



Before a controlled burn occurs, a great deal of preparation and public outreach is done. Carefully planned and safely executed burns yield stunning results. Prairie and woodland plants respond with bursts of color and attract birds, butterflies and bees to these rejuvenated habitats. Healthy, thriving ecosystems in the Midwest have evolved to depend on periodic fire that rid sites of duff (accumulated dead plant material) and invasive species. As an effective land management tool in the hands of trained personnel, even small controlled burns yield large and positive results for the benefit of nature.

prepared to extinguish any sparks, the area within the borders can be ignited.

The plants from last season provide fuel and burn quickly. The fire leaves few embers. The ashes provide an excellent place to spread more varieties of seeds. As though woken up by the fires, the prairie goes from ash to a foot tall blanket of green in mere weeks.

Burning is also beneficial in savanna habitats. Here, scattered larger trees, like oaks with bark thick enough to withstand fire, are surrounded by

grasses and wildflowers. These plants, when dormant, provide good fuel for carrying a fire. It can be helpful in forest systems for clearing shoots of invasive plants or reducing deadfall brush and other fuel.

While controlled burns offer the most effective way to maintain biodiverse prairie and savanna habitats, ultimately they serve humans as well. The growing prairie and savannas are rich and thriving ecosystems that, when properly managed, spark a rekindled human spirit.

Meet Liza Fischel, Education Naturalist for North Park Village Nature Center

Before joining the Chicago Park District this summer, Liza worked as a naturalist at Heller Nature Center in Highland Park for seven years. Prior to that, she was an animal care staff member and tour guide at Ocean World Aquarium in Crescent City, California. She also spent some time on the east coast as a whale watch naturalist in Cape Cod and Gloucester, Massachusetts. Liza grew up in Chicago and attended the University of Illinois. She also volunteered at the Shedd Aquarium and Lincoln Park Zoo. Liza is excited to work at North Park Village Nature Center, a place that offers so much nature in the city. "Chicago is where it started for me and I'm happy to share my experiences," she said. "I enjoy working with people of all ages and like to help them have positive, lasting impressions of nature." Welcome aboard, Liza!

Junior Naturalist: How Do You Measure Up to Prairie Plants?

Prairie plant roots can grow down into the ground 15-20 feet, allowing the plant to gather water and nutrients located deeper in the soil. How tall are you now? How tall do you think you will grow? Compare your height to the roots of these prairie plants!

Compass Plant	15'	Big Blue Stem	9'
Porcupine Grass	4'	Switch Grass	10'
Heath Aster.....	7'	Purple Prairie Clover	3'