

## **NATURAL AREAS SUMMARY**

The District is now in its second year of contracted service with Cardno to provide maintenance of its natural areas supplemented by leadership and labor of one or two Park employees to perform necessary tasks. This relationship, similar to other contracted services employed recently, has proven highly effective. The District also previously maintained equipment and staff at great expense to complete required natural area burn management. A four to five year burn management plan is now employed, and as many as possible natural areas are mowed on an annual basis.

Prior to the 2017/2018 fiscal year, the District employed 1 full-time, 6-9, part-time, and contracted services for the maintenance and development of 220+ acres of natural area set aside. The cost for labor/benefits, equipment, and supplies exceeded \$91,609.90 on an annual basis, at or about \$416.41 per acre. This does not include labor and time, provided with frequency, of full-time maintenance staff; and it was exceptionally difficult to maintain professional staff at the full-time and part-time level required to meet the District's needs.

The contracted cost for annual service and reporting by Cardno is \$40,000, and the District has an annual burn management budget at or about \$15,000.

The total budget for natural areas in the current fiscal year is at or about \$55,000 or \$250 per acre; a net reduction in cost of \$36,609.90 or \$166.41 per acre.

This does not reflect the real savings in the reduction of insurance costs related to what is considered high risk positions for workers compensation coverage. At one point, at the peak of employment for part-time Parks, Natural Areas, and Golf Course Maintenance, workers comp costs exceeded \$100,000 annually. Currently, the total cost including liability and workers comp coverage through PDRMA has been reduced to \$54,981, a net savings of more than \$45,019 per year. The combined annual savings provided by contracted service and reduced insurance costs equates to \$81,628.90

As part of the contracted service by Cardno, an annual status report and recommendations is completed at the end of the season. This is a change from the weekly reporting and posting which added cost in contractor, staff, web designer time with little benefit.

The added necessary benefit is a sustainable approach to Park management.

The Park District will reflect similar savings in building, Park, and golf course maintenance, possible through oversight by Park staff and contracted services of these areas.

Finally, the greenhouse was previously used to grow microgreens/lettuce in the off season. This was a fun project, but was not cost-effective.

The propagating period for natives was March planting, spring-early summer harvest, and summer planting. We have had discussions with a native seed supplier, Prairie Moon Nursery, and understand that beneficial buffer zone grasses could be planted earlier, generating a more viable/more mature plant. We look forward to moving forward on this opportunity in the coming months.

Ed reviewed the level and detail of projects that have been taking place district-wide during the November Board Meeting. The greenhouse has been a low priority due to the numerous other commitments.