



Natural Resource Management Department Memorandum

TO: Benjamin Haberthur, Executive Director
FROM: Patrick Chess, Director of Natural Resources
RE: May 2025 Department Monthly Report

LAND MANAGEMENT

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Restoration

Weed Management

Staff continued heavy-hitting invasive weeds this last month. The usual yearly suspects targeted included wild chervil, poison hemlock, cut-leaf teasel, and garden valerian. Staff spent approximately 500 hours last month tackling invasive species with selective herbicide applications at 53 different preserves.

Rare Plant Monitoring

Our annual staff & volunteer rare plant monitoring has begun and will continue until fall. Our rare plant monitoring protocol is primarily comprised of our collaboration with Chicago Botanic Garden's Plants-of-Concern (POC) program. Staff and trusted volunteers submit incidence/abundance reports online directly to POC who then analyze the data and notify us of any regional trends. Plants monitored this month include goldenseal, small white lady-slipper orchids, and a collaborative foray with the CBG staff and volunteers to monitor blue-eyed Mary's at Bliss Woods FP.

Seed Harvest

Staff also began the season long process of harvesting native seed to aid in the process of restoring degraded landscapes. Woodland spring ephemerals were the target this month, as the first species that flower and produce seed. Species targeted included Dutchman's breeches, pussytoes, and spring beauties.



Pussytoes ready for seed harvest at Sleepy Hollow Ravine.



Juvenile kestrels in the nest box. Kestrels will receive a blue color band in 2025.

Wildlife

Avian Surveys

Wildlife staff continued monitoring spring migratory birds at Big Rock and Fabyan in May. The majority of migratory birds push through in May and there were several highlights this year: Canada, Connecticut, Mourning, Cape-may, Bay-breasted warblers, Yellow-breasted chat, Blue grosbeak and several Grasshopper sparrows. Staff began conducting marshbird surveys at Freeman Kame South and the recently acquired property at I-90 & Rt 47. An American bittern (state endangered) was detected at the new property; however, it was detected prior to the marshbird survey period. Staff continued to band adult kestrels and started to band juvenile kestrels at the end of the month. In addition to federal bands, juvenile kestrels this year will all receive a blue color band; whereas adults continue to receive unique color band combinations.

Reptile and Wildlife Health Studies

May marked the 7th 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. The emphasis of the snake studies is the smooth greensnake, which is a Species of Greatest Conservation Need. 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. Weather in May was challenging for turtle work. One highlight for the month has been the capture of a head-started Blanding's turtle released in 2020 that we recaptured for the first time in 2025. The turtle appeared to be in excellent shape and had grown significantly (607%). It is encouraging that we continue to see head-started turtles surviving and growing at several of our populations. Turtle nesting season will peak in June, so staff began conducting egg checks to better plan for nest monitoring. Eggs will be gathered and incubated again this year to avoid



Veterinary technicians from the University of Illinois help monitor Blanding's turtles.



Sadie Dainko and Oscar Villa hold snakes found during surveys for smooth greensnake populations.

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nest predation. Staff is planning to head-start approximately 60 Blanding's turtles at an in-house facility in 2025.