

Southern Illinois Program

Fall 2020 Fire Update

Totals:

Prescribed Fire: 702 acres

- Shawnee National Forest: 37 acres
- Illinois Department of Natural Resources: 625 acres
- Private Lands: 40 acres

Wildfire Suppression: 200 acres

Burn Unit Preparation: 3,964 acres

- Shawnee National Forest: 3,764 acres
- Illinois Department of Natural Resources: 200 acres

Shawnee National Forest:

Prescribed Fire:

November 3rd – Rothamel Rx (37 acres): This was the first prescribed burn conducted by the Shawnee National Forest since the suspension of burning operations in Region 9 in mid-March. The Shawnee is the first forest in Region 9 to receive approval to resume prescribed fire implementation, using additional COVID-19 mitigations. Nathan assisted Shawnee Fire in burning this open lands unit that is comprised mostly of grasslands with scattered timber stringers in drainages and on the margins. Open lands on the Shawnee are managed for early successional habitat to benefit ground nesting birds and small mammals, in addition to providing upland game hunting opportunities to the public.

Wildfire:

October 15th – Kedron Wildfire (200+ acres): Nathan assisted Shawnee Fire in suppressing a wildfire of unknown origin in Saline County. After prepping the Whoopie Cat burn unit earlier in the day, the crews started heading back to the Vienna Ranger Station but were dispatched to a smoke check near Garden of the Gods. Upon arriving on scene, a large wildfire was located on reclaimed mining land with several local volunteer fire departments (VFDs) already present. The VFDs had suppressed active fire along the road but their equipment was unable to reach the head of the fire. Shawnee Fire and TNC mobilized to the head of the fire with a bulldozer and hand crew, utilizing the dozer's fire plow to quickly cut line through the surrounding timber

while the hand crew performed burn out and mop-up operations. Containment was achieved shortly after nightfall.



Fire scar from the Kedron Fire in Saline County.



Burnout operations on the Kedron Fire.

Burn Unit Preparation (Since October 1st):

Shawnee National Forest Burn Unit Preparation	
Unit	Acres
Whoopie Cat	411
Cave Hill	1,200
Ramsey Branch	80
Bebout	450
Cretaceous Hills	1,547
Kickasola	120
McConnell	131
Lee Mine	125
Total:	3,764

Illinois Department of Natural Resources:

November 13th - Stonefort Rx at Giant City State Park (200 acres): This was a joint burn led by the IDNR with assistance from TNC (Tharran, Caleb, Nathan and Ruth), the Southern Illinois Prescribed Burn Association (SIPBA), SIU Fire Dawgs, Shawnee RC&D and Let the Sun Shine In. TNC also spent two days assisting partners in preparing the fire lines prior to the burn. The unit gets its name from a large stone wall that lies within that was built by indigenous peoples during the Late Woodland Period approximately 1,200, 1,400 years ago.

This burn was the perfect warm welcome for the Southern Illinois Interagency Habitat and Fuels Crew's (SIHFC) newest member, Ruth Campos. Ruth has been based in Utah for several years but has worked throughout the west for the Bureau of Land Management, US Forest Service, Utah and Montana Conservation Corps, and most recently serving as a member of the BLM's Moki Helitack Crew in the Arizona Strip District. Welcome aboard, Ruth!



The actual stonefort smoking during interior ignitions.



New crew member, Ruth Campos, finishing perimeter ignitions at the Stonefort Rx.

November 18th – Rauchfuss Hill State Recreation Area (125 acres): Caleb assisted the IDNR out by the Ohio river in Pope county with implementing a prescribed burn at this recreation area. An interesting site description grabbed from a previous final report I helped put together in 2014 on the site is as follows:

A large bluff overlooking the Ohio River on the north side of the Golconda marina is named Rauchfuss Hill. The site also has been known as Steamboat Hill, because historically, it offered the best location to watch the steamboats go up and down the Ohio River. The U.S. Forest Service obtained ownership of the bluff and built a camping area overlooking the Ohio River. It is now owned by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and is designated a State Recreation Area, used for hiking, nature observation, deer and turkey hunting. This area offers a picnic area and a hiking trail up the historic steps on the south bluff which is registered with the National Historical Society.

This site was very diverse in not only species but the topography as well. The IDNR district forester out east chose to burn here to promote a large diversity of oaks and more open

growing conditions on the bluffs and slopes. There was an impressive display of species with abundant bur and swamp white oaks towards the base of the slopes and bottoms bordering the river and creeks. Chinquapins were scattered all over the unit. Black, red, and white oaks were mixed in growing up top of the bluff and on the outcrops and slopes. Past strike team member Nick Seaton and I were completing ignitions and came across the state listed species *Melothria pendula* (Squirting Cucumber) that grows at this site on our way out. This was a neat find!



Ignitions down the staircase and amongst the escaped ornamental periwinkle vine that settlers used to plant near cemeteries. You can see the Ohio River in the background and the steep slope of this unit.



A population with some scattered stems of the Squirting Cucumber growing in the fire line.

December 9th - Trail of Tears State Forest (300 acres): Tharran, Caleb and Nathan assisted the IDNR along with the SIPBA, Shawnee RC&D, Let the Sun Shine In and University of Illinois Extension Forestry in burning this high-profile and extensively managed area. This unit is part of the TOTSF Demonstration Management Area and includes the very first timber stand improvement (TSI) project that the SIHFC completed. The crew thinned trees on 150 acres in 2016 and 2017, in addition to treating NNIS in this area for the last four years. This burn was the second entry since the TSI.



Trail of Tears Rx after completion of perimeter ignitions.



Flanks of fire still creeping around interior as the sun sets at Trail of Tears State Forest.

Private Lands:

September 22nd / October 8th – Private Lands: On two occasions, Caleb and Nathan assisted the SIPBA along with personnel from the IDNR and Shawnee RC&D to conduct prescribed burns in Pope and Massac Counties. Both units are wildlife fields managed by the landowners. The Pope County unit was 30 acres, while the Massac unit was 10 acres.



Private lands burn in Pope County.



Private lands burn in Massac County.