



## Operations Department Memorandum

TO: Benjamin Haberthur, Executive Director  
FROM: Jeremy Jensen, Director of Operations  
RE: February 2026 Department Monthly Report

### OPERATIONS

#### Tree & Brush Removal

Unseasonably warm weather allowed operations staff to address needed tree and brush removal. This removal was conducted not only for safety purposes, but also visual improvements to preserves. As an example, at the west entrance to the Fabyan Forest Preserve shrubs and bushes around the entrance sign were clear cut and removed to make way for a new landscaping design around the sign. A new mulch bed and plantings will replace the muted tones of the prior shrubs and bushes later on in the spring.

Not all removal is done for aesthetic purposes, safety plays an even more important role in addressing the need to remove trees and brush from a given area. Behind the Creek Bend Nature Center a large dead maple tree was removed. This tree posed a threat to not only the building itself, but it also could have created a major issue in regards to weddings and special events commonly held in the yard behind the Nature Center, being in close proximity to where the tent is erected. This time of year, allows staff to bring in heavier equipment due to the frozen surface than other times of the year.

#### Chainsaw Training and Operations

Each year staff members take time to refresh their chainsaw skills and teach newer staff the appropriate PPE to wear and proper techniques use while working on cutting operations. This helps ensure they are safe while working but also improves their ability to remove trees along heavily used trails and roadways and make good decisions about protecting infrastructure on District property. All operations staff participated in a classroom refresher on PPE and cutting techniques and then a discussion on tree diseases and recognizing tree health. Practical tree identification will be reviewed at an upcoming staff meeting.



*Chainsaw equipment demonstration was held in January for staff.*



*Rangers Martin & Gregory discuss cutting plans.*

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Putting all this information to work, staff scheduled multiple days to work on tree removal at Voyageur Landing and Fitchie Creek Forest Preserves. This year, one whole day was spent on large tree removal along a trail that had several dead or declining specimens that threaten to fall on the trail during every summer thunderstorm. Newer staff members received one-on-one cutting training with seasoned Rangers and Crew Leaders to help them learn the safest way to fell trees, as well as monitor the surroundings and protect preserve visitors during the process. Techniques for removing trees exhibiting heavy leans and the unpredictability of cutting deadfall were emphasized.

This whole process benefits more than just the newest employees. There's always more to learn for the experienced cutter, and the trails are safer for hikers and bicyclists with the dead trees having been removed. By removing the trees that are likely to fall, emergency operations are reduced following icing and thunderstorms throughout the year.

Vehicles and Equipment

In February, Fleet in addition to our regular services and minor repairs, worked on various major repairs. Major repairs completed were diesel exhaust sensors, turbo inspections due to trouble codes, pinion seals, and trailer suspension replacement and rewiring. Along with these repairs, Fleet scheduled several trucks for warranty and mobile recall work keeping our fleet running and up to date at zero cost to the District. We also had several vehicles taken through emissions testing with the help of various staff members throughout the District, keeping us compliant with EPA regulations.

Fleet took delivery of Natural Resources new Ford F-450 Crew Cab and decals were added before being placed in-service with Natural Resources.

Facility Repair and Updates

50 feet of new septic line was installed at the Neville property, following a camera scope that revealed a collapsed pipe. Additional improvements were also made that will allow easier access to the septic system on future repairs. The sign shop created signs for the volunteer stewards to highlight their restoration work. The signs were



*Ranger Smith felling a tree.*



*Rangers Martin & Uidl cleaning up the parking lot.*



*Trades staff installing 50' of new septic line.*

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placed on sandwich boards that can be relocated around the site.

### Horticulture

In the past few weeks, the horticulturist has been going from bed to bed at Fabyan, pruning small trees and shrubs and removing invasive trees. Making sure to always prune to the branch collar for best tree wound recovery as well as aesthetic appearance. During this dormant season efforts were focused on improving the structure of the park areas by helping ensure the best spring regrowth and removing deadwood that could become a hazard if left unchecked.

Areas of focus have been along the walking path on the river, thinning and reducing redbuds for air flow and proper growing structure, removing small invasives and trees around the Villa, the rocky retention area east of the Villa as well as the retention area by the stone wall that contained hundreds of invasive trees, and shrubs in Centennial Garden that had poor form and many suckers that weren't allowing for growth in the main branches. The accessible trees and shrubs in the Japanese Garden have also been pruned, and many were taken back to allow for easier access walking on the paths where many had overgrown and impeded pathways.

Next month the same pruning on the small trees and shrubs around Creek Bend to prepare for the growing season ahead will be conducted to prepare the beds for spring planting.