



Natural Resource Management Department Memorandum

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

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Restoration

Chemical Weed Management

Invasive weeds control is in full swing for the summer. Restoration crews have been hard at work to control a large suite of invasive species including garden valerian, poison hemlock, wild chervil, and reed canary grass. Widespread selective herbicide applications were conducted across the county at over 50 preserves and consisting of almost 600 hours of staff time. The department follows a philosophy of early detection and rapid response to identify invasive species quickly as they emerge and stop them from becoming widely abundant.



Invasive wild chervil grows in a right-of-way; one of the primary vectors for spread.

Soil Sampling

Restoration crews joined together with the District's agricultural coordinator in May to pull soil samples from approximately one third of the District's farm fields. Soil samples are sent to a laboratory to be tested for a number of metrics including carbon and nitrogen levels, soil respiration, and organic matter. While these tests are initially serving as baseline measures of soil health, the department plans to track this information over time to help guide management decisions to both improve the soil productivity for farming as well as provide metrics that can help inform restoration goals. Healthier soils will produce healthier prairies, and the District is also tracking soil health post-restoration to demonstrate how things may improve once pulled from agricultural production.

Wildlife

Avian Surveys

Staff continue to conduct spring bird migration surveys as well as secretive marshbird surveys throughout the month. Surveys are done at Fabyan, Big Rock and Pingree Grove Forest Preserves. Primary highlights from this month include Yellow-breasted chat, Purple martins, Black-billed



Left: Juvenile American kestrels in born in a nest box at Aurora West Forest Preserve. Right: Recaptured adult female American kestrel with intact color bands.

cuckoos, Blue grosbeaks, Hooded warbler and a likely nesting Louisiana waterthrush. The most notable record was a state endangered King rail discovered during secretive marshbird surveys and at least 2 Common gallinule pairs.

American Kestrel banding is fully underway. Staff are banding both adult and juvenile birds with federal and color bands. Staff recaptured an adult female from 2024 who was nesting in the same nest box in 2026 and 2024. This individual was not found nesting in the county in 2025.

Kane County staff has partnered with Cook County wildlife biologists and veterinarians to obtain swabs and blood samples to test for viruses, abnormalities. This year, we will be sampling for neonicotinoids in kestrels as they often live and hunt within agriculture landscapes. In June, we will also be fitting select birds with transmitters.

Amphibian and Reptile Surveys

May marked the 8th year that we have hosted veterinary students from the University of Illinois Wildlife Epidemiology Lab to assist with long-term animal population health studies. This year we are continuing to study the health and pathogens of turtles and snakes. Snake surveys are being conducted at locations where smooth greens snakes were present in the past, as well as sites where their status is unknown.

Turtle work will continue to build upon long-term studies of rare and common species to better understand population dynamics and health. Sampling has yielded a mix of wild born and head-started turtles. Turtle nesting season will peak in June, so staff began conducting egg checks to plan for nest monitoring. Eggs will be gathered and incubated again this year to avoid nest predation. Staff is planning to head-start approximately 80-100 Blanding's turtles at an in-house facility in 2026.



Veterinary staff conduct health assessments on Blanding's turtles.



Health assessments are also conducted on a variety of other reptiles including snakes and snapping turtles.

