2018 Allerton Park Woody Invasive Removal Project

The Allerton Park Prairie planted in 1952 is the second oldest restored prairie in Illinois. The prairie covers about 50 acres and is home to the federally protected Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake and the state protected Kirtland’s Water Snake. Both species of snakes prefer open and wet habitat and we currently manage our prairie in an attempt to keep it open and as wet as possible. Over the past few years we have installed some water control structures on the original clay tiles found under the prairie. These control structures slow the drainage of the prairie and increase the soil moisture. To keep the prairie open we burn portions of the prairie every spring and constantly cut woody vegetation (trees and shrubs) back from the edges of the prairie. The vast majority of the woody vegetation species that encroach on the prairie are non-native and invasive species: multiflora rose, black locust, bush honeysuckle, European privet, Oriental bittersweet, and autumn olive.

Our long-term plan for the Allerton Prairie and the surrounding forest is to manage invasive species and open up the forest allowing for prescribed fire management. By opening up the young forest adjacent to the Allerton Prairie we will be creating potential habitat for listed snake species, creating an open forest habitat that is currently under represented at Allerton Park, and improving our ability to manage invasive species.

Original land surveys of Piatt County show the original prairie/forest transition occurring at this location.
Taken in 1935, the earliest aerial photo of the area shows the majority of the Buck Schroth Interpretive Trail area dominated by pasture or grasslands (not forested).

Allerton Natural Areas staff will first go into the management areas and mark high quality tree species and important areas of native shrubs and wildflowers. Staff will then use a rubber-tracked skid-steer with an attached forestry mower to remove all invasive species and undesirable trees. In some areas adjacent to the prairie 100% of woody vegetation will be removed; however, in most areas our goals will be to only remove dense areas of invasive shrubs. We are conducting this management during the dormant season to limit damage to native plants and animal species. We will attempt to work in the highest quality areas only when the ground is frozen to prevent soil compaction and damage to non-target species. Following the forestry mower treatment management areas may appear unsightly due to debris from the mowing process. Over the upcoming years Allerton staff will continue to remove and treat with herbicide all invasive plants in the areas. Additionally Allerton will be re seeding areas and planting new trees.
Current aerial photo shows the area now dominated by young forest. Management planned for 2018 is outlined in yellow. Future management outlined in red.

We are planning on completing this project by March 1, 2018. During the project we will close the Buck Schroth Interpretive Trail, while the equipment is at Allerton we will likely be using it on other small projects throughout, and we will likely be temporary closing If you have any questions or concerns please contact Nate Beccue (nbeccue@illinois.edu) or Alex Lourash (lourash2@illinois.edu) or call the Allerton Park Natural Areas Office at (217)244-2149.
A Terex model skid-steer with a forestry mower attached.

A good example of what to expect in management areas.