

## County lifts its ban on Miami Woods restoration

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Just a week after Cook County Board President John Stroger lifted a ban on restoration work in Miami Woods, volunteer supporters of the forest preserves already are planning to tackle five years of what they say is uncontrolled growth.

Friends of the Morton Grove Forest Preserves has scheduled work sessions the next three months to begin removing brush, buckthorn and other weeds that have choked out native plants. Invasive species have grown unchecked in the preserve since Stroger imposed the moratorium following complaints by some Chicago homeowners near Forest Preserve woods.

Stroger's action allows most restoration work, such as weeding, the use of herbicides and seed collection, to resume. "There's a lot we can do at this point," said Steve Mayberry, a spokesman for the Cook County Forest Preserve District. But the use of controlled burning still is banned, he said.

The Miami Woods Forest Preserve runs from Dempster Street south to Oakton Street. Stroger last week also lifted the moratorium on restoration work at Indian Road Woods in Chicago. The ban remains in effect at three other forest preserves.

Mayberry said the Forest Preserve District staff has sought the ability to again perform restoration work. Work will be done by volunteers under supervision of Forest Preserve staff beginning next month.

Restoration advocates have scheduled sessions Dec. 22, Jan. 26 and Feb. 16, all from 9 a.m. to noon. Volunteers will meet at a parking lot on Caldwell Avenue north of Oakton.

Volunteer groups including Friends of the Forest Preserves have tried to have the moratorium lifted since it was imposed, and recently stepped up their efforts with a petition drive and meeting with county officials. They also have enlisted the support of local County Board members.

Gladys Bryer, a member of Friends of the Morton Grove Forest Preserves, said supporters are pleased with Stroger's action, but still are hoping that the ban on controlled burning will be lifted. "At some

point everything will be allowed," Bryer said.

"We are definitely pleased about this," said Barbara Hill, spokesman for Friends of the Forest Preserves, a county-wide group. "More changes need to be made, but this is an important step."

In lifting the moratorium, Stroger cited a citizens advisory committee appointed by the County Board to study the issue. That group recommended last April lifting the ban on restoration work in Miami Woods.

Hill noted that burning is a part of the natural process of managing the preserves. But even without that, she said, volunteers can take significant steps toward restoring the woods.

"It will be possible to manage the land again," she said. "They can still do a lot of ecological good."