



# Prescribed Fires at Geneva Park District

## Frequently Asked Questions

- **Why do we burn?** This area was originally made up of prairies, woodlands and wetlands that burned regularly prior to settlers arriving in the early 1800s. Once the settlers arrived, the land was plowed, drained, leveled and fragmented, eliminating the fires. In the parks that we are restoring back to natural areas, fire is an important and inexpensive tool that we use to recreate conditions that our native plants need to thrive. Some additional benefits include a reduction of fuels (avoiding accidental fires) and controlling the non-native plants that could invade our natural areas, but don't *like* the fires.



- **When do we burn?** We burn in the spring and fall. Typically, the spring is a longer season, but we are looking for clear dry days either before the fields start growing in the spring or in the fall after the frost has top-killed the plants for the year and we don't see green anymore.



- **How do you control the fires?** We use a variety of control methods.

Prior to burning an area, we will mow burn breaks around the perimeter of the area. Once the fire is active, we use water and wind to control the fire and of course, we use the fire itself. Once an area has burned, it cannot burn again, this is called a black line. We use the fire to burn into the wind to create black lines that then help put the fire out when we wrap around the unit to create the large head fire.

- **How often do we burn an area?** We would like to burn each of our units every one to two years. Weather can be our biggest deterrent – wet fields don't burn and can put us behind schedule.

- **Does the fire hurt the trees?** Yes and no. The trees native to Northern Illinois (oaks, hickories, and walnuts to name a few) have the fire built into their genetics – their thick bark protects them from fire. Do you notice how some trees seem to go dormant earlier in the fall and take longer to wake up in the spring? That's because they know that fire is possible and won't move sap during fire season. On the flip side, it is likely that the trees that stay green later and force their leaves early in spring are *non-native*. The fires help us keep these invasive species at bay. Since they have sap already running under their bark, the fire boils that sap and blisters the bark, effectively top-killing the plants and keeping our prairies just that, prairies, rather than tree filled thickets.
- **Are the animals safe?** Yes, like the native trees, the animals have a sense built in, warning them to get away. We very rarely see animal issues on our fires!
- **Isn't it too windy to burn?** Don't be worried if you see us out burning on a windy day. We NEED wind to burn! Without wind, the fire cannot move. There are days that might be too windy to burn a prairie, but are perfect for burning a woodland where the breeze is much calmer.
- **Why don't we burn it all?** We deliberately will leave areas unburned to provide habitat for wildlife. Because we don't burn every unit every year, we rotate where we burn to provide this refuge area.
- **Can you burn another area too?** Unfortunately, we cannot add to our list or burn off our property. We are only allowed to burn where we have been permitted by the Illinois EPA and the fire departments. Our fires are planned well in advance to coordinate with other agencies and we are unable to add to that list.

