

Community stands up against tree cutting, burning

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Community members are opposed to the burning of trees to preserve prairies in areas near their homes and will meet with a Cook County Commissioner to express their concerns on Thursday, Jan. 22.

Recently, a row of several trees was cut down in a couple hours in the area of Caldwell and Milwaukee by Bunker Hill. Several acres in the Miami Woods and St. Paul Woods in Morton Grove have also been burned to be transformed into prairie.

About 12 years ago a moratorium was put into place by Cook County to stop the cutting and burning that was taking place in local areas, such as in Niles and Morton Grove.

“There was such an outcry against this that President Stroger set up a moratorium from North Park College to Miami Woods,” said Deb Domick, who has lived in the Bunker Hill area for 19 years.

The moratorium was lifted in 2006 by interim president Bobbie Steele and residents are once again concerned with losing trees and the safety hazards related.

Local community groups Urban Wildlife Coalition, Trees for Life and Natural Forest Advocates are calling for a ban on “questionable practices including tree cutting, burning and herbiciding” in areas including Bunker Hill and Miami Woods.

“They all kind of have an emotional connection to it,” said Bathsheba Birman, of the Urban Wildlife Coalition, about the residents.

“Our neighborhood is cooler than other parts of Niles; it gives us shade and shelter; it is invaluable,” said Domick.

“We are not hurting but helping the land,” said Mayberry. “Native species that would otherwise get choked out by Buckthorn will now have the resources to grown and thrive.”

“When they change ecosystems that rapidly it has a detrimental affect on wildlife,” said Birman.

In a press release issued by the Urban Wildlife Coalition, the practice of maintaining the sites includes the use of herbicides “which poses a risk if it leeches into the water table or is aerosoled in a burn.”

“Besides the environmental impact, landscape burns pose health risks from particulate matter that is equivalent to burning a massive pile of cigarettes and are opposed by the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago,” explained the press release.

“We’ve never in our history let a fire out of control or caused a public safety hazard,” assured Mayberry, who said they are “low level” fires and that district personnel or fire department personnel are always on hand. He said there is reason to believe the moratorium was put in place 12 years ago for “political reasons.”

Mayberry said that if you come back to an area about 12-18 months later you can’t tell that they burned in that location and more often than not they are gorgeous areas.

Domick believes that with the struggling economy there is no reason they should be spending money on turning forests into prairie.

“Why do you have to cut down a forest to make a prairie?” questioned Birman.

Local residents will be meeting with Cook County Commissioner Peter Silvestri on Thursday, Jan 22 to continue expressing their concerns regarding the burns.