



Planning & Land Management Department Memorandum

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

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Wildlife

Reptile Conservation and Research Projects

July was an exciting month for turtle conservation work. Staff captured Blanding's turtles at a preserve where they were previously unknown. Staff released 54 head-starts, 10 were fitted with radio transmitters to allow staff to track their survival. Clutches of eggs collected in 2026 began hatching. A total of 105 eggs are being incubated this year. Most of the resulting hatchlings will be retained for head-starting.

Deer Management Program

The application period for the 2026/27 deer management program was from 7/1-7/21. There were 153 applications submitted. Thirty-five groups or individuals were selected in the lottery to fill available spots in the program. In total 76 individuals will participate in the program this year if everyone meets program requirements. Qualifications will be held in August.

Avian Research

Wildlife staff wrapped up a very successful kestrel banding season in July. A total of 77 new birds were banded this season: 10 adults & 67 chicks. We also had one recaptured adult female from Big Rock. Transmitters were deployed on a handful of chicks to monitor post-fledge activity and survival. All birds were sampled to test for viruses and neonicotinoid exposure.



Blanding's turtles released with radio transmitters.



Transmittered juvenile female kestrel.

Invertebrate Surveys

Staff completed mussel surveys at Welch Creek, Tyler Creek and Ferson Creek. An adult fluted-shell mussel was discovered with a team of INHS researchers. The INHS team photographed and took swab samples from the mussel for a rare and endangered mussel species project.



Forest Preserve staff surveying for mussels in Welch Creek.



Fluted-shell mussel discovered by INHS researchers.

Wildlife staff assisted with an INHS mark-recapture project to monitor the endangered Dark-footed Yellow Loosestrife bee (*Macropus nuda*), a species that typically relies on patches of native loosestrifes (*Lysimachia ciliata* primarily) and has declined greatly across Illinois.

Restoration

Weed Management

Staff continued to focus primarily on Chemical Weed Management preserve in July, totaling over 340 hours at 47 preserves. Target species this last month were cut-leaved teasel, crown vetch, bird's foot trefoil, purple loosestrife, and others.

When staff have not been walking the prairies and woodlands spraying weeds, technicians continued mechanical control of biennial and annual weeds, like sweet clover and giant ragweed. Combined, staff spent over 250 hours in July at 17 preserves using a large 15-foot mower to control invasive species.



Macropis nuda being handled by INHS staff.

Seed Harvesting & Planting

Seed collection continues with many species including spiderwort, shooting star, and great Angelica. Weekly volunteer seed collections kicked off in earnest in July with harvest events at Aurora West, Big Rock, and Chicago Premium Outlets Forest Preserves.

Volunteer Stewards

Volunteer stewards continued to host numerous work days across the county with a focus on mechanical removal of invasive species like giant ragweed, as well as harvesting native seed from the preserves they steward. Additionally, District staff helped organize two cooperative pop-up plug planting events at Hannaford Woods and Lake Run Forest Preserves. At these events, volunteers helped staff plant hundreds of native plant plugs to help increase diversity within the restorations with a special focus on beautification of the entry points to the preserves.



Volunteers helping plant native plugs at Lake Run Forest Preserve



Volunteers helped harvest seed at Chicago Premium Outlets.