



NRM Department Memorandum

TO: Benjamin Haberthur, Executive Director
FROM: Patrick Chess, Director of Natural Resources
DATE: January 13, 2026
RE: Monthly Department Report - December, 2025

LAND MANAGEMENT

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Restoration

Bison Introduction

On December 5th the District marked the return of bison to the prairies of Kane County when six bison were delivered to Burlington Prairie Forest Preserve. The bison were released into a small pasture comprised of tallgrass prairie recreation. The District is currently working to expand the area enclosed to approximately 100 acres through 2026. The bison are owned and managed by the American Indian Center based out of Chicago in partnership with Ruhter Bison who will be the primary agency responsible for animal care. Their arrival was greeted with a small private ceremony as the preserve entrance is closed for the winter. In spring, the District will anticipate hosting opportunities for the public to meet the bison.



Seed Preparation & Planting

During the month of December, staff spent numerous hours cleaning and preparing hundreds of pounds of harvested native seed. We will be busy sowing seed in January as winter conditions set in. We plant seed using hand broadcasting and hopper broadcasters and have approximately 300 acres of new prairie to plant across Rutland North, Brunner Family, and Johnson's Mound Forest Preserves.

Tree & Brush Clearing

On the freezing days last month, the Natural Resource field staff began tackling invasive tree and brush throughout forest preserves. Targeted species to remove included buckthorn, honeysuckle, and other weedy brush. As frozen ground conditions continue to develop, staff can begin tackling larger clearing projects. Staff has begun clearing projects at Bowes Creek Woods and Fox River Bluff Forest Preserves.

Employee Recognition & Holiday Banquet

We are very proud of our department and their accomplishments and service this year. Agricultural Coordinator Michelle Blackburn received the Major Accomplishment Award for all of her efforts throughout the year towards the bison reintroduction effort.

Wildlife

Blanding's Turtle Conservation

Staff continue to care for our first large-scale, in-house cohort of head-started Blanding's turtle hatchlings. We currently have 82 hatchlings in our facility. Their condition and growth are looking good. They will be released in May or June to strengthen several known populations of this endangered species on District land.



Juvenile Blanding's turtle.

Avian Research

In December staff began owl surveys starting with Jon Duerr Forest Preserve where a pair of screech owls and a Great Horned owl were documented. Staff also continued to work on raptor banding and successfully trapped both red-tailed hawks and American kestrels with the help of Natural Resources, South and North Operations staff. No waterfowl surveys were conducted at Muirhead Springs since the open water was frozen throughout the month.

Deer Management Program

The District's 2025-2026 Deer Management Program is entering its final weeks for this season. The season will end on 1/18 and hunters will have until 1/25 to remove their equipment from the preserves. As of 12/31, harvest numbers were: Brunner/FRS (28), Binnie North (3), Big Rock (9), Freeman Kame (21), Lone Grove (3) and Needham (5). In January a contractor will be conducting infrared deer surveys using small unmanned aerial systems (sUAS, aka drones). These surveys will provide staff with critical information on the density and distribution of deer at the sites we manage.