

OPENING DAY BRINGS BIG QUESTIONS

Cubs hope a new manager is enough, White Sox look for signs of life, and both start to get answers today **Chicago Sports**

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BREAKING NEWS AT CHICAGOTRIBUNE.COM

Setting prairies ablaze in springtime is key to protecting native species and revitalizing one of the most endangered ecosystems in the world, experts say



On a recent weekday, short but mighty flames began consuming an expanse of tallgrass in Nachusa Grasslands, their advance marked with crackles and pops.

Satisfied with the blaze, a group of eight conservation workers split in two, walking the perimeter of a 124-acre square expanse of land. They used liquid fuel, drop by drop, to create a ring of fire and rubber tools to put out unruly sparks.

Everything was under control.

The neon orange fire charred most of what it encountered: native plants such as Canada wild rye, big bluestem and Indiangrass; and invasive species like bush honeysuckle and bush clover. It barely grazed a handful of scattered oaks and a willow grove at the center of the open meadow, all leafless but tall, alive and full of water — immune to the fire.

“If we’re doing things right, we’ve tried to set ourselves up so that the fire is largely managing itself, and we’re giving light touches to keep it where it needs to be,” said Elizabeth Bach, a research scientist at The Nature Conservancy, which manages the nature preserve 100 miles west of Chicago. “The idea is ... that the fire won’t get pushed outside of

FROM FIRE, GLORY

By Adriana Pérez | Chicago Tribune



Above: Bison graze at Nachusa Grasslands on March 7.

At top: Restoration technician Jacob Churulo guides the controlled burn at the prairie 100 miles west of Chicago. E. JASON WAMBSGANS/CHICAGO TRIBUNE PHOTOS

the boundaries. It’s like, once you got your lines, you just color inside. Then everything kind of comes together at the end.”

As spring gets underway, conservationists are purposely setting Illinois tallgrass prairies on fire to protect native species and revitalize one of the most endangered ecosystems in the world.

Prairies don’t immediately come to mind when people think about threatened landscapes, and public attention is often focused on rainforests. But there are far fewer prairies.

“More tropical rainforest gets cut down every year than there is tallgrass prairie that still exists,” Bach said. “We’re all about setting up plants and animals to thrive today and into an uncertain future ... with the ecological factors that support them, and prescribed fire is a pivotal one.”

The National Park Service estimates that only 6.8 million acres of tallgrass prairies remain in North America, less than 4% of the 170 million acres that originally covered the region. In just 2021, 1.6 million acres of Great Plains grasslands were plowed

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ELECTION 2024
STATE’S ATTORNEY

O’Neill Burke edge grows

Margin widens to 1,637 as the count enters 2nd week

By A.D. Quig and Claire Malon
Chicago Tribune

For the first time since Election Day, retired Appellate Judge Eileen O’Neill Burke has widened her lead over university lecturer and former government official Clayton Harris III in the hotly contested Democratic primary race for Cook County state’s attorney.

The results came after another taxing day of ballot processing, as the Chicago Board of Elections and Cook County clerk added another 2,257 Democratic votes to the unofficial count. By the end of the day, O’Neill Burke gained 39 votes over Harris. Though not a lot, it is the first time O’Neill Burke has seen her lead grow since late precincts and mail-in ballots began being counted.

With the race entering its second week, O’Neill Burke has received 263,527 votes to Harris’ 261,890 votes for a 1,637-vote margin.

Included in Wednesday’s new totals were approximately 1,800 city ballots collected by election judges in the lead up to Election Day from registered voters who are permanently disabled, incapacitated or are residents of licensed nursing homes or care facilities. Those ballots, which have been locked away since March 19 and counted at the Chicago board on Wednesday, are significant because as valid mail-in votes have dwindled in recent days, that batch was expected to be among the largest cluster to be counted.

Harris had been managing to secure a majority of the daily vote counts from

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Gag order in NY case triggers Trump tirade

By Michael R. Sisak
Associated Press

NEW YORK — Donald Trump lashed out Wednesday at the New York judge who put him under a gag order ahead of his April 15 hush-money criminal trial, making a fallacious claim about his daughter and urging him to step aside from the case.

In a social media post, the former president suggested without evidence that Judge Juan M. Merchan was kowtowing to his daughter’s interests as a Democratic political consultant. He also made a claim — later repudiated by court officials — that she had posted a social media photo showing Trump behind bars.

Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee,

complained on his Truth Social platform that the gag order issued Tuesday was “illegal, un-American, unConstitutional.” He said that Merchan, a veteran Manhattan jurist, was “wrongfully attempting to deprive me of my First Amendment Right to speak out against the Weaponization of Law Enforcement” by Democratic rivals.

Trump claimed that Merchan’s daughter, Loren Merchan, whose firm has worked on campaigns for President Joe Biden and other Democrats, had recently posted a photo on social media depicting her “obvious goal” of seeing him jailed.

In a statement, a spokesperson for New York’s state

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INSIDE



MICHAEL REAVES/GETTY

Illini ready for Sweet 16 test from stingy Cyclones

The Illinois men, playing tonight in their first Sweet 16 since 2005, have their eyes set on an even deeper run. But they’ll have to get past Big 12 Tournament champion Iowa State to do so, and that’s no easy task, with the Cyclones ranking first in the nation in adjusted defensive efficiency. Find a breakdown of the East Region in **Chicago Sports, Page 4.**



Joe Lieberman dies at age 82: Former U.S. Sen. Joe Lieberman of Connecticut, who nearly won the vice presidency on the Democratic ticket with Al Gore in the disputed 2000 election and almost became Republican John McCain’s running mate eight years later, died Wednesday. **Nation & World, Page 6**

TODAY’S
WEATHER



High 52 Low 33

Complete Chicagoland forecast on Page 12

\$4.00 city and suburbs and elsewhere
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