

# Nachusa Grasslands Prescribed Fire Program

## Summary Report and Lessons Learned Fall 2023 through Spring 2024

By Bill Kleiman | The Nature Conservancy | Project Director | May 8, 2024

Share with your colleagues.



### The bottom line:

- Number of burn days was 19.
- We burned 2,204-acres of Nachusa, close to a record high, on 16 burn units
- We assisted on 874-acres on 12 units.
- Average size of a burn unit was 138-acres with a unit as small as 3-acres and big as 300.
- Average crew size was 14.



In above photo four of the crew are from the *Forest Preserve District of Cook County*. They sometimes send their fire crew to help others burn. It is a win for them and us. When you burn with other crews you learn and confirm. Two crew are from the *Friends of the Illinois Nature Preserves*. There is one TNC seasonal there and four Nachusa volunteers. Getting the job done.



Finishing at sunset with good smoke lift.



We did an annual fire refresher in the fall. This helps crews pick up details, increase cohesion and sustain a fire culture of excellence.



Annual fire refresher attendees. Our fire crews have taken basic fire course work, annually do a moderate walking pack test and attend a fire refresher.

**Lessons learned:**

- Fire breaks make or break you.
- Daily attention to details makes a fire day go.
- Volunteers, staff, and guest agencies can work seamlessly.
- Most years there are under two dozen burn weather days so make use of them.
- Mentor others



Above, Big Woods unit burning well. The flame lengths are modest but these fires set back the brush and support the ground layer plants, and the fires sustain the oak and the hickory which do well with sunshine.



We use UTVs with water pumps that spray efficiently at several gallons per minute with high pressure. Want to read more about UTV water pumpers? <https://grasslandrestorationnetwork.org/2024/03/14/rx-fire-pumper-units-and-tenders/>



Above, Volunteer Chantalle Edmunds has burned with us about a decade. She knows us, our equipment and procedures. Chantalle was on eight fires this year.



The Northern Illinois University Fire Huskies were on the fire line. Here is NIU student Allyson Thompson with her mentor for the day, Susan Kleiman. We are literally passing the torch to the next generation. Ok a flapper in this case.



Kaleb Baker (INPC), Pete Oliver (citizen), Phil Nagorny (TNC) at the Hill Site owned by the Middle Rock Conservation Partners. At the base of the hill you can see where Kaleb walked a circuitous path with that torch.



A day after the Hill Site fire with shrubs top killed by the heat but an old bur oak stands sentinel, that tree perhaps is old enough to have had Native American fires run past.



A photo from a fourteen year old planting. A few weeks after the fire a northern dropseed grass emerges for the year. This planting has lots of dropseed plants, and 133 other species that were seeded. This is at our Stonebarn Savanna unit. How we did this planting can be found here: [2010 Planting history](#)



Above is that Stonebarn prairie planting in June with white wild indigo in bloom.



Photo by Charles Larry. This prairie is on the loop trail at the Visitor Center.



Above is an example of how an oak woods can look with a few fires. This is Lowden Miller State Forest with the Rock River showing there through the trees. This unit was burned Spring of 2023 with Paul Bane as burn boss. Other fires there have been by Melissa Grycan and Brad Semel. High fives all around!





In the same woods these lovely hepatica bloom in the oak litter.



This is a new knife mulcher made by Denis Cimaf on our also new Cat skid loader. This mulcher uses a sharp knife edge to make easier work of brush. This allows this 100 hp machine to do more work than the older blunt toothed style brush mower. The downside is you need to sharpen the teeth every day, or every other day, which takes about 20 minutes.

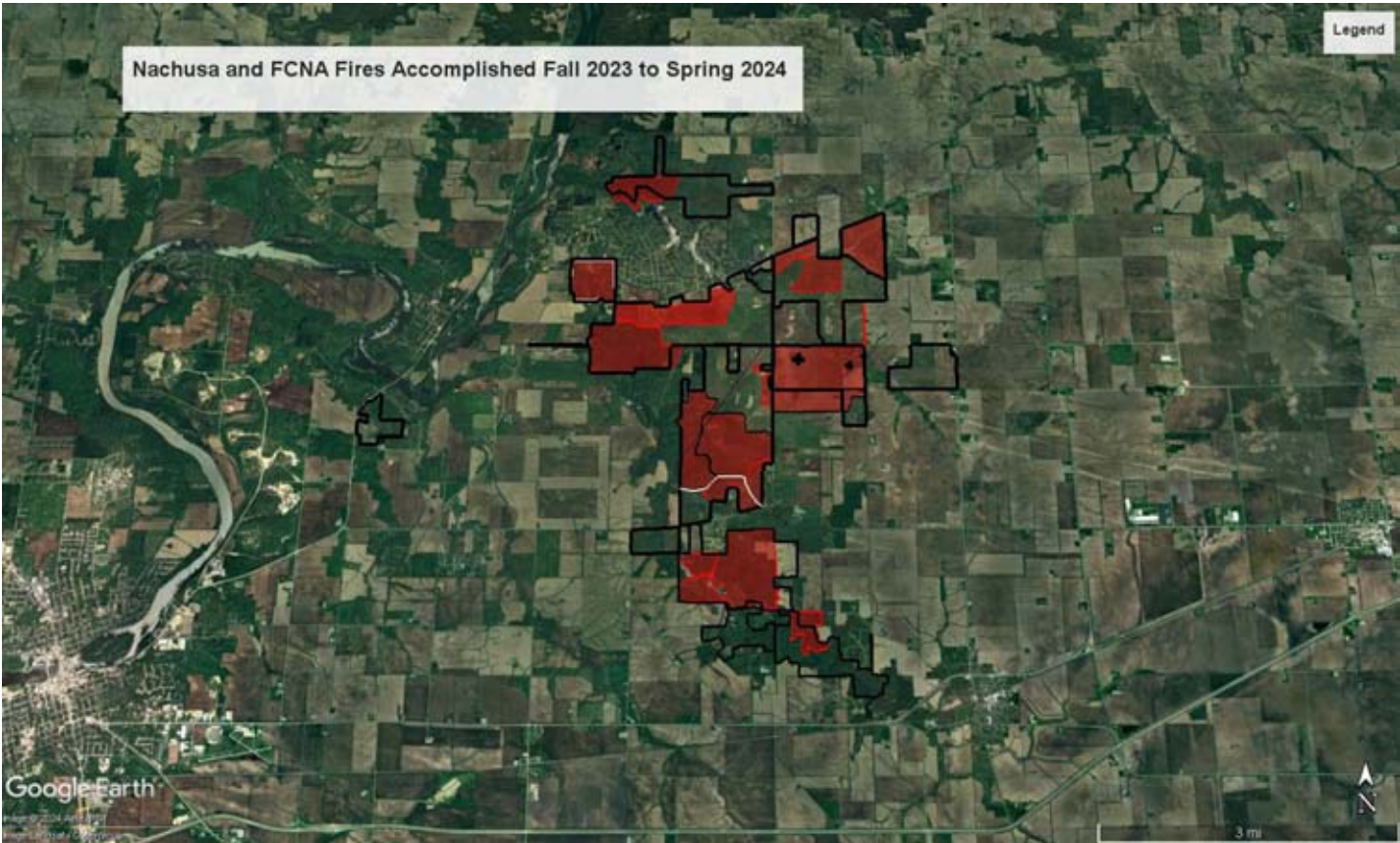


### **Twelve organizations come together for a controlled burn**

A huge fire crew gathers at Nachusa headquarters to prepare to go burn at DNR's Franklin Creek State Natural Area. There were 27 of us from 12 different organizations. We burned almost 500 acres with 6 units, two units being burned at a time. Not all acres would carry fire, but where there was healthy oak woods, the fire carried through. Bill is holding his annual birthday cake which notes how many fires he has led over the decades.

All photos by Bill Kleiman unless noted.

Below are the map and data.



Nachusa Grasslands			
Crew who participated in Fall 2023 to Spring 2024 prescribed fires			
(Let me know if I missed you. )			
First name	Last Name	# of fires	Comments
Bill	Kleiman	19	burn boss 490 times
Susan	Kleiman	15	crew boss, lots of fire
Molly	Duncan	12	Trex, lots of fire, crew boss
Riley	Berner	5	
Jacob	Cherulo	15	lots of fire
Kelly	Popper	5	
James	Johnson	4	
Phil	Nagorny	7	burn boss, crew boss
Elizabeth	Bach	4	crew boss
Mark	Herman	15	lots of fire
Chantalle	Edmunds	8	lots of fire
Drew	Frasz	8	lots of fire
Paul	Mellen	3	
Andrew	Petty	1	
Micky	Cardenas	3	
Paul	Say	5	crew boss
Dave	Brewer	6	lots of fire
Greg	Hunter	1	
Marcos	Carillo	2	
Damian	Considine	1	burn boss w MRCP
Josh	Nelson	1	
Paul	Swanson	2	
Katee	Johnson	1	
Kevin	Scheiwiller	2	
Stew	Pegenstecher	3	
Tim	Smith	3	
Erig	Bugvilionis	3	crew boss
Kevin	Wheelan	1	
Sam	Berk	3	
Moira	Staudacher	3	
Dana	Potts	1	
Allyson	Thompson	3	
Samantha	Smith	2	
Hannah	Starbuck	2	
Kevin	Kaltenbach	4	
Max	Moteback	1	
Jessie	Crow-Mermel	2	
Russ	Blogg	1	
Cody	Considine	1	crew boss
Matt	Hoogerwerf	1	
Claudia	Piqhetti	1	

Tom	Morgan	1	
Lorraine	Foelske	1	
Thomas	Peters	2	
Parker	Erick	1	
Karina	Cardella	1	
Jordan	Simms	2	
Ryan	Walsh	2	
Stone	Hansard	2	
Bryon	Walters	1	
Gene	Noska	1	
John	Gelwicks	1	
Graciela	Olmedo	2	
Erin	Spear	2	
Jonathan	Sabath	2	
TOTAL CREW		55	

Fires done by Nachusa Grasslands crew from Fall 2023 to Spring 2024

Date	Day of week	Ownership	Unit Name	Burn boss	Acres TNC	Acres Other	Lead	Temp high	Humidity low	Wind direction	Wind speed	Crew size	Crew: BB first, then first two are line bosses	
3/10/2024	Sn	TNC	Hotchkiss, CCS, Juanita	BK	308			43	33	NW	14	14	Dave B, Kevin Wheelan, Susan K, Sam Berk, Paul Swanson, Stew Peg, Kevin Scheiw, Mark H, Moira Staudacher, Dana Potts, Paul Mellen, Drew Frasz	
3/13/2024	W	TNC	Big Jump center and west	BK	130			69	37	E	9	11	BK. Elizabeth, Phil: Drew F, Tim S, Jacob Ch, Susan K, Chantalle E and 3 NIU fire huskies: Sam Beck, Allyson Thompson, Samantha Smith	
3/13/2024	W	TNC	Gray house	BK	2			69	37	E	9	10	BK. Elizabeth, Susan: Drew F, Tim S, Jacob Ch, Chantalle E and 3 NIU fire huskies: Sam Beck, Allyson Thompson, Samantha Smith	
3/18/2024	M	TNC	Stonebarn Savanna	BK	300			32	45	NW	12	12	BK: Phil, Molly: Jacob C, Mark H, Hannah Starbuck, Kevin K, Susan K, Eric B, Max Mittelbach, Jessie Crow-Mermel, Moira Stud.	This fire blackened even w cold air.
3/20/2024	W	DNR	FCNA Unit D	RB		280		40	21	NW	14	27	RB: Crew boss of BK, CC, PN, & EB. Matt Hoogenwerf, Susan K, Claudia Pighetti, Chantalle E, Tom Morgan, Lorraine F, Molly D, Allyson T, Eric B, Paul S, Thomas Peters, Jessie Crow Mermal, Kevin K, Hannah Starbuch, Parker Zerick, Moira Staudacher, Karina Cardella, Bryon W, Gene Noska, Mark H, John Gelwicks, Stew P	

3/20/2024	W	DNR	FCNA Unit E	RB		25	40	21	NW	14	27	Unit D is all the crew but they were divided into 4 sub crews.	
3/20/2024	W	DNR	FCNA Unit F	RB		5	40	21	NW	14	27	Unit D is all the crew but they were divided into 4 sub crews.	
3/20/2024	W	DNR	FCNA Unit A	RB		55	40	21	NW	14	27	Unit D is all the crew but they were divided into 4 sub crews.	
3/20/2024	W	DNR	FCNA Unit B	RB		46	40	21	NW	14	27	Unit D is all the crew but they were divided into 4 sub crews.	
3/20/2024	W	DNR	FCNA Unit B	RB		78	40	21	NW	14	27	<b>Total for this FCNA day was about 500-acres.</b> Unit D is all the crew but they were divided into 4 sub crews.	





Thank you for reading our report. Our past reports can be found on the Friends website:

<https://www.nachusagrasslands.org/controlled-burns.html>

Reports from other agencies are on the IL Rx Fire Council site: <https://www.illinoisprescribedfirecouncil.org/prescribed-burn-reports.html>

The End