



Amboy Marsh Nature Preserve & Gremel Wildlife Sanctuary

Local Sanctuary Committee Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2021

Reporting Time Period: April 1, 2020 – March 31, 2021

Report Submitted by: Debra Carey

Management Activities

Successful research projects and restoration of savanna, wetland, and prairie at Amboy Marsh beginning December 4, 2012 (date of acquisition) through March 2021 has been swift and satisfying because of dedicated volunteers, and available funding. The volunteer Local Sanctuary Committee (LSC) of Birdsong Chapter assumes the daily role in restoration activities and management of the 321.8-acre site. The entire AMNP parcel is located within INAI #1621. A 19.8-acre parcel was acquired with IAS funding from the Ryback family in December 2020 thus adding to the acreage. The Ryback family (from Arizona) contacted us as they wished to preserve a portion of their original farm as a memorial to their family. The Ryback parcel includes the same habitat and topography as Amboy Marsh; dunes, swales, oak savanna and wetlands plus a small creek. The land is degraded and in need of woody invasives removal. The Ryback parcel is considered as part of Amboy Marsh, and not a separate site.

A small portion of Amboy Marsh is not designated as Illinois Nature Preserve; this area includes the parking lot, the two south entrances, the previous Illinois Central Railroad right-of-way (now used as a neighborhood connector trail) and the area where the buildings are located on the original Amboy Marsh parcel. And the 19.8-acre Ryback site is not designated as Illinois Nature Preserve.

The same restoration and research efforts began on the date of acquisition (6 December 2016) at Gremel Wildlife Sanctuary.

A small portion of Gremel is in the process of designation as an Illinois Nature Preserve; this includes the 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.

Having said this, soon into FY21, volunteers were not allowed on site per Governor Pritzker's orders to prevent the spread of Covid-19. New orders were received during the year and volunteers were allowed with stipulations. Kaleb Baker kept us well-informed as to what was allowed and what procedures must be followed.

The Volunteer Center at AMNP, well used by volunteers almost every day of the reporting period, was maintained and cleaned by Jim Hampson, donor of the Center and faithful volunteer, who also keeps the bird feeders and bird baths cleaned and filled 365 days of the year. We are rewarded with a large number of birds including many red-headed woodpeckers. A journal is kept to record dates of first-of-the-year and end-of-year sightings and other wildlife experiences. Fourteen new species were recorded on eBird at AMNP which lists 178 species; the log at AMNP lists 197 species.

Jim installed and maintained bird feeders at Gremel; a large picture window in the Gremel house affords some great bird watching opportunities. Red-breasted nuthatches are prevalent. Trumpeter swans grace Main Pond. We have 207 recorded avian species on eBird at Gremel with four new species in FY21. We encourage everyone to list on eBird. And we are indebted to Steve Hager, Augustana College, for assisting with bird surveys. His photographs also grace many of our publications.

The Nest, the original AMNP volunteer building, serves as a work shop and storage building for all equipment. We are thankful to Jeff Schnaiter for completing preventative maintenance and repairs on equipment.

Jeff and John McCrosky constructed a workbench in the Gremel shop, installed an air compressor, and organized the place into a usable, efficient work place. Jeff is a talented man with many skills and we are sorry to say goodbye to him as he and his wife Carol moved to Pennsylvania in late summer 2020. Randy Singleton has stepped into the gap created by Jeff's departure and we appreciate this.

John McCrosky and Deb Walens never fail to make the entrance area around the buildings, and the trails look welcoming. They mow and trim every week during the growing season. And Deb's photos often grace our newsletters. Her willingness to be the volunteer hour coordinator is much appreciated. John is an avid invasive mullein remover!

Alice and Ernie Topping continue to care for the grounds at Gremel; mowing, trimming and keeping the yard and trails clear keep these dependable volunteers busy all season.

The driving forces behind the archival program are John McCrosky, Deb Walens, Bob Chinn and Cassandra Rodgers. This project has made great strides in FY21. This crew is working diligently to archive history and current business.

In addition, Bob is a sterling photographer and his pictures archive the very essence of Amboy Marsh. Cassandra serves as Secretary of LSC and of Birdsong; she keeps everything in order and records every happening, decision, project, program, problem – everything.

IAS Birdsong Chapter met in the Volunteer Center; no public programs were held due to Covid-19 pandemic. Zoom programs were offered instead. Attendance was a bit lower than in-person meetings.

Spring Bird Count, Christmas Bird Count and a Sandhill Crane Count were completed thanks to Gene, Diana and Alyssa Rod. All Covid-19 safety procedures were followed. And Gene keeps the golf carts running at both sites.

Bluebird boxes at AMNP and Gremel, and purple martin houses at AMNP, were maintained and checked throughout the nesting season. Jim Hampson and Carol Schnaiter maintained the bird house trails and recorded nesting efforts; as noted we will miss Carol's able assistance. Jack Hartford jumped in to help Jim.

Two information kiosks at AMNP welcome visitors and explain the fragile nature of the site. Specific rules (no dogs or vehicles, etc.) are posted, as are current trail closures due to wildlife nesting or wet conditions. Dave and Amy Brewer maintain the kiosks along with helping with many other projects such as signage, invasive weed pulling, brush-cutting, photography and more. Amy created an amazing, educational and fact-filled web page for Birdsong Chapter highlighting our two sanctuaries. Dave keeps Facebook postings up to date. In addition, Amy had the Amboy Marsh brochures translated and printed in Spanish; this provides all visitors an opportunity to enjoy the site. Amy also created some family-oriented ideas that fit into the Covid-19 protocol such as the Bingo Card Scavenger Hunt.

The public parking area off Lewis Road serves Gremel; a map box provided site brochures with a good map.

Game cameras are used in various locations on both sites. These have provided much detail on the life of wildlife. Bill Rogers keeps these rolling and we are rewarded with otters and more.

A daily journal is kept by Deb Carey 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 AMNP and Gremel – good and bad. Deb handles most administrative duties.

Bill Rogers serves as Restoration Manager and he rarely misses a day on the sites 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.

Improving habitat for endangered Blanding's turtle is a prime goal; volunteers Amy & Dave photographed the first-of-the-season adult Blanding's on 4-30-2020 in a restored wetland (that was a cornfield a few short years ago) at AMNP.

At AMNP, a stewardship challenge grant was applied for and received from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation; this grant period began in late fall; numerous work days were scheduled and many volunteer hours accumulated as people cut and removed woody invasives brush. Amy handled the public media part by creating an active Facebook page and she and Dave posted the needed 100 hours right off the bat. In addition, contractors Shane Coers; ENCAP, Inc.; and Bryon Walters are part of this grant. A hydraulic dump trailer was purchased with grant funds. Randy Singleton scheduled the work days and is working to reach the goal of 400 volunteer hours. Donors came up with \$8,575.00; \$7,000.00 was the goal so we exceeded that handily thanks to everyone's generosity.

New fencing was installed at AMNP along Mormon Road by contract with Prairie Fence; this keeps our lands from being invaded by off-road vehicles.

Prescribed fire was implemented with poor results in December 2020 at AMNP; high humidity and low winds overcame the dedication of Land Steward Kaleb Baker and volunteers. But March 2021 saw much better weather with low humidity and brisk winds; the Derr Field, and the Indigo Wetland-Long Pond area burned successfully at AMNP, and an area beginning at Oak Lane and ending at Green Wing Road was burned at Gremel. This area was in dire need of fire and the burn was rewarding. We are indebted to Kaleb for writing the detailed burn plans, making maps and managing the fires; plus, we thank Bryon Walters and Damian Considine; both certified burn bosses, for assisting. MRCP assists at every burn. And our sturdy, dedicated volunteers are always there when needed. Everyone puts in some long hours during burns. And of course, we could not safely implement burns without secure fire lines - which is a year-long job keeping the fire breaks clear.

AMNP and Gremel offer unparalleled opportunities for natural area restoration due to their 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.

Due to an extended dry period in August and early September 2020, the decision to implement forestry mowing in a normally inaccessible part of Mink Meadow at Gremel was suggested by LSC and approved by IAS staff. This worked out extraordinarily well; we would not usually mow during a non-dormant time, but this opportunity presented itself and the results look very promising.

A long-awaited project at AMNP was completed in December 2020; this was the removal of some well-established buckthorns on the west edge of Big Marsh at AMNP. Good riddance! And invasive buckthorn and honeysuckle was removed from the “Antique Machinery Oak Grove” at AMNP. Several pieces of antique machinery were discovered in this overgrown grove.

The “opening” of the landscape linking Mink Meadow, Iris East, Iris West, Chorus Frog Pond, the lovely wetland at the foot of Coers Prairie and Walters Pond at Gremel moved quickly forward in FY21.

Herbaceous species, with number nine and ten S&W ratings, that have returned to areas cleared of invasives are listed in a Conservative Species Inventory. The total flora inventory lists 450 species at AMNP. Several new plants were added to the flora inventory during this reporting period. One plant has been installed at Amboy Marsh; *Filipendula rubra* (Queen of the Prairie). This endangered plant grows in a road right-of-way near Amboy Marsh. It was approved by INPC, IAS and the Lee County Road Commissioner to move several plants to two secure locations at AMNP. Plants transplanted in fall 2019 grew and bloomed in 2020. These plants are closely monitored.

Gremel saw several new flora species including *Cirsium muticum* (Fen thistle), a conservative and very welcome species. The flora list at Gremel is numbered at 439 species. We thank Bill Handel for keeping up with botanizing all the newly-restored areas on both sites.

And the really exciting news on the first day of August 2020 was that Isaac Stewart documented a federally-endangered Rusty Patched Bumble Bee in two different locations at Gremel! What a coup for the first year of his insect surveys.

All inventories are available for review: Flora; Avian; Mammal; Herpetological; Moth; Lepidoptera; Fungus; Odonata; and Insect.

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

William Handel – Flora

Dr. Richard King/David Mauger – *Emydoidea blandingii* (AMNP only)

Linda Curtis – Carex

Dr. Bo Dziadyk – Odonata

Tara Beveroth – Avian

Isaac Stewart - Entomology

Professional research projects are critical to successful restoration and management of the site. Individual researchers greatly add to our data collection and some provide suggestions 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.

The annual agreement between IAS and the Green River Saddle Club was approved; this allows the club to ride on the old railroad bed (not part of the Nature Preserve) to access some of their trails on other private lands.

Covid-19 interfered with the usual Augustana College/IAS partnership student activities in FY21.

As usual with sites holding multiple buildings, a few mishaps occurred. The well at Gremel was hit by lightning with resulting, expensive repairs (but was covered by IAS insurance). On the up side: volunteers removed and correctly disposed of four dilapidated sheds at Gremel. And at AMNP, the giant sliding doors on The Nest required attention once again from the volunteers. And we did contract with Flessner Construction for some involved repairs to the south end of The Nest.

At Gremel, the west berm, washed out by heavy rain in previous years, was repaired and an emergency spillway constructed by contractor Kevin Shaw in the fall of 2020. Kevin experienced the full moon rising over Main Pond while finishing the berm job; he still relates to everyone he meets the extraordinary beauty of the moonlight and colorful autumn oak leaves reflected on the still surface of Main Pond.

Equipment maintenance and repairs were expected and none out of the ordinary; good, well-running equipment is critical to managing the sites. We did purchase a new 16ft. x 81-inch trailer in order to transport the 6-passenger Kawasaki UTV. This also assists in moving fire equipment to site prescribed burns.

Eagle Scout projects at Gremel included the construction of some wonderful Aldo Leopold-style benches, and the construction of three bat houses. Due to Covid-19, no Scout camping activities took place in FY21.

A Preserve Design was approved by the Lands Committee. This provides a footprint of future preservation efforts. The approved Amboy Marsh Management Plan was amended to add the Ryback parcel and the amended plan was approved by the Lands Committee in March 2021.

Gremel saw an unfortunate poaching incident in June 2020. One person was recorded on the game camera (thanks to Bill Rogers) shooting frogs at Gremel's Main Pond. A second juvenile offender was recorded retrieving the frogs. IDNR CPO Audrey took immediate action and the shooter was charged.

Both sites are completely closed to visitors and volunteers during shotgun deer seasons since adjacent neighbors all hunt. Although no hunting is allowed on AMNP and Gremel, we close the sites as a

precaution. Bow season extends for a long period and we strive as much as possible without interfering with normal site activities, to keep noise to a minimum for those neighbors who bow hunt.

LSC/Birdsong Chapter is indebted to IAS staff for providing administrative and technical assistance, and for answering hundreds of emails, texts and phone calls.

LSC/Birdsong Chapter is grateful to the IAS Board for their continued support.

Deb Carey's 1986 dream of permanently preserving and managing AMNP is now her daily volunteer job. Gremel is the icing on the cake! And we have grand plans of acquiring new parcels of land to complete the approved preserve design!

Participating Volunteers

Bill Rogers
Deb Carey
Jim Hampson
Dave Brewer
Amy Brewer
John McCrosky
Deb Walens
Cassandra Rodgers
Damian Considine
Randy Singleton
Dave Hinkston
Bryon Walters
Nancy Wadsworth
Jeff Schnaiter
Carol Schnaiter
Jack Hartford
Bob Chinn
Tim Smith
Teresa Smith
Diana Rod
Gene Rod
Alyssa Rod
Lonnie Sheaffer
Dan Shaefer
Dave Granskrog
Dick Todd
Valerie Andrews
Greg Hunter
Steve Hager
Bo Dziadyk
Alice Topping
Ernie Topping
Jan Williams
Levi Huene

Jack Huene
Boy Scout Troop #979

Total Volunteer Hours

3868.5

Note: We logged 1,248.5 MORE hours than we did in FY20!

Donations

ICECF Challenge Grant (\$8,575.00)

\$5,000 from Jerry & Christine Guanci

Contract Work and/or Grant Items

Contracts at both sites: 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. Installation of firebreaks.

Approximate acres: 11

Contracts at both sites: 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: 285 acres

Contracts at both sites: 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: 13

Contract at AMNP: Prairie Fence

Removal and disposal of old barbed wire and steel posts; installation of new smooth wire, steel posts and wooden corner posts/braces.

Grants:

AMNP -Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation Stewardship Challenge Grant

AMNP - ICECF Acquisition Grant for Ryback land

Approximate Number of Visitors (Annually)

1,600

Promotions

Monthly Birdsong Chapter Newsletter

Site Brochures

Two Informational Kiosks at AMNP

Map/Brochure Box at Gremel

Programs for Visitors (per Covid-19 protocol)

Webpage

Facebook

Additional Information

Amboy Marsh Nature Preserve, and the acres designated as non-INP, were exempted from local real estate tax for the first time since acquisition in FY21. Gremel Wildlife Sanctuary was also exempted. Volunteers feel a commitment to the local community is important, and this is a goal for FY22.

Attachments:

Photographs

Volunteer Hour Sheet

Attachments

Photographs

Blanding's turtle in Wet Pond, April 30, 2020



White breasted nuthatch, November 29, 2020



Queen of the prairie



White robin in Derr Field, March 26, 2021



Deb Carey and Bill Rodgers at Gremel



Shane Coers with brush mower for ICECF grant



Red headed woodpecker, July 2020



Bat houses for Gremel from Eagle Scouts



Leopold benches for Gremel from Eagle Scout Eric Minogue



Gremel volunteers, January 13, 2021



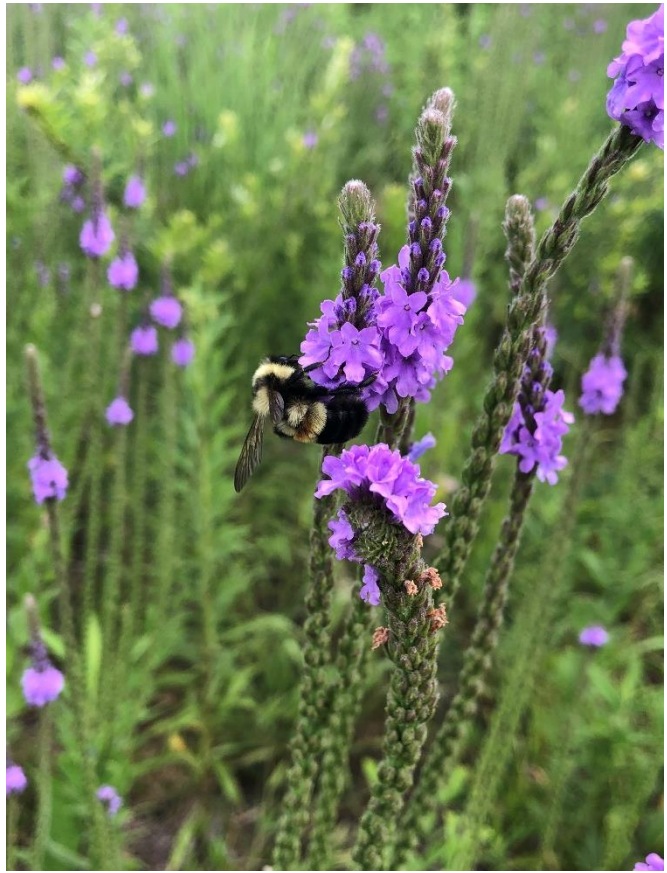
Bluebird in ICECF grant area, November 29, 2020



Storm tossed shed removed by volunteers



Rusty patched bumblebee at Gremel (Fed Endangered)



Gallinules in Willow Wetland, May 3, 2020



Amboy Marsh fire crew, March 2020



John McCrosky ICECF grant work, November 16, 2021



Bill Rodgers ICECF grant area, November 16, 2020



Gremel fire crew, March 2020



Volunteer Hours invested at Amboy Marsh Nature Preserve and Gremel Wildlife Sanctuary

APRIL 2020-MARCH 2021	TOTALS	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR
Education & Outreach													
Citizen Science	601	102	92	57.5	65.5	41.5	48.5	27	28.5	25	46	29.5	38
Nesting Box	2			2									
Education & Outreach (Plan, prep, delivery)	19						3.5	4			1.5	4	6
Newsletter-BOTH SITES	38.5	2	2	16	1.5	2	2	2	2	2	3	2	2
Social Media	42.5		3	0.5		0.5	16.5	2	8	1	2	7	2
Operations & Support													
Administration (BOTH SITES)	527	6.5	52	61	41	69.5	49	52	12.5	45	63.5	28	47
Archives	230	6	4.5	6		23.5	77.5				10.5	27	75
Community Relations	15.5						4.5	6	2	3		0	
Bird Feeder Maintenance	245	10	15	15.5	10	10	30	10	33	30.5	31	30	20
Trail & Boundary Maintenance	90.5	3	3	13	12	30	11.5	7	4	2		1	4
Vehicle/Equipment (repairs, fuel)	133.5	4.5	16	7	4	13	10	14.5	13	3	9		39.5
Building Maintenance	64		1	1	11.5	5	13.5	23	1		3	5	
Yard & Grounds Maintenance	66.5	2.5	13.5	14	17.5	12	5		2				
Stewardship Activities													
Invasive Removal	410.5	7	39	60.5	52	31.5	28.5	159	6	5			22
Prescribed Burn (including prep)	172.5						8	18	13.5	83			50
Burr Oak Maintenance	11		2				3	2				3	1
ICECF GRANT-Crowfoot Pond													
Labor	311								154	148	6.5	3	0
Social Media (web design & maintenance)	107.5								52	52.5	3		0

Volunteer Hours at GWS		APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEPT	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR
Citizen Science	69	2	12.5	8.5		2	9.5	5.5	10	6.5	8.5	2	2
Nesting Box Surveys	56	8	8	10	8	10	8						4
Events (Planning, prep, delivery)													
Social Media/Signage/Kiosk	3								0.5	2.5			
Operations & Support													
Administration (meetings, paperwork, etc.)	46	0.5	5			25.5	8.5				2.5	4	
Community Relations	14.5		2	4				2.5	2	1.5	1.5	1	
Bird Feeder Maintenance	109	5	6	10	5	5	5	10	10	10.5	12.5	20	10
Trail & Boundary Maintenance	158		4.5	12	17.5	47.5	13	3	0.5	1.5	55.5		3
Vehicle Maintenance (repairs, fuel)	20			4	5	3	2		2			4	
Building Maintenance	81.5	0.5	7	28.5	12.5	1.5	3	5.5	6.5	1.5	7	8	
Yard & Grounds Maintenance	46		6	15.5	3	3.5	8	8				2	
Stewardship Activities													
Invasive Removal	89	8	11.5	17	16.5	11.5	14		2	1.5			7
Prescribed Burn (including prep)	89					0.5		8.5					80
TOTALS	3868.5	167.5	306	364	283	348.5	382	370	365	425	267	180.5	413

(That's two full time employee's worth of time!!)

End.