

Douglas C. Hancock  
Attorney at Law  
2215 Pepper Valley Drive, #8  
Geneva, IL 60134  
630-262-8940  
doug@drm.comcastbiz.net

July 26, 2016

City of St. Charles  
Tree Commission Members  
2 E Main Street  
St. Charles, IL 60174

RE: Out Lot B

Dear Mr. Grathoff, Chairman and Members of the Tree Commission,

My relationship with Out Lot B started in the early 1970's, after I purchased the adjoining five acres located to the south. At that time, what is presently Out Lot B was part of the gravel pit property consisting of 140 acres more or less.

Members of the Wayne equestrian community and myself maintained and expanded existing trails through the entire property and the adjoining properties.

Once the gravel pit became the Woods of Fox Glen, our trail activity continued on Out Lot B and adjoining properties to the south and east.

Starting in the late 1990's, my efforts, along with others, commenced to become a "restoration" of the property. The work started at the east end and proceeded to the west. Approximately 10 acres have been worked on for restoration, but not completed. Restoration is always a "work in progress". When work commenced, the condition of the property can be reasonably described as "unprotected and degraded". The property was thick with multiflora rose, buckthorn, bush honeysuckle, box elder trees, maples, ash, elms and other "shade tolerant" trees. Hardwoods such as oaks, walnuts and hickory were old, rare and very stressed. Much of the soil was bare and unprotected as a result of the thick "canopy" that shaded the area and prevented a healthy "understory". The property, other than the maintained trails, was impenetrable. Presently, the condition of approximately 10 acres of the western portion of Out Lot B is in that "degraded" condition.

For purposes of brevity, I have exhibits that support my message. Exhibits 1 and 2, aerials from 1939 show that the property historically was a prairie, being farmed, with a few large hardwoods along the Norton Creek. Presently, there is little, if anything special about the trees in Out Lot B. It is all regrowth since the 1950's and 1960's, when farming stopped. The north south road on Exhibit 1 is Nelson Drive. The junction of the north branch and south branch of Norton Creek is approximately 125 yards from the east border of Out Lot B. Exhibit 3 confirms that the area was originally "open".

Exhibit 4 "Too Many Trees in the Forest", Chicago Tribune, April 15, 2015, provides an "eye opener" as to what is being done to recreate prairies and savannas. If one values the trees removed in the Lake County project, it would be in the "millions" using the analysis as provided in Graf Tree Care report of February 22, 2016. The value of the removal in DuPage and Kane County would be considerably less. These Forest Preserve Districts are just getting started on the Restoration trend. This article makes it very clear that a new "mind set" about trees, prairies and forest restoration is evolving with Forest Preserves, Park Districts and private landowners.

Exhibit 5 is one of my invoices for prairie grasses and for forbs, much of which has been planted in the portion of Out Lot B which I have worked. The results of the plantings are becoming more evident.

I suggest that you consider a visit to the Kane County Forest Preserve Enhancement Project, which is located at the southwest corner of Route 31 and Fabyan Parkway. The restored woods in that project mimic to a large extent the work that I have done in Out Lot B.

Consider reviewing or reading "Miracle Under the Oaks" by William K. Stevens, 1977. This book is a factual account of what Steve Packard, started in 1997, with lots of volunteers, restoring Cook County Forest Preserve property along the North Branch of the Chicago River. Steve Packard is credited with starting the restoration movement that culminated in the work being done as expressed in the Chicago Tribune article of April 15, 2015, which is enclosed as Exhibit 4.

In summary, I invite all of you to tour the property with me. I can accommodate you on more than one date.

I have just attended the North American Prairie Conference, at Illinois State University in Normal, Illinois on July 17, 2016 – July 20, 2016. These conferences began in 1970 and are held every two years in various locations in the Midwest and Canada. Briefly, my take-away from the conference:

- There is no "one way" for prairie, savannah restoration. It is an art, not a science. Everyone in this field is constantly learning.

- Restoration is "inspired guesswork".

Where should St. Charles go from here? I have delivered the "wake-up call", although it may have been delivered abruptly or even rudely.

Out Lot B is a potential restoration "jewel", and it should be restored. Approximately, 1/3 of the work has been completed.

If not St. Charles, with volunteers, then, who? St. Charles can little afford to pay hundreds of thousands of dollars to hire a restoration contractor, and then continually pay to maintain the restoration.

If not now, when should the work be done? The degradation continues, slowly.

Looking forward to meeting all of you on site, and I can also appear at your meetings.

Respectfully,

*Douglas C. Hancock*

Douglas C. Hancock

DCH:dmc

Enclosures

cc: Mr. Peter Suhr, Director of Public Works

Mr. John M. McGuirk, Attorney at Law

Mr. Jerry M. Johnson

z. CIRCA 1939



EXHIBIT I

Circa 1939



Exhibit 2





STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Janet Zupko, of Chicago, walks Sunday at Ryerson Woods Forest Preserve in Riverwoods. "My opinion is that you don't cut down perfectly healthy trees unless it is really necessary," she said. Some counties are felling trees in preserves as part of restoration projects.

# Too many trees in the forest?

Some preserve districts cut from crowded woods, aiming to restore prairies, draw back native species

BY ROBERT MCCOPPIN  
AND SHERYL DEVORE

Chicago Tribune

The buzz of chain saws filled Potawatomi Woods this winter. Century-old trees cracked and fell to the ground. Contractors cleared 259 acres of mature ash, maples and sycamores.

With the spring thaw, parts of the forest preserve near northwest suburban Wheel-

ing look like a muddy wasteland. Hundreds of tree trunks lie stacked like firewood. Stumps dot the landscape.

If the areas look devastated or ugly, Cook County Forest Preserve District officials say their work will eventually lead to a beautiful, and ecologically important, rebirth. The goal is to bring back the native habitat of grasses and sedges, red-headed woodpeckers and wildflowers.

The project is part of a growing effort by

conservationists in the Chicago area to cut down overcrowded woods into more open woodlands, savannas and meadows. In some cases, forest preserves are being transformed into prairie preserves. It's also an indication that, despite their names, forest preserve districts in the Chicago area are spending a good deal of their resources tearing down trees.

"Now, ironically, forest preserves have too many trees," said Benjamin Cox, executive director of the Chicago-based Friends of the Forest Preserves. "(Having)

Turn to *Preserves*, Page 6

## Lake County district focuses on oak trees

BY SHERYL DEVORE  
Chicago Tribune

The Lake County Forest Preserve District has torn down thousands of maples, elms and other mostly healthy trees in the past three years, and those who support the project say they're taking a long view toward the forests' health.

The nearly 4,000 trees were felled because they were crowding out oaks and the wildlife that rely on oaks for food and shelter.

"The big issue here is regeneration," said Robert Fahey, a forest ecologist at The Morton Arboretum who consults with Lake

County. "The (older) oaks are all going to die within the next 100 years. ... There are no young oaks to replace them."

Lake County believes its work can serve as a model for other conservation agencies in the Chicago area, which has experienced a major loss of once-dominant native oaks. But Lake County officials acknowledge it's tough watching mature trees fall.

"Nobody likes to cut down trees," said Deb Maurer, natural resources manager. "It wasn't easy for our staff" to watch the trees be taken down, she said. Maurer heads a team

removing trees, planting oak seedlings and gathering wildlife and soil composition data. The \$3 million project was funded from a voter-approved 2008 bond referendum for restoration work.

This winter, a contractor removed invasive woody species and shade-tolerant understory trees from sections of northern flatwoods communities in the preserves.

To grow successfully, oak saplings need light, and over the past century, the canopies of many of the area's natural woodlands have become closed, taken over by trees such as maples that are more tolerant of shade. The idea behind the clearing projects is that they will increase the amount of sunlight that reaches the ground, encouraging the re-

generation of native, shade-intolerant trees and shrubs like white oak, red oak, walnuts, viburnum and hazelnut.

In some wooded areas, for example within Ryerson Conservation Area near Deerfield, sugar maples have outgrown the oaks and are stifling sunlight from getting to oak saplings.

Over the past several decades, the forest preserve has introduced prescribed burns to the woodlands, removed nonnative species and developed a deer-reduction program to keep the oak saplings from being over-browsed.

"But that just hasn't been enough," Maurer said.

Working with Fahey, the forest preserve created plots of land within the woods of the four preserves with varying amounts of

tree removal and planting. At some sites, like Ryerson, visitors can see large stumps where sugar maples once stood.

Maurer said not all maples are being removed.

The team is gathering data to see which regimen will most help oak seedlings grow successfully. In addition, they are monitoring soil properties and changes in other plant and animal life in the oak woodlands.

The hope is that the work will bring back native animals, including certain species of birds and amphibians that have been declining, said Gary Glowacki, Lake County Forest Preserve District wildlife biologist.

In the past 20 or 30 years, the preserves "completely lost wood frogs and spotted salamanders," species that

require open oak woodlands with transient ponds in which to breed, he said.

Bird species such as red-headed woodpeckers also require open woodlands and have been documented less and less over the past 20 years in the preserves the district is managing for oak regeneration, Glowacki said.

After two years of tree removal, the woodpeckers are returning to all the preserves where the work is being done, he said.

"We're trying to make the ecosystem healthier and trying to create a new generation of oak trees that will be there for the future," Fahey said. "We have to think about the future of our forests."

DeVore is a freelance reporter.

# Trees felled for restoration

Preserves, from Page 1

too many trees creates tons of shade, and prevents growth of the understory."

In Lake County, about 4,000 trees, many mature and healthy, have been felled from four preserves in the past three years in an effort to let in sunlight to grow more oak trees. Though pests have also been a major reason for tree removal, the large-scale removal of trees to restore and preserve habitat marks a continuing evolution in conservation.

When Illinois lawmakers authorized the creation of forest preserve districts in 1913, the mission was exclusively to save forests. Land management meant planting more trees, preventing fires and otherwise largely leaving the preserves alone.

But fire suppression and preservation led to fast-growing trees like sugar maples and elms shading out other plants, primarily oak trees that had dominated the area's woodlands for thousands of years, said Robert Fahey, forest ecologist at The Morton Arboretum in Lisle.

Before Europeans settled the area, fires set by Native Americans and by lightning strikes "created a mosaic of prairies, savannas and woodlands," Fahey said, keeping the growth of other plants in check while allowing the fire-resistant oaks to thrive. But when the fires stopped, the ecosystem eventually got knocked off balance, with thickets of nonnative species like buckthorn and honeysuckle spreading unchecked, naturalists say.

In recent decades, the removal of such invasive trees, often with the help of volunteers and controlled brush burns, have been common in forest preserves, though not without controversy. Protests led Cook and DuPage counties to ban such tactics in 1996. The bans were lifted in stages over 10 years, and some of those who raised red flags then have since been won over.

After his initial concerns were answered, Cook County Commissioner Peter Silvestri, for instance, now says he supports restoration.

Chip O'Leary, chief ecologist for the Cook County preserves, said restoration projects have prompted the renewal of plants and wildlife and have attracted greater diversity that's the hallmark of a healthy ecosystem. With the return of certain types of frogs and snakes, migratory and wetland birds and small mammals in Potawatomi Woods, he said, "it'll be a lot prettier place to be."

Still, not everyone agrees with the approach.

Mark Spreyer is executive director of the Stillman Nature Center, a private, nonprofit center on a former farm in South Barrington that features woods and prairie. Spreyer led Chicago's peregrine falcon release program in the 1980s and has taught environmental biology at the College of Lake County.

He says it's unrealistic to try to re-create an idealized setting from 200 years ago when the environment has changed. He notes, for instance, that the federal map of what plants can live in



STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Andy Wade uses a log grabber to stack tree trunks onto a flatbed truck in January after the clear-cutting of land in a Cook County forest preserve in Wheeling. Some trees in the county are being removed as part of a restoration effort.



STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Lumberjack Doug Brehm cuts up trees in January in a Cook County forest preserve in Wheeling.

different zones has been redrawn in recent years. Some plants and animals thrive in the current condi-

tions and will be harmed by attempts to destroy habitat and convert cool, tranquil forests to "hot, buggy"

meadows, he said. His approach reflects the recent but controversial notion that "novel ecosystems" with nonnative species have adapted to human intervention.

"The public prefers forests," he said, "but we're getting prairie shoved down our throats."

Yet restoration, including the clearing of existing trees, is solidly in the mainstream of land management. The U.S. Forest Service has its own program that includes thinning and burning woods in places like Mark Twain National Forest in Missouri and Arkansas. In Cook County, restoration projects are often carried out in consultation with state and federal authorities.

Naturalists argue that precisely because humans have carved up and altered natural areas so drastically, they require aggressive management to restore balance and diversity.

"People had understandable concerns when they saw so many trees coming down," Cook County Forest

District spokesman Don Parker said, "but once we've talked to them about what we're doing, people have been supportive of the work."

The Potawatomi Woods project is funded through \$1.7 million provided by the Illinois Tollway as compensation for the trees that had to be removed several years ago to widen the nearby Tri-State Tollway. By agreement, the money had to be spent in the area, near the Des Plaines River, though officials said restoration would have been done eventually, anyway.

For the first time, the forest agency plans to sell some of the wood as timber and firewood, hoping to earn \$235,000. More typically, such wood would be burned or chipped on-site.

Similar tactics have been used with great success in other preserves, officials said. Prime examples are Deer Grove East near Palatine and Orland Grassland preserves, where the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers recently completed a \$12 million restoration of

almost 1,000 acres. Both sites have attracted native grassland wildflowers, butterflies and breeding birds, including bobolinks, Henslow's sparrows and eastern meadowlarks.

The work in Cook County fits in with the Next Century Conservation Plan, which aims to restore 30,000 acres over 25 years. The work will cost an estimated \$40 million a year, though where most of the money will come from has not been identified.

Officials from other counties in the area are approaching restoration in their own ways.

In Lake County, the forest preserve district is thinning forests as part of a regional plan to grow new oak woodlands. The loss of oak woodlands that once dominated the area, and lack of young oak trees, is of particular concern to conservationists.

Other forest preserve districts in the area are pursuing ambitious restoration projects that do not involve wide-scale tree removal.

In DuPage County, work began this winter to remove a stand of invasive trees from Klein Fen, but the district is not generally removing large trees, said Scott Meister, assistant manager of natural resources. The district is doing other innovative restoration, Meister said, widening waterways like Spring Brook Creek No. 1 near Winfield, to better handle floods.

In Will County, the forest preserve district's largest restoration project at Hadley Valley in Joliet comes around a cost of \$10 million. That project involves planting more than 300,000 wetland plants and almost 34,000 trees and shrubs to convert farmland back to wetland and prairie.

Kane County has limited itself to clearing smaller invasive species. It is growing oak seedlings and planting them in former farm fields to re-create savannas.

Drew Ullberg, director of natural resources for the Forest Preserve District of Kane County, said he's awaiting the results of Lake County's woodland thinning.

"We're watching to see the ecological results and the public reaction," Ullberg said. "Not everybody's an ecologist. When you have the name 'forest preserve district,' people are really sensitive. Why are you cutting trees? We hear that."

The McHenry County Conservation District got that reaction this spring after it cleared brush as part of a restoration program on Nippersink Creek. Ed Collins, director of land preservation and natural resources, wrote online that visitors tend to judge such a project prematurely by its cut stumps and empty space.

Over time, he wrote, sunlight and plantings will bring new generations of butterflies, oaks and wildflowers, and transform the landscape "to a soft water color portrait of a sublime and very Midwestern landscape."

McCoppin is a Tribune reporter; De Vore is a freelance reporter.

emcoppin@tribpub.com  
Twitter @RobertMcCoppin