

From newsroom to nature

Dunn exhibition sheds light on local landscapes



Prescribed burns and the Native Seed Nursery at Rollins Savanna are two initiatives addressed at a special exhibition. (Courtesy of John Weinstein)



“Managing Healthy Landscapes” is the special exhibition running at the Dunn Museum through Sunday, April 7. (Courtesy of John Weinstein)



More than 5,980 linear feet of drain tile were removed or disabled at Pine Dunes Forest Preserve in an effort to restore wetlands. (Courtesy of Tim Elliott)



Prescribed burns are considered a natural resource manager's most cost-effective tool available for managing natural communities. (Courtesy of Lake County Forest Preserves)

Just more than five years ago, as I made the leap from my extensive journalism career to join the Lake County Forest Preserves, I thought I had a solid grasp of the organization's mission and functions.

I couldn't have been more mistaken. Even after spending most of my life in Lake County, I was unaware of what the forest preserves have to offer. I've made it my mission to share the amazing things that happen in the 64 forest preserves and facilities.

There's a special exhibition, "Managing Healthy Landscapes," running through April 7 at the Dunn Museum in Libertyville. While exploring the exhibit, I learned many facts that I want to share. Here are a few highlights:

- The Native Seed Nursery at Rollins Savanna Forest Preserve near Grayslake was established in 2005 to grow native seed for use in restoration projects across the landscape. Production has grown steadily, now yielding between \$180,000–\$230,000 worth of seed a year, with the help of thousands of volunteer hours annually. Many seeds are priceless because they can't be purchased in the marketplace.

- A 10-foot-high fence surrounds the nursery to prevent wildlife from damaging plant beds.
- Common buckthorn, an invasive large shrub or tree, is harmful as it overshadows native plants and obstructs their access to sunlight. Removing the pesky plant is a key objective for the Forest Preserves.
- Not sure what buckthorn looks like? It is one of the first species to turn green in the spring and among the last to shed its leaves in the fall.
- A 2020 tree census revealed that buckthorn accounts for 52.2% of Lake County's trees, according to the U.S. Forest Service and The Morton Arboretum. Beloved oaks don't appear on the list until the seventh and 10th positions.
- Many agricultural fields were once part of a vast mosaic of wetlands in Lake County. Early settlers installed clay drain tiles to deplete wetlands, leaving behind rich tillable soils. More than 10 million acres have been tilled in Illinois. While the technique was effective for expanding agriculture across our region, it was at the expense of natural wetlands.
- A primary objective of the Forest Preserves is to restore the natural hydrology of wetlands. Hydrology is the way water cycles through an area. One large project was completed at Pine Dunes Forest Preserve near Antioch where more than 5,980 linear feet of drain tile were removed or disabled. The newly restored habitat supports an array of wildlife and plant life, including oaks, while also providing improved flood control.
- Scientists estimate restored wetlands reduce flood damages by almost \$8,000 per acre each year. Restoring the wetlands at Pine Dunes generates nearly \$640,000 in flood reduction damage each year.
- One of the forest preserves' largest and most complex projects tackled restoring an impaired lake into a healthy, meandering stream in Ethel's Woods Forest Preserve near Antioch. In reality, the 57-acre human-made Rasmussen Lake was severely eroded. In terms of water quality, it ranked as the second worst of the 162 lakes monitored by the Lake County Health Department. The comprehensive project, estimated at about \$6.1 million, was completed in stages from 2014 to 2019.
- The prescribed burn program treats about 3,000 acres a year. The burns recycle nutrients into the soil, remove thatch from previous growing seasons and top-kill invasive woody plants. It's like pressing a reset button.
- The Des Plaines River meanders about 133 miles from its origin near Racine, Wisconsin, to the Kankakee River where together they become the Illinois River. The river's ecological complexity serves as a habitat for 270 of the 300 bird species commonly found in Illinois and sustains thriving communities of 86 fish species.

Plan your visit to the "Managing Healthy Landscapes" special exhibition at [LCFPD.org/PlanYourVisit](https://www.lcforestpreserves.org/PlanYourVisit).

- Kim Mikus is a communications specialist for the Lake County Forest Preserves. She writes a bimonthly column about various aspects of the preserves. Contact her with ideas or questions at kmikuscroke@LCFPD.org. Connect with the Lake County Forest Preserves on social media @LCFPD.