



Natural Resource Management Department Memorandum

TO: Benjamin Haberthur, Executive Director
FROM: Patrick Chess, Director of Natural Resources
RE: Monthly Department Report – June, 2026

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Restoration

Plug Propagation and Planting

Through the growing season, the District's Plant Ecologist is hard at work propagating seeds from rare native species in an effort to bolster populations. Efforts in 2026 include several species of milkweeds, skullcaps, and speckled alder. Additionally, staff has worked with numerous volunteer groups to supplement diversity in various preserves through planting plugs of both prairie and woodland species. In June, work days were held at Big Rock, Lake Run, and Dick Young. Efforts were primarily focused on preserve entrances to beautify the preserves as well as improve the habitat.



Rare milkweed species propagated at the Natural Resource Management Facility.

Chemical Weed Management

Invasive herbaceous weed control continues to be the largest focus of time for the restoration crews. Slowing the spread and eliminating small populations of several invasive species like crown vetch, garden valerian, and teasel is a time-consuming task, but one that helps preserve the biodiversity present in our remnant and restored communities. Widespread selective herbicide applications were conducted across the county at over 50 preserves and consisting of over 600 hours of staff time.

Wildlife

Avian Surveys

Staff continue to work with the Forest Preserve District of Cook County to band American kestrels throughout Kane County. In June, 41 kestrel chicks and 3 adults were banded, measured, and sampled for a variety of diseases, viruses, and pesticide exposure. Additionally, 4 chicks in Kane County were fitted with solar



Kestrel chicks in a District nest box.

powered transmitters. These transmitters are put onto the birds just before fledging and will show the bird's movement after it leaves the nest box.

Bird surveys were completed at Aurora West, Elburn, Burlington, Fabyan and Big Rock Forest Preserves. Marshbird surveys were also finished at Pingree Grove. Highlights from these surveys included Hooded warbler, White-eyed vireo, Louisiana waterthrush, Bell's vireo, Blue grosbeak, Yellow-breasted chat, and King rail.

Freshwater Mussels

Staff released 421 ellipse mussels throughout Ferson Creek in June. This group of mussels is a fraction of what will eventually be placed within the Fox Rivershed (over 1,000 animals) in future months. The remaining cohort should be large enough for release within the next few months. The Ellipse mussels were raised by our partners at the Urban Stream Research Center in DuPage County.

Amphibian and Reptile Surveys

June is the busiest month of the year for turtle conservation and health studies. Sampling was conducted at 5 locations. Painted turtles, Blanding's turtles and snapping turtles were sampled for pathogens by veterinary students as part of a regional study of turtle population health in the Chicago region. Staff also observed turtles nesting that were marked as juveniles 5-10 years ago, new turtles reaching adulthood is critical to population growth and persistence. The night shift worked diligently to find and collect eggs from Blanding's turtle nests to protect them from predation. Staff are currently incubating 105 Blanding's turtle eggs. The hatchlings will be head-started and released in 2027 to bolster our turtle populations.

Staff also conducted snake surveys at several sites. Captured snakes were identified, evaluated by students from the Wildlife Epidemiology Lab, and swabbed for a fungal pathogen that can be harmful to snake populations. Milk snake, common garter snakes and Dekay's brown snakes were observed. Smooth green snake eggs were discovered at one survey location. Smooth green snakes are listed as a species in greatest need of conservation and were recently considered for listing as threatened in Illinois. Evidence of their presence and reproduction is encouraging.



Staff releasing mussels into Ferson Creek.



Milk snake set for pathogen testing.



Staff excavating turtle eggs for incubation.