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State park will restore oak woodland

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Work is expected to begin on the restoration of 75 acres of oak woodland in Frontenac State Park sometime this month.

The idea for the project was introduced a while back, but contractor issues and weather problems caused continual delays. Since shrubs and trees keep choking out the park's oak trees, manager Harry Roberts hopes work will kick off before the end of the month.

"We've been wanting to do this project for four years," Roberts said.

The primary problem is buckthorn, which is covering the forest floor and preventing oak regeneration because the oak saplings can't get the sunlight they need.

"If you want a dense hedge row to screen off your home or yard, it's very good at doing that. Unfortunately, once it gets out in the wild it just goes crazy," Roberts said. "It's a very aggressive grower and it's taken over."

During the past decade, park staff has cut some buckthorn out by hand, but decided to hire a contrac-

tor out of Rochester to tackle the project quicker.

Buckthorn isn't the only issue. Workers also will go after honeysuckle and box elder trees, which tend to take over as well.

The bulk of the initial work is expected to be done by March, but years of follow-up treatment are required to keep the invasive species away.

"These plants produce an incredible amount of seed and they can be dormant for several years and still come up," Roberts explained. "Then

HARRY ROBERTS

Frontenac State Park manager

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you end up with plants showing up when you thought you were all done."

Frontenac State Park staff will treat shrub and tree stumps with herbicide and burn through the area to prevent regrowth. Staff will do some supplemental planting of native prairie grasses and flowers.

While Roberts said he doesn't know exactly where the debris from the project will be sent, he does know it will be used for heat or electricity at a biomass facility.

"It's kind of a deviation from the incinerator principle," he explained. "We have a lot of biomass around the country, too, and it burns, and anything that burns will create some energy for heat."

The project is expected to cost \$47,500 and is being funded by the Minnesota Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund. It's more of a resource-driven project than it is recreational, but Roberts said park visitors may benefit nonetheless.

"It'll be more inviting for people that do want to take a little walk out there and take a look at the park."

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