



# Natural Resource Management Department Memorandum

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

## LAND MANAGEMENT

### NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

#### *Restoration*

##### Prescribed Burn Season

Spring weather arrived early this year, and the warm dry conditions allowed staff to begin prescribed burn season on February 17<sup>th</sup>. Through the course of the month, the District completed 11 burns covering about 325 acres. As spring continues into March, the prescribed burn season will carry on, with a goal of reaching 2,500 combined between spring and fall.

Prescribed burns are a driving force in ecosystem restoration across northern Illinois. Local plant communities co-evolved with fire and rely on it to help flush nutrients back into the soil, to encourage seed germination, and to aid in the control of invasive species.

##### Tree and Brush Clearing with Chemical Weed Management

Staff continued to make tree and brush clearing a primary focus in the first half of the month. Staff cleared brush and trees at Lone Grove, Kenyon Farm, Jon J. Duerr, and Fabyan Forest Preserves. Simultaneously, contractors continued to clear trees and brush from numerous preserves including Burnidge and Aurora West Forest Preserves.

Our crew continues to take an Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM) approach to invasive species control, which focuses on eliminating these pests at every stage of their life cycles. During the winter months, this typically means spot-application of selective herbicide application following cutting. This type of chemical follow-up prevents spring re-sprouting, which saves time, money and effort in the long run.

##### Seed Planting



*Prescribed burn at Pingree Grove Forest Preserve*



*Crew Leader Ryan Kurtz lights an interior line at Almon Underwood Forest Preserve*

**Natural Resource Management Department Memorandum**  
February Report

---

The final prairie planting efforts of the winter occurred in early February. Staff wrapped up planting the remainder of Mill Creek Greenway, Rutland North, Burlington Prairie, and Brunner Family Farm Forest Preserve. In total, the District planted over 250 acres of former cropland to tallgrass prairie this winter.

***Wildlife***

Avian Studies & Nest Structure Program

In February, wildlife staff conducted two owl surveys at Elburn Woods and the Hughes Rd parcel. A total of one Northern saw-whet owl and a pair of Great Horned owls, likely on breeding territory, were documented. Staff have also been coordinating with several counties across the Chicagoland region to participate in a multi-state effort to detect Eastern screech owls within and around urbanized areas. Counties will be deploying acoustic recording units to detect owls during the breeding season to measure screech owl occupancy as well as co-occurrence with other owl species. This study will be starting in mid-March.

Habitat Management

Many wetlands at the District continue to be dry due to the ongoing drought. Wildlife staff capitalized on the dry conditions to remove patches of aggressive willows that were starting to overtake sections of a high-quality marsh at Freeman Kame. Wildlife staff also joined other NRM staff to conduct controlled burns during a window of suitable conditions in February.



*Tree and brush clearing efforts at Kenyon Farm Forest Preserve opened up an oak/hickory woodland*