



Natural Resource Management Department Memorandum

TO: Benjamin Haberthur, Executive Director

FROM: Patrick Chess, Director of Natural Resources

RE: November 2024 Department Monthly Report

LAND MANAGEMENT

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Restoration

Fall Prescribed Burn Season

The wet weather this fall made for a fairly compressed burn season, with the summer drought ending abruptly in November. Over 200 acres have been burned to date this fall, divided between 10 burns. Some highlights of the season include burns conducted at Jon J Duerr, Burlington Prairie, and LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserves. A full report will be delivered to the Commission in spring. Very rarely do we receive weather conditions appropriate for a prescribed burn in winter, so the fall prescribed burn season will soon be coming to a close.

Seed Processing

Staff continued to spend time last month processing seed for planting. The upcoming dormant season will be the best time to sow prairie, and staff will intersperse seed sowing projects amongst the brush clearing projects as time and weather dictate this winter. Staff will disperse seed by tractor, trail-vehicle, or even by hand to make sure the precious native seed gets to the places where it can do the most good.

Proper seed processing is important in order to maximize yield and quality of production. Staff prepares the seed by drying, threshing, and cleaning. To begin the process, collected seed is laid out and dried. Once sufficiently dried, the seed is milled. We use a hammer mill machine to chop up the collected seed in preparation for the clipper and fan mill. To clean seed, staff use screens with various hole sizes to filter the seed and remove unnecessary plant materials. These screens are put into the clipper machine, which then uses strong vibrations to facilitate the sifting process.

Approximately \$237,000 worth of native seed was purchased via bid from various native seed vendors this year (combined Operating and Construction & Development budgets and grants). Orders will arrive



Short-eared owl at Muirhead Springs F.P.



Tundra Swans at Muirhead Springs F.P. Identified by the narrower black tapering from bill to eye (larger in Trumpeter), yellow dot near eye, & are more likely to flock in large numbers (Trumpeters are more often seen in pairs or fewer numbers)

(Photos taken by Jason Newton at Muirhead Springs, from eBird.org)

in early December and they will be mixed with our 2024 volunteer collected seed harvest. These mixes will establish approximately 200 acres of new prairie (agricultural conversion). The remainder are designed for dozens of acres worth of enrichment projects across ongoing restorations.

Wildlife

Avian Research

Wildlife staff are monitoring the waterfowl & shorebird migration at Muirhead Springs this winter. Some recent highlights have been Black duck, Canvasback, Common Golden Eye, Tundra Swan, Cackling geese, as well as some non-waterfowl highlights like the Northern Shrike & Short-eared Owl. The few remaining shorebirds finally departed the last week of November & consisted of a group of 1 Long-billed Dowitcher, 1 Greater Yellowlegs & 1 Least Sandpiper. However, we continue to see Wilson's Snipe active in the preserve.

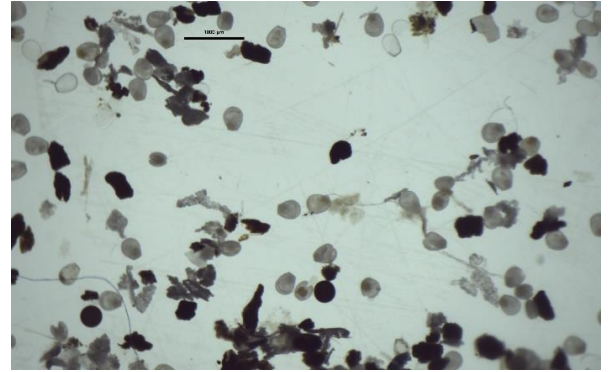
Staff also began conducting owl surveys and have detected Eastern Screech, Short-eared, Barred & Great-Horned Owls at just 2 preserves thus far. In a single survey point at Hampshire, 2 individual Eastern Screech Owls & 1 Barred Owl were detected, neither of which had been recorded at this point in previous surveys.

Deer Management Program

The District's 2024-2025 Deer Management Program was active at all sites in the program as of 11/1. The opportunity for season 1 hunters ended on 11/12 at Brunner/FRS, Binnie North, Freeman Kame, Lone Grove and Needham. Season 2 began on 11/13. As of 11/30 harvest levels were: Brunner/FRS (20), Binnie North (4), Freeman Kame (12), Lone Grove (6) and Needham (3). Hunting at Big, Rock, Lone Grove and Needham was closed from 11/22-11/24 during the first firearm deer season.

Mussel Relocation and Conservation

USRC staff placed out gravid female ellipse mussels with their host fish species to allow "infestation" with mussel glochidia. The glochidia have started dropping off their host and several hundred have already been collected for propagation. It is anticipated that there will be more dropping off in the near future.



Mussel glochidia.