



Natural Resource Management Department Memorandum

TO: Benjamin Haberthur, Executive Director

FROM: Patrick Chess, Director of Natural Resources

RE: November 2025 Department Monthly Report

LAND MANAGEMENT

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Restoration

Fall Prescribed Burn Season

Over 450 acres have been burned to date this fall, divided between 17 burns. Some highlights of the season include burns conducted at Bowes Creek Woods, Burlington Prairie, and LeRoy Oakes Forest Preserves. Conditions were fairly typical for a fall season this year, resulting in a productive season overall. A full report will be delivered to the Commission in spring when conditions are normally more conducive to prescribed fire. Heavy snowfall on the last day of November put an effective end to the fall burn season.

Seed Processing

Staff continued to spend time last month processing seed for planting. The upcoming dormant season will be the best time to sow prairie, and staff will intersperse seed sowing projects amongst the brush clearing projects as time and weather dictate this winter. Staff will disperse seed by tractor, trail-vehicle, or even by hand.

Proper seed processing is important in order to maximize yield and quality of production. Staff prepares the seed by drying, threshing, and cleaning. To begin the process, collected seed is laid out and dried. Once sufficiently dried, the seed is milled. We use a hammer mill machine to chop up the collected seed in preparation for the clipper and fan mill. To clean seed, staff use screens with various hole sizes to filter the seed and remove unnecessary plant materials. These screens are put into the clipper machine, which then uses strong vibrations to facilitate the sifting process.



Prescribed burn conducted at Grunwald Farms Forest Preserve.



Restoration technician Justin Lechner processing seed.

Approximately \$210,000 worth of native seed was purchased via bid from various native seed vendors this year (combined Operating and Construction & Development budgets and grants). Orders will arrive in early December and they will be mixed with our 2025 volunteer collected seed harvest. These mixes will establish approximately 250 acres of new prairie (agricultural conversion) at Johnson's Mound and Rutland North Forest Preserves. The remainder are designed for dozens of acres worth of enrichment projects across ongoing restorations.

Wildlife

Avian Research

Wildlife staff have started a new raptor research project. Partnering with Millikin University and the Illinois Raptor Center, staff will be banding and taking samples from common raptor species throughout the county. Samples will be used in health studies for Millikin student projects. Red-tailed hawk research will be used to contribute to a larger, long-term collaborative study called "The Red-tailed Hawk project".

Staff have continued to survey for waterfowl and other species at Muirhead Springs. Highlights from November include merlin, northern shrike, Trumpeter swans, Lapland longspurs, increases in several waterfowl species including wigeon, black duck, gadwall, pintail, scaup, ring-necked duck and others.

Deer Management Program

The District's 2025-2026 Deer Management Program was active at all sites in the program as of 11/1. The opportunity for season 1 hunters ended on 11/11 at Brunner/FRS, Binnie North, Freeman Kame, Lone Grove and Needham. Season 2 began on 11/12. As of 11/26 harvest numbers were: Brunner/FRS (19), Binnie North (2), Big Rock (6), Freeman Kame (19), Lone Grove (3) and Needham (5). Hunting at Big, Rock and Needham was closed from 11/21-11/23 during the first firearm deer season. Lone Grove closed to hunting on 11/11 in 2025.



Juvenile red-tailed hawk caught near Grunwald Forest Preserve.