

Cattail Control Project Update: Phase 1 complete, C-2000 grant not funded

Phase 1 of the cattail control project was completed this summer. Friends of the Bluff Spring Fen (FBSF) hired Turning Leaf Conservation (TLC) for 80 man-hours at a cost of \$4000 to hand-swipe cattails throughout the Linear Fen and the east edge of the cattail marsh. Hand-swiping is a very controlled, but highly labor intensive, method of applying herbicide to each plant. This protects intermixed non-target plants from getting herbicided and killed. TLC came out three different days. The first day, they hit patches in the Linear Fen east of the cattail marsh. They then waited several weeks to let the herbicide work. The next time, they went through those patches to hit any plants that were still green and not killed, and started other areas not yet done. They then waited again. The final day, they went back through the previous areas, but spent the bulk of the time on the east edge of the cattail marsh itself.

We saw encouraging browning off of the plants after each treatment. We are expecting to see very little resprouting in those areas next year. However, there is still the main bulk of the cattail marsh itself that needs to be treated. We estimate that it will take more than \$20,000 additional funds to complete the cattail eradication in this area. Other areas of the preserve have far fewer cattails, and may be able to be handled through volunteer workdays at no monetary cost to FBSF.

We had applied for a C-2000 grant through the Illinois Department of Natural Resources that would have given us \$15,000 for this project. We were ranked very highly by the grant review board, and most likely would have received the grant. However, the state economy being as bad off as it is right now, there will not be any funding available for the grant program. It is having to be diverted to cover much more critical costs. Mel Manner, FBSF treasurer, is looking at several other possible grant programs to try and find the money elsewhere. We will also be counting on private donations to help out. The \$4000 spent this year was completely from private donations made by you, our loyal supporters. We thank each and every one of you. This impressive start would not have happened at all if it weren't for you.

Spring Creek Volunteers Pick Seeds at Fen

Spring Creek is a Cook County Forest Preserve, a bit north of Bluff Spring Fen in the Barrington area. (Website www.springcreekstewards.org.) They have a relatively new but loyal group of volunteers doing restoration there as part of the Volunteer Stewardship Network and under the guidance of the Forest Preserve District of Cook County, like we have at Bluff Spring Fen.

An interesting connection between our two sites is that Spring Creek is actually quite close to the original Healy Road Prairie. This was a virgin prairie on gravel company lands. When the company planned to mine the prairie hill, an historic effort was made to save at least part of the prairie by transplanting it to Bluff Spring Fen. This was the first time ever that anyone had tried to move an entire prairie. It was somewhat successful in that most, if not all, of the plants survived. However, virtually all of the insects were lost. The Healy Road Transplant Hill has been inarguably wonderful for Bluff Spring Fen, though. It has brought in many species from which we now collect seeds. Those seeds are then used to improve the diversity in other gravel areas and recreate habitat in newly recontoured areas.

In recent years, the Fen volunteers have worked with the Spring Creek volunteers to collect seed at Bluff Spring Fen for Spring Creek Forest Preserve. The idea behind this is that Spring Creek is actually closer to the original prairie than the Fen. So by rights, they deserve some of the seed with the local genotypes (genetic make-up). This year Spring Creek volunteer Ryan White and Fen co-steward Rick Manner teamed up to hold a joint seed collecting day. Seeds were then split between the two groups at the end of the day, benefitting both sites and allowing us a chance to get to know our fellow volunteers. Plans are already underway to do this again next year.

Fen Bits

Donations Needed and Appreciated

Thanks to donations from many of you, we have started control of the highly invasive narrow-leaved cattail. So far, you have donated \$4,000, which has given us a good start. (See cover story on page 1.) We do apply for grants, but getting them is never guaranteed, and they are often limited in scope or amount. So most large projects end up being funded only partly with grant money, but then with private donations and individual sponsors making up the rest.

We are extremely grateful those of you who donate, be it a small or a large amount. Part of the reason our restoration efforts have been so successful at the Fen is because of the support from all of you. If you have not donated yet this year, please consider sending in a donation. Even \$10 or \$20 can be a big help when combined with other donations.

To donate, please use the form on page 3. All donations are tax-deductible.

Photos from Arlene Koziol

Arlene is a local nature photographer who has donated many wonderful photos, including one showing a red headed woodpecker parent and its chick. We have put together an album that we use as part of our Fen display at local fairs and events. The pictures really get across how beautiful and diverse Bluff Spring Fen is. They have been very popular with the folks stopping by our booth. Our thanks to Arlene for her photos and her support!

Website www.bluffspringfen.org updated

We have finally done a much needed update to our website. We have added more material, and broken it down into separate pages. We hope you will find this more user-friendly. We plan to continue expanding the website now that it is organized better. Coming soon will be "Recent Sightings" where you can find out what flowers are blooming and what birds and insects are around. Suggestions are always welcome. Email bluffspringfen@sbcglobal.net with any requests.

Winter Workday Schedule and Directions

Dec. 6	Dec. 20	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. 3 - Cookie Day!	Jan. 17	
Feb. 7	Feb. 21	
Mar. 7	Mar. 21	
Apr. 4	Apr. 18	

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.

Seasonal Birds at Bluff Spring Fen

by Roger Hotham

Open, flowing water during the winter season attracts a few unique bird species. We often find Wilson's snipe in the area near the boy scout bridge. Winter wren likes the area closer to Poplar Creek. Kingfisher and great blue heron catch prey in the open water. Winter specialities such as northern shrike and pine siskin have appeared occasionally. The common winter seed-eaters are junco, cardinal, goldfinch, mourning dove, tree sparrow, and song sparrow.

The Fen offers nothing unique for the passage birds of spring and fall migration. During these times, the number and variety can be large. There are perhaps 25 species of warblers, half a dozen different sparrows, vireos, and flycatchers, plus a variety of swallows, thrushes, hawks, ducks, etc. This is a great time to seek birds.

The summer season is important in that we learn what our habitat provides for nesting success. For the past 16 years, our bird monitors have worked diligently at the task of confirming both nesting attempts and successes. Our wetlands have produced nesting red-winged blackbird, mallard, green heron, marsh wren, wood duck, and possibly swamp sparrow. We have no nesting prairie birds.

The woodland list is long. It includes 5 types of woodpecker, including the spectacular red-headed. This uncommon bird favors drilling in soft wood for its nesting cavity and uses, exclusively, large, dead cottonwood trees on this site. This bird seems to favor the open woodland of the adjacent cemetery for its foraging. Other nesting woodland species include Baltimore oriole, rose-breasted grosbeak, gnatcatcher, wood pewee, nuthatch, Cooper's hawk, woodcock, great crested flycatcher, horned owl, and red-eyed vireo.

Another classification is shrubland. Some birds favor small scattered brush clumps out in the open meadows. This list includes song and field sparrows, indigo bunting, yellow warbler, and common yellowthroat. More finicky are chat, orchard oriole, willow flycatcher, brown thrasher, and cuckoo. Their requirements vary somewhat, but generally their open clump habitat needs are much larger in area, height, and diversity than the previous group. Both of these shrubland groups avoid edge habitat. Edge habitat is tolerated by the following. The list includes catbird, towhee, cardinal, chickadee, robin, mourning dove, cedar waxwing, bluebird, and house wren.

Other preserve nesters from the past include killdeer, wood thrush, and hooded merganser.

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 the form below and send it and the donation 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: _____

Cookie Day at the Fen

Yes, it's about that time again. Holiday Season is upon us, and Cookie Day is around the bend. This year it's on January 3rd. The workday goes from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Come when you can, and stay as long as you like.

For those of you not in the know, it's our biggest and best workday of the year. We clear invasive brush and trees, piling them onto large brush piles. The brush piles make a very cheery blaze that keeps us plenty warm, even on a cold, winter day. We also all bring cookies and other holiday treats to eat. And boy, do we eat! We have hotdogs and brats to roast, plus Dave usually comes out with his Texas chili. We guarantee it'll warm you up!

Since we do have fires burning, do not wear any synthetic clothing. Wear natural fibers only. Synthetics melt if they get hit by a stray spark, which can result in serious burns. You don't need to bring anything but yourself and treats if you have some to get rid of. We have lots of food, so we need lots of people to come eat it!

We hope to see you there. Call Rick Manner at 847-464-4426 for more information.

Entrance Bridge Shored Up

The entrance bridge at the Fen had developed a pretty strong slant this summer after flooding in the area. It needed to be leveled out before winter came, and co-steward Rick Manner and volunteer Kevin Collins were up to the task. They spent a day recently adding new support posts and boards to reinforce the sides. Kevin and Rick did a fantastic job, and the bridge is now level and sturdy. And done just in time for the winter snow!

Their time was donated of course, so FBSF just had to pay for the lumber. The entire repair cost only \$79.36. The funds came out of fen donations for tools.

Thanks to Kevin and Rick for a job well done!!! We'll all appreciate it when slogging out to the workdays this winter.

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