

CONSERVATION IN ACTION

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 5

Board of Directors

Rudy Rice, *Chairman*

Dale Shumaker, *Vice-Chair*

Phyllis Mace, *Secretary/Treasurer*

Tom Anderson

Connie Beck

Fred Becker

Glenn Seeber

Tom Fisher

Jodi Hawkins

Doris Heaton

Jim Kirkland

Carlyn Light

Robert Lorinskas

Chuck Medvick

Charles Nolan

Jerry Pirtle

Butch Rider

Jesse Riechman

Gayla Sink

Executive Director

Tabitha Ayres

tabithaayres@gmail.com

Program Director

Cathy Poshard

info@shawneercd.org

Save the Date!

The Shawnee RC&D 2015 Annual Meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 24th at 6:00pm. The cost to attend is \$15.00 and includes meal, beverage, and dessert. This year's meeting will be hosted in Marion, IL, location to be announced in January.

This meeting is a wonderful opportunity to learn about the valuable work SRC&D has accomplished and what new projects are underway. It is also a great way to meet other professionals in the Conservation field.

If you already plan to attend—please send your RSVP to info@shawneercd.org.

Upcoming Regional Events

January

5-13—[Wilderness First Responder Course](#) (Touch of Nature Environmental Center)

8—[Union County History](#) (Shawnee Sierra Club)

13—Shawnee RCD Council Meeting (USDA, Marion)

21-22—[Bottomland Forest Climate Change and Adaptation Workshop](#) (John A. Logan College)

February

12—[Woodland Restoration](#) (Shawnee Sierra Club)

21-22 Maple Festival (Touch of Nature Environmental Center)

Illinois Stop the Spread!

By Jennifer Behnken, Urban & Community Forestry Coordinator

Callery pear (also known as Bradford pear) is a potentially problematic tree species for land managers and residents alike. This ornamental pear species is escaping into the wild and potentially becoming an invasive species. This problem is occurring across the state of Illinois, even as ornamental pear species are continuing to be used as a landscape plant along streets, sidewalks, businesses, and residential lands. The need for high maintenance pruning combined with Callery pear's short life span and proneness to splitting indicates increased frequency in tree replacement and potential strain on city tree management budgets.

Many partnering organizations have united to bring awareness to these issues and establish the *Illinois Stop the Spread!* campaign. This campaign, adopted from Missouri's efforts, will provide a positive solution to the problem of the Callery pear by identifying and promoting available species of native trees which consumers, landscapers, and city planners may select as alternatives. These alternative native species were planted and displayed for all to see in a community demonstration area at Attucks Park and Green Earth, Inc. Pyles Fork Preserve in Carbondale, Illinois. Partners involved in this campaign, to date, include the Carbondale Park District, Green Earth Inc., Illinois Forestry Association, Illinois Native Plant Society Southern Chapter, Society of American Foresters Illinois Chapter, Keep Carbondale Beautiful, River to River Cooperative Weed Management Area, Southern Illinois University, University of Illinois Extension, Illinois Wildlife Action Plan - Invasive Species Campaign, and Shawnee Resource Conservation and Development.

The day of the planting arrived with dropping temperatures and chilly winds. However, the SIUC student chapter of Society of American Foresters volunteers arrived in their winter gear, eager to plant. A local representative of the Illinois Department of Agriculture, interested in supporting the campaign's cause, volunteered his time and helped with the planting as well, along with partners from the Carbondale Park District, River the River Weed Cooperative Management Area, and Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Overall, there were thirteen volunteers that assisted with the fall planting event this November.

The event began with a welcome and description of the campaign's objectives followed tree planting demonstration and overview of proper planting methods provided by Jennifer Behnken, SIU Urban and Community Forestry Coordinator. Volunteers then strapped on their gloves, grabbed their shovels, and immediately set to work. Although the

Meet Jennifer

Jennifer Behnken is the Urban and Community Forestry Coordinator for central and southern



Illinois, based out of Southern Illinois University Carbondale. She assists communities throughout Illinois by coordinating city planners, organizations, and volunteers to implement and maintain community forestry practices, helping communities build their urban and community forest management skills. This assistance encourages communities to move toward sustainable management of their urban forests, enhance their volunteer capacity and knowledge of municipal forest management, and promote urban forest health and awareness.

Jennifer holds a B.S in Forestry and M.S. in Forestry, with a focus on analyzing land management practices and landscape scale restoration measures in a multi-agency setting, targeting the Cache River Joint Venture Partnership. She also served 2 years as an AmeriCorps member at the Cache River Wetlands Center.

Continued on page 4

Restoring Illinois' Mighty Oak Forests

by Tracy Boutelle

Take a walk in your nearest forest, lie on your back and tell me whether you see sky or branches overhead. While each forest is unique, most Illinois forests share one unfortunate similarity: They are shady. It wasn't always this way.

Illinois' forests once sported wildflowers and grasses, thanks to a more open structure that let the sun shine into them. Butterflies, bees and other insects loved these plants, and birds, bats and other small critters loved eating *them*. In this sunny place, the mighty oak thrived. Oaks, you see, require a lot of light. Remove the light, and you (eventually) remove the oaks.

"We're worried about the loss of oaks. You don't see many young oaks trees," said Eric Holzmüller, a forest ecologist at Southern Illinois University who has been studying what trees make up the region's forests and how that composition is changing over time.

An impending crisis?

In virtually every forest in the Eastern United States, scientists have tracked a shift towards trees that tolerate shade. Within these forest discussions, Illinois holds an unfortunate place: Its southwestern forests are on track to become the first place in North America where oaks lose dominance. Scientists call this transition mesophication.

Once shade-loving trees get a foothold, they make the forest moister and cooler, essentially changing the climate of the forest. Leaves and wood on the forest floor begin retaining more moisture, which limits fire on the landscape. Over time, a self-perpetuating cycle is created where these shade-loving trees gradually change the forest to suit them — not oaks or the other plants that thrived in this fire-dependent environment.

Scientists are sounding the alarm about this transition. An article in *Forestry Matters* calls it an "impending crisis," saying: "We feel strongly that the risk of losing large components of the eastern oak forest is real, and the potential consequences to the timber industry and wildlife populations will be dire."

Restoring Illinois' oak woodlands

Illinois forests are a mosaic of glades, barrens, open oak woodlands, closed oak woodlands, upland forests, bottomland forests, swamps and more. The differences between each community type are subtle — and can seem academic to the average forest lover. For example, the tree canopy cover in a closed oak woodland spans between 50 and 80 percent of the sky, while an open oak woodland canopy covers 20 to 50 percent. Restoration efforts in the state are targeting areas that should be more open, such as woodlands.

Prescribed fire, which is a fire conducted by natural resource professionals under specific conditions, and selective tree removal are two management techniques that can create a more open forest.

"Everybody thinks that you don't disturb the forest," said Larry Heggemann, who works with the Central Hardwoods Joint Venture to raise awareness about the changes taking place in eastern U.S. forests and how those changes affect wildlife. "The highest challenge that we have is convincing people that having disturbance in a forest is a good thing."

Continued on page 5

Illinois Stop the Spread...continued from page 2

ground stiff from dry clay soils and freezing temperatures, everyone put their backs into it and chiseled away at the concrete-like soil. Each tree was planted with thoughtful efforts, grunts, chattering teeth, and energetic smiles.

Randy Montgomery, the grounds supervisor from Carbondale Park District, also helped plant and watered the trees, thanks to a watering tank donated by Nancy Garwood from the Illinois Native Plant Society. The volunteer crew set to work digging new holes and some replacement locations for trees and shrubs that didn't make it this spring. A local tree service donated mulch, which was placed around the new plantings and along a newly constructed trail at the project site. Thanks to those who photographed our fall event, including Karla Gage, Coordinator of the River to River Cooperative Weed Management Area, and Jennifer Behnken, SIUC Urban and Community Forestry Coordinator. Other photographers of the spring planting event include Tabitha Ayres, Shawnee RC&D Executive Director, and Lisa Thomas, Green Earth volunteer.



All in all, thirty-three trees and shrubs were planted this fall for a grand total of sixty-two tree and shrubs of twenty-two various species for the year. To visit the planting site, please visit Attucks Park at 800 N. Wall St. in Carbondale, Illinois. This is a volunteer project and as such, we are asking for your help. Please consider donating to Green Earth Inc. to supplement our efforts (visit greeneearthinc.org). Funds will be used to offset costs of printing outreach materials which will be free to the public, as well as materials for tree maintenance, such as gator bags, fertilizer and mulch. Even one dollar can go a long way; all support is greatly appreciated!

Stay tuned for the interpretive signage implementation in May 2015 and future publications to continue outreach activities. Many heartfelt thanks to those that have made this project possible! We hope it serves as a template to generate grassroots efforts towards deterring the spread of Callery (Bradford) pear trees and the beginning of a statewide awareness program. Consider alternatives to plant in your backyard and help *Illinois Stop the Spread!*



Photo credits: Karla Gage, CWMA Coordinator.

Restoring Illinois' Mighty Oak Forests.....continued from page 3

Check it out!

From Northern Illinois' Lake County Forest Preserves to south central Illinois' Forbes State Park, there are places in the state where forest landowners can assess woodland management for themselves. One new project is at Southern Illinois' Trail of Tears State Forest. There, a demonstration project will assess what combination and timing of forest actions would have the best, most immediate effects. It will examine whether prescribed fire should come before or after any cutting in the forest, as well as specific cutting techniques, including selectively harvesting trees and thinning the middle canopy.

"We can highlight the changes that are going on, while also having a discussion about forest management techniques," said David Allen, a forester with Illinois Department of Natural Resources who has been leading the effort.

Because the demonstration project will assess these different treatments, it will be like a one-stop shop for landowners who are interested in improving management on their forested lands.

Interested in learning more? Like Southern Illinois Forest Management on Facebook. Follow SoIL Forests on Twitter. Or, visit Lake County Forest Preserves' Woodland Habitat Restoration Project's web site at <http://www.lcfpd.org/woodlands/>.

Thank You!

With the end of the year quickly approaching, those of us at Shawnee RC&D would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to all the people and organizations who have contributed so much to make our projects and programs possible. Without the efforts of staff, dedicated conservation professionals, and skilled community volunteers, our organization would not be able to accomplish our vital goals in the Southern Illinois region.

We know that each of you have many demands on your time and talent, and that you generously choose to share them with us. So "Thank You" to our partners, professionals, and volunteers. You all do so much to ensure that our aim to improve conservation efforts in the RC&D Area continues.

With many Thanks....

Shawnee Resource Conservation & Development