



Natural Area Guardians

MONTGOMERY CO. SWCD
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 217-532-3610, EXT. 3

A MESSAGE FROM PRESIDENT SCHAAL

Greetings NAGs Members,

I would like to thank the Montgomery County Natural Area Guardians board and past president Henry Eilers for making my transition to president of NAGs go smoothly. No one can fill Henry's shoes, but I do plan to continue the goals of this organization.

As the new NAGs president, one of my priorities is to encourage the NAGs general membership to become more active. There are plenty of projects that we are involved in—some public and some still in the works.

We need people with many different talents and skills. Besides an interest in conservation and the out-of-doors, we need people who like to write, are interested in public relations and marketing, and have excellent communication and computer skills.

At present we are involved in several habitat projects. Our very first project involves revegetating with native plants the borrow pit that resulted from the construction of the Fusion Fitness & Aquatics center on the Hillsboro Area Hospital campus. Since then we have picked up an additional

3 acre prairie restoration on the HAH grounds.

The Kee Trail on the abandoned railroad between Hillsboro and Butler is a potential project that NAGs may take on after the sewer line is complete.

The newest project is the Route 66 Prairie restoration beside I-55 north of Litchfield. Last summer several of us met with Senator Demuzio, once in Carlinville and again in Springfield. Mrs. Demuzio was instrumental in getting this project going, as she made important contacts for us with IDOT, the owner of the property. She also encouraged us to persevere when communications broke down. This project has the potential to be a real show-piece.

As you can see, there is plenty to do. I would like to ask NAGs members, who want to do more, to get in touch with me. Call Melissa of the Montgomery County Soil and Water Conservation District at (217) 532-3610 Ext. 3 and leave your contact information, or come to the field workshop on June 20 at the Fusion Fitness Center restoration project and discuss with me your interests in volunteering.

—Ken Schaal

NAG FIELD WORKSHOP IS JUNE 20

This year's annual NAG field workshop will be held at 2 pm on Saturday, June 20. The tour involves two restoration projects on the Hillsboro Area Hospital campus to the south of Fusion Fitness & Aquatics. Tour the pond and observe the wetland vegetation; the upland surrounding the pond includes prairie vegetation. Next, visit the new 3 acre field that is being transformed into prairie with native grasses. Discuss these projects and other NAGs activities with local experts. Walk, observe and learn. Meet in the lot behind the Fusion Fitness & Aquatics center where there will be plenty of parking.



Field Day activities are free and open to the public.

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Natural Area Guardians is a subcommittee of the Montgomery County Soil and Water Conservation District and exists under State Statute. They consist of dues paying members and are led by a panel of officers.

President: Ken Schaal

Vice President: Dave Rahe

Secretary: Anne Foster

Newsletter

Editor: Richard Slepicka

The Role of Soils in Natural Areas—By Dave Rahe, CPSS

In simple terms, soils are the foundation of all life. Those of us who are interested in natural ecosystems are interested in all the components of the ecosystem. A great soil scientist, Hans Jenny found the place for soils in the ecosystem through his brilliant “five factors of soil formation.” Dr. Jenny put soils at the center of the ecosystem by listing the five factors that influence soil development. They are: climate, parent material, biota, and topography acting on the soil over time.

Human involvement in natural ecosystems is minimal, but in order for future generations to benefit from nature we must preserve some of it. The best way to study plants is in their natural environment. The best way to study animals is in their natural environment. The best way to study soils is in their natural environment. In order for us to leave future generations with the opportunities to learn more about nature, we must have some “nature” that can be studied.

The five factors of soil formation have all influenced our soils in Montgomery County. Climate has influenced our soils in many ways. First a colder climate caused Illinois to be covered and flattened by glaciers, some as thick as one mile. A warmer dryer climate made prairie the dominant ecosystem starting about 7000 years ago. As the climate got wetter, trees returned to Illinois. Some places a microclimate influences our soils. Flat areas have a “wetter” climate. North facing slopes have a “cooler” climate.

We have three or four major parent materials in Montgomery County. Most of our soils have a Loess influence. Loess is the fine textured windblown material deposited on the surface. Underlying the loess in most upland areas is glacial till. Glacial till is the ground up and mixed rock and soil material that was deposited by the movement of the glacial across the land. Some areas of the county have soil materials deposited by glacial melt waters. These materials are called outwash. Pediment materials appear to have been glacial till and outwash reworked by permafrost and water. We also have alluvial soils which are recent deposits located in bottomland areas.

Soils in Montgomery County are general divided into 2 or 3 systems that relate to biota. Most of our soils originally developed under tundra which gave way to bo-

real forests. When a great drought hit the Midwest about 7000 years ago, trees died and prairie vegetation invaded from the west. Most areas show the influence of prairie to some degree or another. We have true prairie soils, we have soils that were formed by prairie degrading timber soils and in some places timber re-invaded and degraded the prairie soils. We also sometimes see splotchy patterns on aerial photographs that lead us to believe that savannah also existed in Illinois. While we focus on the vegetation, the microrhyzae, bacteria, micro-fauna, invertebrates, and large fauna are all different depending on the vegetative ecosystem and micro-moisture regime. One example of fauna influence is the mixing of materials that ants and worms provide in prairies. Timber is a much more acid environment than prairie, therefore timber soils tend to be more weathered than prairie soils.

In Illinois, topography influences soils mostly by affecting how water acts on the soil. Does the water pond? Does the water run off slowly thus causing more of it to move into the soil. Does the water run off fast thus reducing the amount of water or moisture in the soil? Other unique situations include Rolling topography, bottomland topography, and closed depressions. Each situation creates a unique ecosystem that has an effect on soils.

Time also has an effect on soils in Montgomery County. Bottomland soils are much younger than upland soils. Little weathering has occurred in our bottomland soils. Upland soils show the effects of time in many ways. One of the most noticeable is the distinctive increase in clay in subsoils that was caused by clay movement in the soil over time. Our soils in Montgomery County are more weathered than soils on similar landscapes further north in the state because our deposits are older than deposits in Champaign County for example.

We depend on the soil for our life and livelihood in Montgomery County. Each farm feeds hundreds of people. The productivity of our soils has been influenced by all five soil forming factors to some degree or another. By preserving and restoring our native ecosystems we are able to learn more about our native vegetation and more about our soils.



Interview With a Pheasant

The author, Glenn Savage, and his German Wirehair, Boomer, interviewed a Central Illinois pheasant in November of 2006. The interview took place in the middle of a 100 acre CRP field in Montgomery County at 8:00 AM on a Tuesday morning.

Author- Excuse me, I see you there by that clump of Indian Grass. Would you mind if we don't hunt today but instead just chat?

Pheasant- What do you mean "if we don't hunt...?"

I'm not hunting, you and your dog are the ones hunting. I'm just going about pheasant business which is all about survival. But I might talk a while if you'll answer a question. I didn't move or even blink as you walked past me. What gave me away?

Boomer- I smelled you. In fact, I still smell you. I would still be on point if Glenn hadn't told me to "leave it" and then to "sit and stay."

P- I have got to change my deodorant. I spend a lot of time on grooming and then for my roll-on to let me down---

A- Do you really use deodorant?

P- I'm just joking about the roll-on, but I'm impeccable when it comes to grooming. Get it, im peck able?

A- Why the emphasis on grooming?

P- It is part of my survival strategy to groom thoroughly several times a day. Grooming interlocks my feathers' smallest parts to form better airfoils for flying and to make a weather resistant but breathable barrier. Also, I distribute oil that weather proofs my feathers. Underneath my flight and body feathers are down feathers which insulate me from heat and cold. Besides, a clean, well groomed bird gives off less scent than a dirty bird. By the way, you're looking a little disheveled Mr. Hunter; and that dog of yours looks like an unmade bed.

B- Excuse me; let's leave appearances out of this OK? We found you did we not? Besides, your sense of humor is fowl.



A- Grooming aside, what is your opinion on hunting?

P- From my viewpoint, hunting is a small part of the survival "big picture." I was in a fight for survival before I left my mother in the egg. The weather could have destroyed me with a late freeze or hail; coyotes, skunks, raccoons, opossums, house cats, or snakes could have eaten me when I was just an egg. When I was hatched, I was at risk from the weather, all the predators I named, plus hawks and owls. Hunting by humans is not a concern until late in the fall. When I am hunted by the rules you humans make up, survival of the species is not a concern at all. Let's face it, with all your special outdoor clothes, fancy guns, and help from dogs, we (pheasants) get away most of the time. The only reason you're getting this interview was that I chose to hide instead of run. Mostly, I wanted a closer look at that strange dog you have helping you.

I answered your question, now how about answering a question of mine. Why do **you** hunt?

A- My species had to hunt to survive. I guess hunting is in my genes. When I was little, my dad took me hunting. He taught me to respect the outdoors and its creatures. Now that I'm older, I think that I hunt because it takes me back to the times I spent with my dad. Dad also taught me to respect the land owners, and the rules that govern hunting and the hunting seasons. Hunting for pheasants still helps me survive by keeping me in good health. All the walking I have to do helps me deal with stress and keeps my heart healthy.

P- Could you tell your hairy friend to step back a bit, he's drooling as he stares at me. Well, I have to fly now (fly, get it?) You seem to be a respectable sort, but I have to tell you that your species does not have a very good record of preserving the environment. Pheasants, other game and non-game animals will not be around if you don't get your act together.

THE WHITE JUNCO

Albino Or Leucism?

Thanks to one of our members for reporting the sighting of a white slate-colored junco. The bird spent the winter in rural Hillsboro with a flock of "normal" juncos. It was definitely easy to spot—probably too easy. Without protective coloration, the white junco may be easy prey for a predator.

The bird is not an albino as it lacks red eyes and does have tan on its wings. This type of color variation in animals is called "leucism." It is a condition resulting in the reduction of all types of skin pigments, not just melanin as with albinos.

Cases of leucism have been reported in birds, snakes and mammals. Leucistic zebras, for example, still have stripes. But instead of black stripes, leucistic zebras are tan and white.



NAG NUGGETS—"NUGGETS" ARE HELPFUL TIPS PROVIDED BY NAG MEMBERS. IF YOU HAVE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS, CONTACT NAGS; WE WILL DO OUR BEST TO ANSWER YOUR QUESTIONS IN FUTURE ISSUES.

Emergency rinse - If chemical laden droplets get "in your eye" or "on your skin," the clean water in your plastic water bottle can provide immediate irrigation.

Chemical application requires safety precautions be observed at all times. The labels of chemicals prescribe what clothing and other protective gear must be worn.

Always carry a lightweight plastic bottle or two of drinking water on your person. If one makes a small hole near the neck of the bottle with a pocket knife or car key, the flexible plastic bottle of water becomes a steady stream squirt bottle that is ideal for eye irrigation.

Cocoa mulch is a garden product sold at box stores and garden centers. It is made from the shell of the cocoa bean and is sold as landscaping mulch. Smelling like chocolate, cocoa mulch is toxic to dogs—just like chocolate is. The same ingredient that makes chocolate toxic (theobromide) is also found in the cocoa bean shell. Dog owners should avoid using cocoa mulch as there have been cases of dogs eating the mulch, getting sick and dying.

Join Natural Area Guardians!! (or renew your membership)

Use this coupon to join NAGs of Montgomery County. Membership is open to individuals, families, students and corporations, and is renewable annually.

- Individual \$ 5.00
- Family \$ 10.00
- Student \$ 2.50
- Corporate \$ 25.00

Name:

Telephone:

Street, City, Zip:

E-mail:

Clip and mail to:

Montgomery County SWCD
 Natural Area Guardians
 1621 Vandalia Rd

Interests, skills or ways I would like to help:

NAG Membership News

The word is out! As a result of our first newsletter, membership drives at the PF annual banquet, word of mouth and other means, Montgomery County Natural Area Guardians dues paying members have reached 44 people. This includes individual, family and organizational memberships. Membership dues is \$5 for an individual membership and \$10 per family; organizational membership is also available.

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- Put it in your recycle bin for "office Paper"
- Or go completely green and receive an electronic copy via E-mail (just notify us at melissa.cauble@il.nacdnet.net)



NAGs 'Route 66 Prairie' Journal

4-6-2009 - Henry Eilers (HE) met at 9am with Sean Stinnett, IDOT at the site. Sean indicated the exact location of the south line and it was decided that parking would be at the south-east property line corner. He is to notify HE when construction begins. Our restoration activities can go to up to the I-55 fence line. We have permission to do all teasel control in their 80' drainage right-away that separates our 2 parcels. Temporary staking needs to be replaced with T-posts.

4-7- Glenn and Nancy Savage, Doug Dressen, Henry Eilers met 4-1, Friday afternoon for an hour at above site.

Evaluation: The site was thoroughly burnt a few weeks ago by IDOT staff from the local maintenance yard. Fescue, the primary turf cover is already well greened up. The primary purpose was surveying for the extent of teasel infestation. Most teasel stands were easily found by last year's stalks, not consumed by the burn. We found on inspection that some seed was still present in the heads. One year rosettes were already in active growth. Huge numbers of emerging seedlings, all in the early cotyledon stage were present. The drainage corridor, being retained by IDOT has a nearly solid cover of seedlings and many mature plants as well.

The north section surface was exceptionally rough textured and very wet. The south section has a more variable surface and vegetative cover. With a slightly higher elevation it should be better drained but it also had a lot of surface ponding at this time. Some concrete slabs, possibly old sidewalk remnants were seen. According to Doug these may be remains from former roadside facilities along the old highway alignment.

Action: HE did some test spraying of teasel rosettes with Roundup. It was too windy to be practical on a larger scale because of potential collateral damage. Doug Dressen volunteered for teasel control. Due to the extent and severity of infestation it was decided that two or three spraying units with booms and/or hand wands will be required. We may want to include populations of Parsnip and widespread Crown Vetch in our control program. Timing, while critical will depend to a large degree on suitable con-

ditions. Above all, soil conditions have to support the equipment without causing excessive surface damage. The site shows much such damage from the past. Our first year control strategy may need to include selective mowing in the bolting stage to prevent any additional weed recruitment. HE has enough 'Trimec' herbicide [a 2,4D formulation] for ten to fifteen gallons of spraying solution.

One gallon of 2,4D should cost \$25, to be paid from NAGs account.

We need to recruit additional volunteers and equipment.

Tim [Rossi?] from M & M Service Co. provided the following telephone estimate on 4-3-2009: Spraying for cool season grasses with 'Poast Plus' herbicide, \$85.60/lg., total cost estimate applied for 8 acres is \$328.40. [The actual acreage is 6.8 acres and may have to be further adjusted downward depending on further site evaluation.] Such an effort to try and release the warm season grasses from competition may have to wait for the next suitable season as the Indian Grass is elongating already. By the time conditions are favorable for ground application it will be too damaging for the warm season grasses.

4-22 - Mark southwest property line with T-posts. Set flagging to delineate area to be sprayed for control of major teasel infestations, but also for crown vetch, sweet clover and parsnip.

Green Fringed Orchid and Rattlesnake Master occur in the target area. How do we avoid eliminating them and other desirable species as well? To what degree do we need to consider substituting mowing as a control measure? It is a huge dilemma. Four snakes were seen sunning though cool, probably all Black Snakes.

4-23 - Trucks from the IDOT's Litchfield Maintenance Yard rolled in at 8am and installed a 2 vehicle parking pad for our project some 200' to the south of our site: because of grade changes, I was told.

Pheasants Forever volunteers Glenn Savage, Doug Dressen and Bob Meyers arrived with trucks, carrying two 4-wheelers and sprayers with 10' booms. 30 gal. of 0.25% 2,4D solution was applied over 4-5 acres. Very rough ground,

last year's teasel stalks, some woody stems and less than favorable weather conditions presented application challenges. HE applied 4 gallons of Trimec Broadleaf herbicide at a 1 ½ TB/1 gal. solution selectively with a backpack sprayer to Teasel in the best quality prairie strip paralleling the frontage road.

5-6 - Sowed seed of Prairie Buttercup [*Ranunculus fascicularis*] and planted bulbs of Prairie Hyacinth [*Camassia scilloides*]. Large numbers of Blue-eyed Grass [*Sisyrinchium albidum*] were in full bloom. Took photos, including early foliar stage of Ladies Tresses [*Spiranthes*] and Green-fringed [*Habenaria lacera*] orchids. Trimec sprayed weeds indicate a degree of control. Time will tell how complete. The 2,4D treated areas will have to be re-sprayed. Sweet clover and crown vetch showed distinctive curling, but the teasel was essentially not affected. Application rates for Teasel, the main target species will have to be adjusted accordingly.

5-14 - HE sprayed several moist spots, appr. 10 sq/ft each with Roundup. This should facilitate future introductions of competition sensitive species. Also planted were 4 Illinois Bundle Flower and 1 Purple Prairie Clover and remaining prairie seed sweepings from 2008 harvest and freshly collected seed from *Corydalis micrantha*, Wood Sorrel [*Oxalis violacea*] and Annual Bluets [*Hedyotis pusilla*] scattered in suitable sites. The ongoing inventory revealed previously not seen populations of the following good conservative prairie species: Senna [*Cassia marylandica*], Meadow Rue [*Thalictrum revolutum*], Sullivan's Milkweed [*Asclepias sullivantii*]. These all occur in areas of severe weed infestations.

5-21 - Re-spraying for Teasel was done by Glenn Savage and Bob Meyer with a 20' boom sprayer with 50 gallons of 0.50% solution and at a lower ground speed. The Bluet species *Hedyotis longifolia* was in abundant bloom and Pale-spike Lobelia [*Lobelia spicata*] just beginning.

Report by NAGs 'Route 66 Prairie' committee chair Henry Eilers

Who Are The Natural Area Guardians?

We are called NAGs, Natural Area Guardians. The Montgomery County Natural Area Guardians was organized in 2005 and exists by Illinois statute as a committee of the Montgomery County Soil and Water Conservation District. The purpose of our NAGs group is to provide an organized means for locating and preserving natural areas and open lands in Montgomery County. Our goals include encouraging and aiding landowners to manage their natural areas and open lands wisely, as well as providing educational programs concerning natural areas and our natural heritage. We are also available to assist land owners with management of natural areas and open lands and if necessary to aid in their purchase.

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