



## Planning & Land Management Department Memorandum

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TO: Benjamin Haberthur, Executive Director

FROM: Jennifer Rooks-Lopez, Chief of Planning & Land Management  
Patrick Chess, Director of Natural Resources  
Jeremy Jensen, Director of Operations

RE: June 2024 Department Monthly Report

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### PLANNING

#### LAND ACQUISITION

Staff continues to work with the Land Acquisition Committee on the evaluation and acquisition of properties. The District closed on an approximately 23-acre acquisition adjacent to Johnson's Mound FP in Elburn, Blackberry Township in early June; and is currently expected to close on 298 acres in Huntley, adjacent to Rutland RP, in July.

#### GRANT PROJECTS



*Carpentersville Dam, February 2023*

#### ***Carpentersville Dam Removal***

In an agreement ratified by the Commission in 2015 and extension in 2018, the IDNR agreed to provide the funding to remove the Carpentersville dam. The dam currently fragments the Fox River by creating a barrier that prevents the free movement of fish and other aquatic organisms, compromises the water quality of the Fox River upstream, and is an impediment to safe canoe and kayak recreational use.

#### *Project Updates:*

- April 2024 – Bids for the removal of Carpentersville dam were released on April 23<sup>rd</sup> and opened on May 14<sup>th</sup>.
- May 2024 – Bids were received for the demolition of the dam. As part of the agreement between the District and the IDNR, INDR approval is required before the contract can be awarded. The IDNR determined that the two lowest bidders were not qualified at the time of bid opening, due to the status of their IDOT pre-qualification application. As a result, the project will be re-bid in June.
- June 2024 – Bids for the dam were opened on June 27<sup>th</sup> and are currently under review for approval by the IDNR. Staff anticipates approval the first week of July to present to full

commission on July 9<sup>th</sup>. If IDNR approval is delayed, the project will be moved to the August agenda for approval.

### ***Jon J. Duerr F.P. Renovation Project***

The District was awarded an Open Space Land Acquisition and Development (OSLAD) in June 2022 for improvements to the Jon Duerr Forest Preserve. This project will renovate the existing prairie, parking lots, shelters, restrooms and realign a section of the Riverbend regional trail as well as replace the existing boat launch with a new ADA compliant launch that is able to accommodate small motorized boats.

#### ***Project Updates:***

- April 2024 – The second round of bidding was received with a slight reduction in the bid price and an additional three bidders. The project is scheduled for presentation and award at the May 14<sup>th</sup> Commission.
- May 2024 – The project was awarded to the lowest qualified bidder, Obsidian Asphalt. A pre-construction meeting was held on site on May 29<sup>th</sup>.
- June 2024 – Construction at Jon Duerr Forest Preserve started on June 17<sup>th</sup>. The parking lot and boat launch will be closed for the duration of the project. The Fox River Trail will be rerouted during construction, to keep it open to the public as much as possible.

### ***Mill Creek Greenway***

The District was awarded an Open space Land Acquisition Grant (OSLAD) in 2023 for improvements to the Mill Creek Greenway Forest Preserve. This project will to develop the 62.5 acres purchased in 2016 with Land Water Conservation Funding (LWCF) by introducing resource-based recreation elements that include an outdoor archery range (first of the District's kind), interpretive nature trails, 60+ acres of prairie restoration, parking, restrooms, and design for a future linkage to a regional bike trail.

#### ***Project Updates:***

- March 2024 – Staff worked with Hey & Associates to layout the entry road and parking lot and building amenities.
- May 2024 – Staff continues to progress on design documents.
- June 2024 – Construction documents and specifications are in final review. The project is expected to release for bid on July 23<sup>rd</sup>.



*Archery range and site plan concept drawing by Hey & Associates.*

## CAPITAL PROJECTS

### ***Drainage Projects***

The Drainage Committee met on May 15<sup>th</sup> to discuss the status of various active drainage projects throughout the District.

- June 2024 – Drain tile replacement and repair at Otter Creek Forest Preserves is currently out for public bid. Bids will be received on July 9<sup>th</sup>.

### ***Muirhead Springs Wetland/Stream Mitigation Bank Project***

In 2017, the District began planning to restore over 200 acres of wetland at Muirhead Springs Forest Preserve as part of a wetland mitigation bank. V3 Companies was chosen and approved to be the consultant for this project. Staff and V3 met on-site to review the site conditions.

#### *Project Updates:*

- April 2024 – Weed control and final staking for plug planting began in April. Plugs are anticipated to begin in May. The spring rains highlighted some areas of concern, especially in the central portion of the mitigation bank where water is escaping to the north and out of the mitigation zone. V3 is currently working with staff to create a berm to contain the north-central area water loss.
- May 2024 –The additional berm to contain the escaping water to the north has been constructed and spring plug planting started in May.



*A flock of endangered whooping cranes with a young colt (orange-brown) made a stop at Muirhead Springs last month, accompanied by Sandhill cranes and a Canada goose. (photo credit Kevin Hatcher)*

### ***Brunner Family & Buffalo Park Forest Preserves Improvements Project***

The District has been working closely with the Kane County Division of Transportation (KDOT) regarding various enhancements to these Preserves associated with the Longmeadow Road improvements. The improvements will include construction of a shelter, bathroom, trail connection from northerly parking lot to shelter/bathroom parking lot, existing gate upgrades, and converting various areas of limestone trails to asphalt surfaces including required drainage improvements.

#### *Project Updates:*

- April 2024 – The project was released for bidding on April 23<sup>rd</sup>.
- May 2024- Bids were opened on May 14<sup>th</sup>. The lowest qualified bidder was Midwest Excavators, LLC. The project is expected to be awarded at the June 11<sup>th</sup> Commission.
- June 2024 – Contracts have been signed and the pre-construction meeting is scheduled for July 3<sup>rd</sup>.

## LAND MANAGEMENT

### NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

#### ***Restoration***

##### Weed Management

Staff continued to focus primarily on Chemical Weed Management at nearly every preserve in June, totaling over 430 hours. Target species this last month were cut-leaved teasel, crown vetch, poison hemlock, bird's foot trefoil, garden heliotrope, and others.

When staff have not been walking the prairies and woodlands spraying weeds, technicians started working their way up and down the county with our 15-foot back wing mowers, knocking down this year's crop of giant ragweed, sweet clover, and thistles. Large mowings occurred at Grunwald Farms, Johnson's Mound, and Meissner-Corron Forest Preserves, amongst many others.

##### Seed Harvesting & Planting

Seed collection continues with many species including alumroot, wild hyacinth, and blue-eyed grass. Weekly volunteer seed collections also began early, with the first event taking place at Dick Young F.P. to harvest spiderwort.

#### ***Wildlife***

##### Turtle Conservation and Research Projects

June is perhaps the busiest month for turtle research and conservation. Trapping continued for long-term population and health monitoring at 3 sites. NRM staff worked together to monitor for turtle nesting 7 days a week for a majority of June. Those efforts were rewarded with the recovery of several missing Blanding's turtles and the collection of a record number of eggs to incubate. Staff collected 16 clutches of Blanding's turtle eggs, with a total of 233 eggs. Collecting and incubating these eggs circumvents nest predation, which can be substantial. The hatchlings can be direct released or head-started to bolster our vulnerable populations.



*Alum root and wild hyacinth from [illinoiswildflowers.info](http://illinoiswildflowers.info)*



*A huge turnout for our first Seed Team of the season. Staff and volunteers were at Dick Youna FP harvestina spiderwort.*

Population monitoring has also yielded an encouraging number of head-started Blanding's turtles from 2019-2021. Staff has captured 6 previously released head-starts this month, indicating that they are surviving in the wild.

#### Avian Research and Training

In June, staff worked to band juvenile American Kestrels at the following sites: Grunwald, Sauer Family Prairie Kame, Burlington & Muirhead Forest Preserves. A total of 19 chicks and 2 adults were banded this month. The 2 adult birds were recaptures both originally banded at Aurora West. One individual was initially banded in 2023 & is currently nesting in Elburn & the other was banded in 2020 & is now nesting in Pingree Grove

Staff also conducted breeding bird surveys at the following sites: Big Rock, Fabyan, Burlington, Elburn & Aurora West Forest Preserves. Breeding surveys continue through the first week of July.



*Photos showing a juvenile (left) & adult female (right) American Kestrel. Staff look at feather wear, molt & coloring to determine sex & ages; however, using recapture banding data is the best way to confirm age.*

## OPERATIONS

### Storm Damage

Storm damage removal and clean up from downed limbs and trees was a major time investment throughout the month of June across both South and North Operations. Due to record breaking high temperatures with a lack of rain causing stress during some weeks of the month, immediately followed by heavy thunderstorms with downpours and high winds fallen trees has been a problem throughout the month. District staff responded to trees blocking internal preserve roadways, regional bike trails, as well as falling onto the properties sharing property lines with the district. These events required significant manhours to address primarily during the second and fourth week of the month. District staff even responded to these issues on the weekend in between shelter check ins for reservation guests. Locations like the road to the Fabyan Villa had trees that were located down by district staff and removed from the roadway before museum tours on the weekend of June 22nd. Final clean up stretched into the following week on large downed trees, slowing down normally scheduled duties.

### Trail Maintenance & Repairs

Linear and internal trail improvements have kept staff very busy this month. In addition to the regular mowing along multipurpose trails, staff have been working on clearing back vegetation along the edges and rough-cut mowing areas that need annual service. Several trees had to be cut up and removed from the trails following storms, and debris shoveled off where culverts overflowed onto the trail. Trail intersections were cleaned up to remove gravel, making it safer for bicyclists to stop. Decking board repairs were made on the Fox River Trail and on the boardwalks and bridges connecting Fox River Bluff West to the Fox River Trail on the east side of the river. Finally, vandalism to the Long Meadow bridge and along the trail at Route 20 was painted over to improve the appearance of the trails.



*Operations staff cutting back downed limbs over the Fox River Trail in Dundee.*



*Ranger Tosto clearing off the roadway to the Fabyan Villa on Saturday, June 22nd.*

In addition to the travel options provided by the Fox River, Riverbend and Great Western Trails, and the three branches of the Prairie Path, Operations maintains 144 miles of trails within the boundaries of the preserves. These trails provide hiking, biking and equestrian options for the public to enjoy year-round.

#### Horticulturist Operations

The Horticulturist and crew worked on furthering improve the Centennial garden area by watering, weeding and pruning. Maintaining water for the new grass seed has improved all muddy areas. Weeding out beds for future plantings to bring back this once beautiful area. Annual maintenance of the Villa gardens, Windmill Garden, and the Japanese Garden.

#### Trades Operations

The trades department completed repairs to the Buffalo Park staff residence to make it ready for the rental housing program. The water was repaired at Johnson's Mound, due to an underground leak. The centennial concrete project was completed by an outside contractor. Windows that were original to the Tyler Creek staff residence were replaced and some clean up in the basement was done. There were several damaged gates in June that required new motors and a gate needed to be welded. A memorial bench was placed on the Great Western Trail to take the place of an old bench.

The bridge at Jon J. Duerr received some emergency deck repair and the Fox River Bluff bridge patches were redone due to weather deterioration. Tekakwitha had a high voltage power line repaired with the help of the Trades department.

The sign specialist made 375 address labels, 6 metal signs, 12 decals, vehicle graphics, 1 entrance sign, 4 acrylic graphics were produced and 43 preserve inspections were performed. New signs were placed at Schweitzer Woods for the SEC committee.



*Ranger Gregory cutting up a downed tree from storm damage.*



*Photo of the completed concrete work done around the Fabyan Centennial Garden..*