intrepid fen folks gathered at co-stewards Rick and Mel Manner's house to screen, shred, and otherwise mangle seed heads at our annual seed processing party. The goal is to break the seed heads, which can hold hundreds of seeds, down into the individual seeds. It is amazing how tough seeds and seed heads are. Despite being squashed through screens of various sizes, put through a chipper-shredder, or any other method we can think of, the seeds come through whole and intact and ready to plant. We take these seeds and create mixes for the different places where we will spread them. This way, we only have to walk through an area once to spread all of the species that need to go there. This is very efficient, and has the side benefit of reducing trampling and compaction of the soil. Ideally, we will spread the seeds right before a light snow, so that they get good soil contact, some watering from the snow, and protection from hungry birds and small mammals.

There are some species that are not added into the mix. Early season seeds in particular often need to be spread right away to mimic the effects of nature. These are picked individually and spread that day or in the following week. Fall seeds that are extremely tiny or that are in very small amounts are often not added to a mix. They are held aside and spread by individual volunteers throughout the winter. We have a small gardening program that may also need some seeds set aside for it. And lastly, we trade seeds with a few select restoration sites according to the rules of the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission and the Forest Preserve District of Cook County. This way, we can help other high quality sites increase their diversity, while getting back seeds that we may not have a source for, or for which we want to increase the gene pool if our population is very small.

Over the nearly 30 years of doing this, we have had many different mixes as we worked in different areas. For example, our dry hill prairies on the Small Kame and Large Kame now have good diversity of blooming forbs thanks to seeding, so we are no longer making those mixes. However, we are pushing east of the preserve into an old farm field. This was originally prairie, so we need lots of farm field prairie mix. This year, we ended up with 7 mixes of about 50 species, and 13 bags of seeds. Another 20 or so species were handled individually. This is a little light, as we were not able to gather much savanna seed. We also did not gather much wetland seed as we didn't have a need for it. In future years, we will add these mixes back in as necessary.

Thanks to Forest Preserve District of Cook County

If you have been reading the last few newsletters, you know that this is our first year, since being partially bought by the Forest Preserve District of Cook County (FPDCC) in 2006, that we have asked them for help on projects. We had five projects in mind. Four have been completed, and one has been contracted out by them to be done this winter. There was a miscommunication in the spring that resulted in our split rail fence being completely removed instead of repaired. However, the FPDCC has installed a brand new fence that is better than the original. It is of sturdier stock and is taller, thus discouraging folks from sitting on the rails. We also asked them to place it further back from the road to help prevent damage during winter snow removal. The second project was non-native narrow-leaved cattail removal in the main marsh. It looks like we got a very good kill percentage. The true test will be seeing what comes up this spring. The FPDCC will provide another season of herbiciding if necessary.

The third project was a last minute one. We wanted to get a fall burn in. We were surprised, but pleased, that FPDCC Burn Coordinator John McCabe came out personally with a crew of 5 to participate in our burn. The day was windier than we had hoped, although still within the range of safe conditions. We got a good burn in through most of the target areas, but we were not able to burn the northernmost part, due to the wind. We hope to do so in the spring. The fourth project

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Thanks to FPDCC continued . . .

also involved John McCabe and his crew and has been ongoing over the summer. They wildly exceeded our expectations. We asked them to take out a huge debris dam near where the Fen water flows into Poplar Creek. Not only did they remove that dam, they did all the others downstream of it all the way to the Cook/Kane County border. This was a total of nine dams of various sizes. We had thought this would take at least 3 or 4 years, but they did it in one summer! It's amazing what the proper equipment and a good crew can get done.

The remaining project is a follow-up to the debris dam removal. The FPDCC has contracted with a private restoration company to remove the non-native and invasive trees along a section of Poplar Creek to prevent trees from falling into the stream and creating more debris dams. This is only Phase One as eventually, the entire stream edge will need to be cleared where appropriate. Much of it was historically open, not treed, so this is a huge task way beyond the Fen volunteers. Now that we are partially an FPDCC site, they will be able to tackle this project preventing flooding along the entire creek edge, allowing proper floodplain restoration to take place.

Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen is very grateful for this huge amount of assistance this year, and we look forward to a continuing fruitful partnership with the Forest Preserve District of Cook County and it's staff.

Decay Snakes Sighted

Co-steward Mel Manner

We have a pretty good representation of common snakes at Bluff Spring Fen. You rarely see them during the summer, however, as they dislike people and our feet that can step on them! Often, the best time for me (co-steward Mel Manner) to see them is in the fall when they are in the trail trying to get the last vestiges of warm sunlight. That has been true this November. Within 2 weeks, I saw two decay snakes, each about a foot long. These small brown snakes are common around here and are not aggressive. However, one did it's best to threaten my shoe after I nudged it gently to make sure it was still alive. I backed off enough to keep it from actually striking my shoe, as it couldn't have done me any damage, but might have actually done damage to itself on the hard leather. It curled up in what I call a circle S pattern, just like you've seen in photos of rattle snakes. And it had it's very small, red tongue flickering in and out. I could hear the hissing, but I think it was doing it's best. I quickly satisfied my curiosity and moved on, not wanting to stress it out any more than I had. I'm sure it did not enjoy our encounter, but I am adding this to my list of favorite visits to the Fen.

For those of you interested in snakes: We do not have any venomous snakes at the Fen, although Massasauga rattlesnakes may have been in the area at one time. We do have quite a few fox snake, common garter snake, and prairie garter snake on site. You usually only get lucky enough to see the tip of their tails as they flee away from you. Occasionally, the prairie garter, if found in a trail, will threaten you, as they are the more aggressive of the two garter species. I have yet to be lucky enough to see a fox snake, even though they are common onsite and can get at least 4 feet in length. If I ever get so lucky, you can bet I'll put it here in the newsletter.

If you have any interesting sighting of snakes or any other fen animals, feel free to share them by emailing us at bluffspringfen@sbcglobe.net

GPS and Restoration

Co-steward Mel Manner

I am anything but tech savvy, however, even I can use the basic GPS (global positioning system) devices. I recently broke down and bought a Garmin eTrex Vista HCx. This device lets me walk anywhere at the Fen and record waypoints. Being one of the newer units, it is extremely accurate, usually within 2 feet on a sunny day. I then come home, and using the included software, I upload the waypoints from my device onto my computer, then send it over to Google Earth. All of my waypoints show up as numbered dots on an aerial view of the Fen. At that point, it's like playing connect the dots like I did as a kid. (I excelled at that!) This new technology allows us to keep much more accurate, detailed records of everything we do.

I have now accurately mapped our trails and main streams. I will add on the different habitats as soon as I walk the transition zones. I am in the process of mapping the fall burn we just did to record it and tell us how much acreage was burned. We already map project requests for the FPDCC. We plan to also map our trees and their ages, endangered species, seed spreading, weed infestations, monitoring routes, and who knows what else. It's addictive!

Cookie Day 2010!

This is our huge, annual workday to celebrate the new year! It's on January 2nd, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Come when you can; stay as long as you like.

Bring coolies, treats, or non-alcoholic drinks to share if you like. Eat as much food as possible! Cut down and pile invasive brush and trees. New folks are more than welcome! We'll show you what to do. Brushpiles will be burning to keep us warm. We'll provide hotdogs and brats for roasting, and Dave usually brings his Texas chili. You don't want to miss it.

Make sure to wear natural fiber clothing to this and all other winter workdays, as synthetic fabrics can melt to skin if hit by a spark from the fire. Wear warm boots.

If you have any questions, send Rick an email at bluffspringfen@sbcglobal.net or give him a call at 847-464-4426.

Winter Workday Schedule: Brush & Tree Clearing & Brushpile Burns!

Dec. 5	Dec. 19	To get to Bluff Spring Fen, take US Highway 20 to the southeast side of Elgin. At the stoplight for Shales Pkwy/Bluff City Blvd, turn south onto Bluff City Blvd. The road will turn immediately to the west. Follow it and look for the main entrance of the Bluff City Cemetery on your left. Enter the cemetery, and follow the curving road to the small parking lot with the split rail fence.
Jan. 2	Jan. 16	
Feb. 6	Feb. 20	
Mar. 6	Mar. 20	
Apr. 3	Apr. 17	

Our workdays are a great way to learn about the plants and restoration, while helping to protect a wonderful site. We provide the knowledge and the tools, but we need your hands to help us get all the work done. Children accompanied by an adult are welcome on all workdays.

Workdays are on the **1st and 3rd Saturdays of the month**, unless very severe weather forces us to cancel. **We begin at 9 AM. DRESS FOR THE WEATHER.** Wear old, durable clothes, boots or old shoes, and only **natural fiber clothing** to winter workdays, as synthetics such as nylon can melt to skin when hit by sparks. Bring work gloves if you have them.

Winter is when we remove invasive brush and trees. It's hard work, but extremely satisfying. At the end of the workday, we can really see our progress! It's also fun, as we often have a brush pile burning and sometimes even hotdogs to roast. We teach you about general restoration, and are happy to answer any questions you have. When we don't roast hotdogs, we usually go to lunch afterwards at a nearby McDonald's.

Come April, we'll switch over to weed control for garlic mustard and other invasive spring bloomers. For more workday information, call Rick Manner at 847-464-4426.

Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen Donation Slip

Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen (FBSF) is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Donations are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. Donations will go towards restoration supplies, matching funds for charitable grants for restoration, public outreach materials, and contracts with professional restoration companies for invasive species projects. For more information, contact FBSF Treasurer, Mel Manner at bluffspringfen@sbcglobal.net or 847-464-4426.

Please fill out this form and send it and a check made out to "**Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen**" to:
FBSF c/o Mel Manner, 41W039 Bowes Bend Dr, Elgin IL 60124-8325.

Name: _____
Street Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Phone: _____ Email: _____

www.bluffspringfen.org - Your source for Fen info

Trail Map Available on Website

Foils have asked for a trail map that can be printed off of our website. There is one available in pdf format. We have a better one in the works and hope to post it after the holiday season.

Electronic Newsletter

This newsletter is available in pdf format on our website, www.bluffspringfen.org. We send out email notices each issue letting subscribers know when the newsletter has been posted onto the website and containing a link to the newsletter. If you would like to be removed from the paper mailing and switched to the email notices, send an email to bluffspringfen@sbcglobal.net

Other Items?

If you would like to see other things on our website, please send your suggestions to us at bluffspringfen@sbcglobal.net

Shop & Share Program a Success - Next Days are 12/7, 12/8, & 12/9

This is our first year joining the Shop & Share program through Jewel/Osco, and we've netted over \$110 so far. The first shop in May had 14 participants and earned us \$36.12. The second shop in September had 21 participants, a 50% increase. It earned us \$77.63, which is double the first shop. This all doesn't sound like much, but let me remind you that we didn't have to do anything extra for this money.

Our last shop of the year is coming up in December. You'll see the orange slip inside this newsletter (or on the Fen's Shop & Share website page for those of you receiving this electronically). All you do is take that slip to any Jewel/Osco store on Dec. 7th, 8th, or 9th and do your regular grocery shopping. At the end of your shopping, give the slip to the cashier. Make sure to sign it there first. The cashier will then record your grocery total on the slip. Jewel/Osco will collect all of the slips and send us, Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen, a check for 5% of the total. Even if you only need milk and bread, please take the slip. Every little bit adds up. Remember, this program is free for us, and free for you, and a good way to support us even in this tough economy. As more supporters like you continue to participate each time, we will see this amount rise. Thanks to all of you for helping out.

The Fenship Newsletter

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