



Operations Department Memorandum

TO: Benjamin Haberthur, Executive Director
FROM: Jeremy Jensen, Director of Operations
RE: January 2025 Department Monthly Report

OPERATIONS

Wood Duck Box Maintenance

The cold stretch in mid-January provided the opportunity staff were waiting for to complete their Wood Duck box program. Each winter, in an effort to create nesting opportunities, they install and maintain more than thirty nest boxes located in creeks, ponds and wetlands in sixteen District forest preserves. To make the nesting boxes appealing to ducks migrating back for the summer, staff clean out the remains of the previous year's nest, make sure the wooden box is still constructed well and secured to its pole and there's no vegetation encroaching on the nest. Then they put fresh woodchips in the box for the next brood to use. Each winter, a few boxes need to be replaced; these are constructed by staff in-house. This year, eight new boxes were built and placed in the field, adding three new sites to the program.

Cleaning out the old nesting material provides an opportunity to measure the ducks' nesting success. In the thirty-three boxes visited this year, there was evidence of ninety-six successfully hatched eggs.

One additional benefit to visiting all the box locations is the wildlife viewing opportunities. This year's hard freeze, initially followed by a lack of snow, created ice clear enough to observe snapping turtles and muskrats enjoying their winter habitat under the ice layer, and screech owls were found napping in five of the nest boxes when they were opened for cleaning.

Winter Tree Work

Cold January weather when the ground is frozen allows for our team to get off of the paved trails and out of the parking lots to address tree work without worrying about damaging the surface. Construction on a new trail going through the area that used to be the Deer Valley Golf Course will begin this winter, and part of the existing cart paths, including the old bridge over Big Rock Creek will be integrated into the plan. Having been closed for a number of years, the trails became



Rangers Callahan and Smith working on wood duck box maintenance.



A screech owl has taken residence at one of the wood duck boxes.



Clear ice creating a window to observe snapping turtles.

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overgrown, so crews went through and removed dead trees and brush to ensure that the project kicks off on time. This sort of work is consistent throughout the county all winter. Removing vegetation and material dead trees is common in the winter, taking place at other locations like the Batavia Prairie Path, ensuring a better experience for preserve patrons during the warmer seasons. Unlike during the warmer months where our preserves and trails are full of patrons utilizing the areas and small hand trimming to keep spaces open is the focus, the winter is the time when we can knock back large amounts of vegetation in short periods of time.

Cold Weather Gardening

The horticulturist and staff completed wintertime preventive pruning. This is done to eliminate any rubbing branches and improve the overall shape of the plants. Staff cut back several yews in the Japanese Garden; mainly to stop a particularly large yew from eating at its neighboring Weeping Norway. The yew by the waterfall was also shaped more appropriately for the spot it is in. Some viburnums were cut back entirely for rejuvenation. Staff removed a diseased redbud to prolong the life of surrounding redbuds. Drafts have been completed of the proposed re-design of the sign beds and of the front design of Creek Bend Nature Center. The plan consists of companion plantings and native plantings for birds and pollinators.

Repairs, Servicing, & Preparations

The tradesmen spent the month of January at Settler's and Hughes Golf Courses making repairs and painting, in preparation for the new golf management company, Landscapes Golf Management. Staff also had call-outs to look at gates that were malfunctioning due to the extreme cold. Mendel Plumbing & Heating was called to replace a failed furnace at the Durant Museum, to make the house available for the Preservation Partners tours. The Sign Shop has been diligently producing new spring Kiosk posters, special event signs for the Maple Sugaring Days. The usual stock signs have been prepared for when needed and the new vehicle for Natural Resources was in for decaling.



Staff working on mass-clearing dead trees and overgrown brush.



Preventative pruning done at the Japanese Garden.



Working on repairs and maintenance at Hughes Creek Golf Course clubhouse.