



Gremel Wildlife Sanctuary:
A Legacy Project of the Illinois Clean Energy Community
Foundation
Local Sanctuary Committee Annual Report
Fiscal Year 2020

Reporting Time Period: April 1, 2020 2019 – March 31, 2020

Report Submitted by: Debra Carey

Management Activities

Successful restoration of savanna, wetland, and prairie areas beginning with date of acquisition 6 December 2016 through March 2020 has been swift and satisfying because of dedicated volunteers, and available funding. The site is large and we have just begun, but results have been gratifying. The volunteer Local Sanctuary Committee (LSC) assumes the daily role in restoration activities and management of the 424-acre site.

LSC is indebted to Jim Herkert, Jo Fessett and Kaleb Baker for providing administrative and technical assistance. LSC is grateful to the IAS Board for their continued support.

A small portion of the site is in the process of designation as an Illinois Nature Preserve; this includes Green Wing INAI site #1828 and adjacent wetlands and oak savanna totaling 19.1 acres. Adjacent sanctuary land will be designated as INP buffer and totals 373.3 acres. The Gabelmann purchase in 2017 of 29.34 acres is excluded as it holds buildings and maintenance areas.

There are not enough words to thank and glorify the volunteers who cheerfully spend hours in all kinds of weather caring for this site. Not every volunteer is mentioned by name in this report but EVERY volunteer is appreciated! This site would not exist but for volunteers.

The shop serves as a work area and storage building for all equipment. We are thankful to Jeff Schnaiter for completing preventative maintenance and repairs on equipment. He is a talented man with many

skills. Jeff built an excellent wooden workbench, shelves and storage compartments, and installed an air compressor, vise and grinder. John McCrosky assisted in this shop project.

Alice and Ernie Topping never fail to make the entrance area around the buildings look welcoming. They mow and trim during the growing season. Volunteers maintained the house. One plumbing mishap of a burst valve occurred during this time period and was remedied by Grasser's Plumbing, McNabb, IL. Kibble Electric, Inc. replaced the main electrical breaker. The house was utilized by researchers and for Birdsong Chapter and LSC meetings in addition to serving as a volunteer center.

Spring Bird Count, Christmas Bird Count and a Sandhill Crane Count were completed thanks to Gene, Diana and Alyssa Rod. Bluebird houses were maintained and checked throughout the nesting season. Jim Hampson and Carol Schnaiter maintain the bird house trails and record nesting efforts. An IAS field trip Owl Prowl was held December 7th and enjoyed by all participants. The current avian inventory holds just shy of 200 species and we thank Steve Hager for keeping a sharp eye on the bird population. We encourage use of eBird.

Game cameras are used in various locations on site. These have provided much detail on the daily life of wildlife.

A daily journal is kept with detailed observations and notes on activities, projects, frustrations, events, visitors, problems, administration, contractors, repairs and personal comments. This journal provides a candid and frank look at every day at Gremel Wildlife Sanctuary – good and bad.

The public parking on Lewis Road is a magnet for vandalism. The gravel surface is regularly damaged by vehicles. The sanctuary sign was previously damaged and is in need of replacement.

Bill Rogers serves as restoration manager and he rarely misses a day on the site no matter the season. Creating and maintaining fire lines, mowing herbaceous species as part of the management plan; managing contractors; cutting and removing downed trees across trails; monitoring the re-emergence of native blooming and seeding plants; and hand-pulling thousands of herbaceous invasives are a few of his activities. His dedication is commendable.

GWS offers unparalleled opportunities for natural area restoration due to its hydric and sandy soils. First priority has always been given to the identification and restoration of those areas which have best resisted succession and retained their natural, pre-settlement integrity, and to the implementation of management strategies designed to preserve indigenous characteristics with the least possible negative impact. It is rewarding to volunteers that high quality native vegetation often emerges after invasive species are removed. This has been the normal reaction – no seeding has been used in any restoration effort. Herbaceous species of note that have been documented, especially in areas where we have removed copious amounts of woody invasive, include *Carex crawfordii* (IL endangered), *Lobelia cardinalis*, and *Rumex orbiculatus*. All inventories are available for review: Flora; Avian; Mammal. Otter was documented for the first time during this reporting period.

This is not to say that a problem with invasive woody and herbaceous species does not exist; we daily fight with *Rhamnus cathartica* and *frangula*, plus the ever-persistent *Lonicera maackii* and *Phalaris arundinacea*.

A portion of the west berm around Main Pond washed away during a 4.5 inch rain. Rogers made repairs that allow light foot and vehicle use, but permanent repairs are needed.

Prescribed fire was implemented during Spring 2019. Fire Unit #1, mostly degraded oak savanna, was damp but did burn moderately well in areas of high fuel. Wooded areas in Unit#1, choked with brushy invasives, did not burn well. Fire Unit #3, which is pure prairie grasses and forbs, burned successfully. In addition, Coers Prairie and Oak Meadow Prairie (small prairie remnants) burned successfully. Kaleb Baker served as Certified Fire Boss. No prescribed fire was implemented in Fall 2019 or Spring 2020. Fire is needed on site.

GWS is closed to the public, and to volunteer efforts, during shotgun hunting season. Signs are posted at all entrances.

We welcomed the late Russ Gremel's Scout troops for programming and camping.

Researchers are required to apply for an IAS permit. Researchers must provide a written report on their activities including data collected.

William Handel – Flora, 10 site visits, cost \$1,500

Linda Curtis – Sedges, 2 site visits, cost \$500

Dr. Bo Dziadyk – Muskrat, 8 site visits, cost \$500

Tara Beveroth – Avian, 6 site visits, cost \$1,500

Professional research projects are critical to successful restoration and management of the site. Individual researchers greatly add to our data collection, and have provided information on methods and areas that enhance restoration. All research reports are available for review. Volunteer research is invaluable since it covers almost every day of the year. The previously-noted use of game cameras has been helpful in documenting wildlife species.

A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed between IAS and Augustana College. A working relationship between IAS and Augustana College greatly benefits management activities at GWS. Students and faculty have completed many surveys and projects in the past 20 years (providing data for management decisions by IAS), and continue to advance research and restoration under the direction of IAS.

Participating Volunteers

Bill Rogers
Deb Carey
Jim Hampson
Dave Brewer
Amy Brewer
John McCrosky
Deb Walens
Jeff Schnaiter
Carol Schnaiter
Bob Chinn
Tim Smith
Teresa Smith
Bets Jahn
Pete Jahn
Cassandra Rodgers

Diana Rod
Gene Rod
Alyssa Rod
Dick Todd
Steve Hager
Bo Dziadyk
Alice Topping
Ernie Topping
Nancy Wadsworth
Levi Huene
Jack Huene

Total Volunteer Hours

2,620

Donations

An \$81,936.00 grant from John Wheeler through the Morgan Stanley Global Impact Fund was received. John Wheeler was an acquaintance of the late Russ Gremel.

Contract Work and/or Grant Items

Shane Coers Tree Care

Removal and disposal of invasive woody species including Rhamnus cathartica; R. frangula; Quercus velutina; Prunus serotina; Morus alba; Populus grandidentata; Lonicera maackii; and others as encountered.

Approximate acres: 16

Bryon Walters Illinois Natural Area Improvements

Removal and/or control of invasive woody and herbaceous species including Rubus allagheniensis; Phalaris arundinacea; Berberis vulgaris; Phragmites australis; re-sprouts of R. cathartica; R. frangula; Q. velutina; P. serotina; L. maackii; P. grandidentata; and others as encountered.

Approximate area of individual plants treated: 175 acres

ENCAP, Inc.

Removal and/or control of invasive woody species including R. cathartica; R. frangula; Q. velutina; P. serotina; M. alba; R. allagheniensis; L. maackii; and others as encountered.

Approximate acres: 3

400

IAS Field Trip

MONTH	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	TOTAL	
Education & Outreach Administration														Education & Outreach Administration
Citizen Science	18	22	6.5	15	11	3	11.5	8.5	6.5	3.5	4.5	8.5	118.5	Citizen Science
Events		22	7.5	6	13.5	3	2	0.5	13.5	1	8	10	87	Events
Newsletter	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	36	Newsletter
Social Media				1		4	0.5			3			8.5	Social Media
Operations & Support Administration														Operations & Support Administration
Bird Feeder Maintenance	45	72	70	80	64	41	39	41	45	60	60	55	672	Bird Feeder Maintenance
Bluebird Box Maintenance	4	5	4	5	4								22	Bluebird Box Maintenance
Trail & Boundary Maintenance	111	86	73	41	21	7	6	3	8	17	4	16	393	Trail & Boundary Maintenance
Vehicle Maintenance	14	12	10	7	6	5	2.5	3	2	3.5	11	7	83	Vehicle Maintenance
Bldg. Maintenance	31.5	24.5	18	33	5.5	12.5	12.5	8.5	69	3.5	5.5	4.5	228.5	Bldg. Maintenance
Stewardship Activities Prescribed Fire Planning/actual Restoration Planning/mapping Invasives Removal														Stewardship Activities Prescribed Fire Planning/actual Restoration Planning/mapping Invasives Removal
TOTALS	337	294.5	263	293.5	258	181.5	122.5	163	268	126	176.5	137	2620	

Photographs

Boy Scouts Camping at Gremel, May 19, 2019.



Fire crew, April 4, 2019



Gremel workday, April 4, 2019.



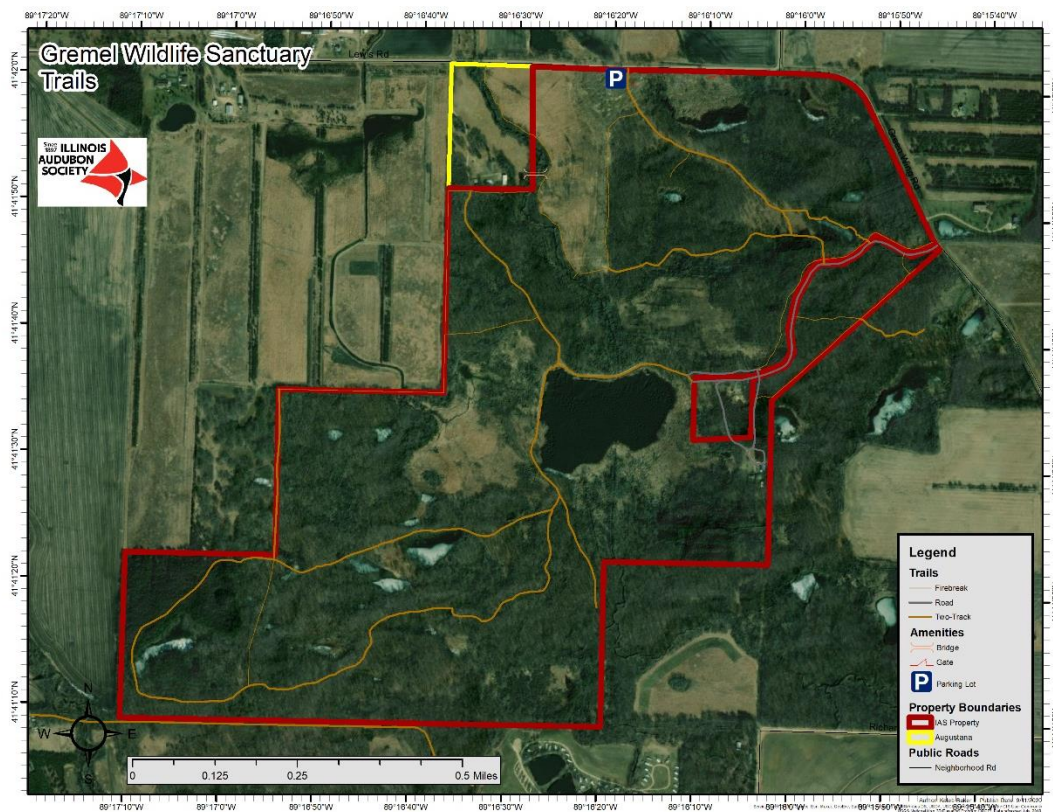
Gremel buck, November 11, 2019



Closed for deer season, November 20, 2019.



Map



End.