



Indiana Nature Conservancy staff after a 700-acre burn in Unit K at Kankakee Sands. © TNC

## EFROYMSON RESTORATION AT Kankakee Sands

APRIL 2015

### Prescribed Fire at Kankakee Sands

This spring we had one of our best burn seasons yet. After the smoke settled, we tallied more than 1,800 acres burned at Kankakee Sands!

For prescribed burning to be successful, it takes a lot of training, time and resources. But it's worth it! Fire is an invaluable tool in maintaining the open prairie and savanna habitats. Prescribed burning reduces the number of trees on the prairie and the small invasive trees in the savanna. Chain-saws and mowing can only do a fraction of the job that prescribed burning can do.

In order to conduct prescribed fires for The Nature Conservancy, our staff is trained to National Wildland Firefighting Coordinating Group standards. These are the same standards used by the federal government's Park Service and Fish and Wildlife Service.



Prescribed fire at Kankakee Sands in 2014. © Stuart Orr/TNC

### Wetland Restoration

We have big news: The wetland restoration of the agricultural field north-west of our Kankakee Sands office will take place this year! Once planted, this 180-acre wetland will provide an important corridor for wildlife, connecting older restoration plantings at Kankakee Sands to one of our wettest wetlands in Unit J.

This fall we will roll in several interior ditches which will allow the water to remain in the field and the soils to be saturated. We will also harvest seed from 200 water-loving plants, to be sown over the ground in the winter of 2015-2016.

We are grateful for funding from the Wetland Reserve Program of the Natural Resources Conservation Services which makes the restoration of these acres possible.



The red box represents the wetland restoration slated for 2015-2016.

### Orchids!

Last year, during the vegetation monitoring of Kankakee Sands, we discovered an exciting find: tubercled orchid and green twayblade orchids growing at Kankakee Sands! The orchids found in our prairie restorations are not the showy species highly desired for trade or sale. Instead, they are the equally special but small, non-showy plants of the wet prairies.

These orchids were not planted in our prairie restoration. They likely found their way back by gusts of wind which can carry the lightweight, dust-like seeds. It's amazing to think that in less than ten years we have turned a cornfield into a wetland that is home to these delicate orchids and hundreds of other plant species.

Tubercled orchid (*Plantanthera flava herbicola*) and green twayblade orchid (*Liparis loeselii*) are both stimulated to grow by prescribed fire. With the successful burn season we had this spring, we are hopeful for an excellent orchid population again this year.



Green twayblade orchid found in wet prairies at Kankakee Sands last summer. © Stuart Orr/TNC

## Meet our 2015 Restoration Management Assistants!

On a cold and blustery February 17th, our seasonal staff of **Shaina DeNasha, Sarah Prichet, Joe Drexler, Lori Nussbaum** and **Matt Kennedy** began their 9-month term at Kankakee Sands. In the short time they have been with us, they have accomplished an incredible amount. They have all become certified as Prescribed Fire Crew Members, which required 40 hours of class training and 'pack' test, which involves carrying 45 pounds and walking three miles in 45 minutes. They have used their knowledge and training to help implement prescribed fire on more than 1,800 acres of property owned by The Nature Conservancy. They have also spent more than 250 hours brush-cutting invasive trees and shrubs from the prairie restorations and at Conrad Station Savanna.

In the months ahead, the crew will perform the critical functions of invasive plant control across Kankakee Sands and native plant production at the Kankakee Sands Nursery. They'll also assist with seed harvesting and seed planting.

Our seasonal crew was hired through the **Student Conservation Association (SCA)**. The mission of the SCA is to build the next generation of conservation leaders and to inspire lifelong stewardship of the environment and communities by engaging young people in hands-on service to the land.

## Birds, Birds, Birds!

The birds are back! Come enjoy the sights and sounds of our grassland birds with during our annual birding event, held on **Saturday, May 9** and **Sunday, May 10**. This year's event will be held in conjunction with the Dunes National Lakeshore's Annual Birding Festival. We are lucky to have Barb Lucas and Jeanette Jaskula leading our birding tours again this year.

For more information and to register, visit [indunesbirdingfestival.com](http://indunesbirdingfestival.com) or [facebook.com/indunesbirdingfestival](https://facebook.com/indunesbirdingfestival).

*If you aren't able to make the birding event, feel free to come out to Kankakee Sands any day of the year to watch the birds. We are always free and open to the public 365 days a year.*



Seasonal crew with brushcutter helmets on—ready to cut some woody saplings. Photo © Tony Capizzo./TNC

**INDIANA DUNES BIRDING FESTIVAL**  
Experience birding like never before...  
on Lake Michigan's South Shore  
MAY 7-10, 2015

**Guided Bird Walks**  
Kankakee Sands  
Newton County, Indiana  
Saturday May 9: 7 a.m.  
Sunday, May 10: 8 a.m.

For more information and to register visit  
[indunesbirdingfestival.com](http://indunesbirdingfestival.com) or  
[facebook.com/indunesbirdingfestival](https://facebook.com/indunesbirdingfestival)

Learn more about Kankakee Sands at  
[nature.org/kankakeesands](http://nature.org/kankakeesands)

Birders of all skill levels welcome!

Friends of the Sands will have wildflowers and grasses of Newton County available in small pots for you to take home.

## Volunteer Opportunities

We offer weekday and weekend workdays for all ages and abilities to experience working on the prairies and savannas of Kankakee Sands. All workdays are family friendly. Feel free to bring a lunch, hike the trails and enjoy the great outdoors after the workday.

### Weekly Workdays

#### Thursdays, 10 am to noon, Central Time

Each Thursday during the growing season, join our Kankakee Sands crew in whatever restoration activity they have planned for the day. Activities include planting at the nursery, removing invasive weeds and harvesting seeds.

### Planting Native Plants at Kankakee Sands Nursery

#### Saturday, May 9, 9 am - noon, Central Time.

Join us for a fun morning of planting our potted greenhouse plants into the great, wide open of our outdoor native plant nursery. There will be plenty of activities for all ages and abilities, from taking small plants out of pots to digging holes, planting, and restacking pots. Many hands are desirable for this busy workday of planting 2,000+ plants. (Wow!)

### Controlling Invasive Weeds

#### Saturday, June 13, 9 am - noon, Central Time.

This will be the first of our summer invasive-focused workdays. We'll start out with a bang by working in Kankakee Sands' first restored prairie: the 1997 planting at Conrad Station Savanna. Our primary target species will be white and yellow sweet clover and we may also seek out and pull the sporadic spotted knapweed plants. Spotted knapweed can be an incredibly nasty invasive plant that we thankfully have very little of at Kankakee Sands, so we are working hard to keep it away!



Xander Nichols, Luka Nichols and Forest Nyberg (l-r) at a native plant nursery workday. Photo Leigh Littiken

Contact Alyssa Nyberg for more information and to RSVP for workdays: [anyberg@tnc.org](mailto:anyberg@tnc.org).

## Want to learn more about Kankakee Sands? Visit [nature.org/kankakeesands](http://nature.org/kankakeesands)

Visit [nature.org/kankakeesands](http://nature.org/kankakeesands) to find out more about the Efrogmson Restoration at Kankakee Sands. Please contact Alyssa Nyberg at (219) 866-1706 or [anyberg@tnc.org](mailto:anyberg@tnc.org) if you'd like to help us in our conservation work or make a financial donation.