

The PRAIRIE PROMOTER

Grassroots Conservation in Action

VOL 33, NO. 1
April 2020

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The
Prairie
Enthusiasts



Timber Rattlesnake: Vanishing Blufflands Icon

By Brian Bielema

Historically significant and emblematic of the wilderness that once existed along the towering bluffs of the Mississippi River, the timber rattlesnake (*Crotalus horridus*) continues to survive in isolated pockets. Revered and respected by Native Americans, with some tribes calling it "Grandfather," it was vilified by European settlers and now only thrives in the most remote mountain ranges of the Eastern states.

After centuries of persecution and wanton killing, a viable population still exists in the Midwest, and it's up to us to protect it. Stories maligning and demonizing the rattlesnake don't fit with the creature I've studied for 30 years. I hope to show you why Benjamin Franklin was right when he penned a multi-point document in support of using the rattlesnake as the symbol of our new nation, calling it "an emblem of magnanimity and true courage."

First and foremost, timber rattlesnakes have a passive temperament. They rely on cryptic coloration to go unnoticed and will almost always allow a human to pass by, maintaining silence even when a foot is placed well within striking distance. Their venom, needed to secure prey, wouldn't be wasted on an animal the size of a human. Even when stepped on, their usual reaction is to rattle and crawl away.



Mother and her litter at a birthing rookery. The neonates (newborn snakes) are grayish and tucked in and around their mother.
(Photo by Brian Bielema)

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Our Mission

The Prairie Enthusiasts seek to ensure the perpetuation and recovery of prairie, oak savanna, and other associated ecosystems of the Upper Midwest through protection, management, restoration, and education. In doing so, we strive to work openly and cooperatively with private landowners and other private and public conservation groups.

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Staff

Acting Executive Director - Scott Fulton
Communications Coordinator - Joe Rising
Bookkeeper - Jerry Pedretti

Editorial Volunteers

Chippewa Savannas - Joe Maurer
theprairieenthusiasts.csc@gmail.com
Coulee Region - Jim Rogala
jrogala58@gmail.com
Empire-Sauk - Cate Harrington
charrington@tnc.org
Glacial Prairie - Alice & Walter Mirk
wamcp70@charter.net
Many Rivers - Deanna Pomije
pomijelynn@hotmail.com
Minnesota Driftless - George Howe
howe93@acegroup.cc
Northwest Illinois - Rickie Rachuy
rr.lonetree@frontier.com
Prairie Bluff - Tom Mitchell
tnmitchell@tds.net
Prairie Sands - Ray Goehring
raygoe@yahoo.com
Southwest Wisconsin - Jack Kussmaul
jack.kussmaul@gmail.com
St. Croix Valley - Evanne Hunt
evanne.hunt@gmail.com

Prairie Promoter Editor -
Debra Noell
promoter@theprairieenthusiasts.org

Cover Photo: "Lupines on a sand prairie."
by Jerry Newman

Editor's Notes

Debra Noell, Editor

Recently, a reader sent me a chapter from the book "Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters" entitled "The Range of the Bison in Wisconsin." Although written claims from the 1800s indicate all bison east of the Mississippi River were eradicated,

author A.W. Schorger argues they were here in the 1600s and possibly into the 1800s.

Schorger presents reports from historic writings, first-person accounts from the 1600s and 1700s referring to an animal, which seems to be the bison, in various languages from French to Souix to English – bison, buffalo, buffs, wild cows, buffe, boeufs and more. Citations indicate bison were present, if not abundant, from Lake Winnebago to Prairie du Chien and south to Chicago. Some writings put them as far north as Chippewa Falls and Pepin.

One of the most fascinating aspects for me were the bison pictographs in LaCrosse County, and bison mounds in Sauk County.

Lately, I've been ravenous for history. It began with a DNA test indicating my ancestral roots, and landed most recently in genealogy strings showing my "people" came to America in the 1600s. When I try to imagine what they saw, even in my admiration of their grit, I can't help but ask why they didn't think to save any of it for us.

Anyone else have documentation on the history of bison to share? You can read the entire book chapter at www.theprairieenthusiasts.org/educational_materials.



(Photos by Debra Noell)



A Major Transition for The Prairie Enthusiasts

Scott Fulton, President and Acting Executive Director

On March 1, the TPE Board of Directors agreed to launch a nationwide search for a new Executive Director. Starting immediately, I will assume the role of Acting Executive Director to manage the staff and operations of TPE during the transition. Chris Kirkpatrick will help with the transition process until March 31.

The Executive Committee of the Board (Jerry Newman, Alice Mirk, Jim Rogala and myself) is selecting a search consultant and (with the help of a few other members) will oversee the process as a Transition Task Force until a new Executive Director is found and begins work.

This was not an easy decision, nor was it taken lightly. Chris has served TPE as Executive Director for nearly eight years, and during that time has overseen a major transformation of the organization. Our professional staff, while still quite small, has grown significantly. We have put in place a strong financial management infrastructure, led by our office administrator and bookkeeper, Jerry Pedretti, and consulting accountant Winne Bade. Our outreach and communications efforts also have grown with the work of Joe Rising, our communications coordinator, and has resulted in a significant increase in both contacts and new members, as well as a much stronger public profile.

Chris also directly led the process of achieving accreditation by the Land Trust Alliance, which has greatly improved our land protection processes. The land we protect by ownership or easement has grown from 2,500 to 4,000 acres. We give Chris sincere thanks for his tenure and accomplishments at TPE, and we wish him well in his future endeavors.

The driving force to make this leadership change is a set of exciting new opportunities and challenges that are emerging for TPE. As many of you are aware, we have received a major three-year grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to develop a new program of direct outreach and services to private and recreational landowners for pollinator habitat restoration and improvement. We are hiring a new, full-time Landowner Services Coordinator to provide ecological assessments to landowners, to help develop management plans, and to assist landowners in obtaining the funding, professional resources and appropriate seeds needed for selected projects.

The NFWF grant also funds a half-time staff member to develop and execute a program of outreach across our service area targeted at building interest among landowners in pollinator habitat projects. Based on our own 2018 landowner surveys, and group discussions with chapter leaders, it appears that educationally focused outreach (including online content, workshops, field trips) will be most valuable and effective. We hope this project will start a long-term effort to share at least some of the vast knowledge and know-how accrued over the decades by TPE's many skilled land management practitioners.

Before receiving the NFWF grant, the Board had decided to add a half-time staff position and to increase

Jerry's hours to build his capacity to work with chapters in membership growth and volunteer engagement.

Over the past year, a team including Chris, Jerry, webmaster Jim Rogala, and past TPE President Evanne Hunt have set up and begun using a new online membership database, communications and development platform called NationBuilder, which we are now starting to make available to chapter leaders and volunteers to help with their efforts. Much work remains to be done to build, refine and deploy all the tools, processes and programs needed to make a major difference, and Board members felt adding staff capacity to support this effort was critical.

After receiving the NFWF grant, we realized the grant-funded landowner outreach and services program needed to be fully integrated with our other membership and volunteer development initiatives. This must become the focus for the entire staff, working as a team in collaboration with the chapters to build outreach, communication, education and services, and overall administration.

We have therefore decided to combine the grant funding and Board-approved funding to hire a new full-time staff member to work with the rest of the team on this integrated outreach, development and services program. Thus, including the new Landowner Services Coordinator, we are adding two new full-time staff positions, effectively doubling the size of our staff.

Given the magnitude of this expansion of staff and programs, the Board seriously discussed whether we should wait to hire the new Executive Director before making these hires. However, the NFWF grant is starting now, and the need for significant improvements in our membership and volunteer development have been discussed with the chapters for several years. We decided that we are ready as an organization to begin these bold steps while we seek a new leader who can help us carry these initiatives forward and take TPE to the next level. We have thus already begun the search and hiring process for the two new positions and expect to have our new staff members start in the next couple of months. Pursuit of a new Executive Director will be done in parallel.

On a personal note, I'm both excited and more than a bit daunted by the challenge of assuming a new, expanded role in the leadership of TPE during this important transition. Having just finished visiting all 11 of our chapters, discussing these opportunities and changes with many of you in considerable depth, I'm deeply impressed by the engagement and thoughtfulness of the leaders and members across the organization. There is a strong sense of hope and even optimism about our future, but there is also a very realistic and well-considered understanding of the significant challenges we will face.

I feel very well supported by the Board, staff, chapter leadership and our members, and ask for all your help in working together through this transition process. As always, please let me know what you think at president@ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org.

If threatened, they may strike defensively. The vast majority of bites are known as “illegitimate,” because the wounds were inflicted during attempts to kill or capture them. Often, these defensive strikes inject no venom, resulting in a “dry bite” with no systemic effects.

Timber rattlesnakes are ambush predators. They brumate (inactive but not hibernating) in rocky dens from November to March and are active from April to October. This can vary, however, and with the warming climate, emergence generally comes earlier and ingress to dens later.

Upon emergence, rattlesnakes seek open canopy rocks in the vicinity of their dens, or move to a foraging site to await their first, and often only, skin shedding (molting) of the year. Months in the den often result in skin lesions that are removed by this molting. Snake Fungal Disease has been found in the timber rattlesnake, which produces severe lesions, mostly on the head, but gratefully hasn’t been lethal as it has with Illinois’ other rattlesnake, the Eastern massasauga.

Each molting adds a segment to the snake’s rattle “string.” Molting may take place a second time later in the summer or fall. After the rattlesnakes have completed their post emergent molt, non-pregnant females and males search for ambush sites to forage for white-footed mice, Eastern gray squirrels and Eastern chipmunks in closed canopy forests with many fallen logs or edges of grassy fields where voles (prairie and meadow) are the target. As an opportunistic predator, other mammals and birds also are taken as size permits.

Ambush sites are chosen by sampling fallen logs for the presence of mouse runways by “tongue flicking” the tops to detect fresh scents. This technique also is employed on the sides of trees that may harbor gray squirrel nests. Once an ambush site is chosen, the rattlesnake rests its head on the side of the log or against the base of a tree, or it lies coiled next to a vole run.

In this position, three senses come into play to direct the strike. With the jaw resting on the log, it can feel vibrations

from a prey animal approaching. It also has good peripheral vision, but the most remarkable sense organs are the heat detecting pits just below and slightly forward of the eyes. Warm blooded prey is “seen” as a stereoscopic image not unlike that produced by a second set of eyes. This second sight allows the rattlesnake to strike accurately in total darkness. When a small mammal such as a mouse is struck, the snake immediately pulls back, avoiding injury from the wounded animal.

The envenomated mouse wanders off and succumbs to the venom. After a brief wait, the rattlesnake follows the scent trail, finds and swallows it headfirst. Remarkably, the smell of the envenomated prey is distinctive, and the rattlesnake can track it through a maze of scent trails laid down by other mice. When birds are struck, the snake holds on until the venom takes effect as a wounded bird would most likely fly, leaving no scent trail and would be lost. The ambush position may be maintained for many hours, and the snake may actu-



Each molting adds a segment to the snake’s rattle “string.” (Photos by Brian Bielema)

ally fall asleep before approaching prey awakens them. It’s recently been discovered the prior presence of other rattlesnakes may provide “public knowledge” of successful sites, drawing others to them by scent.

One surprising benefit rattlesnakes provide humans is that eating their main food species, white-footed mice, reduces Lyme disease. Up to 90% of white-footed mice carry the Lyme bacteria, and tick larvae and nymphs become infected by biting the mice. If the mouse is consumed, both the disease carrier and its tick load is eliminated. It’s estimated a single rattlesnake may consume more than 1,000 ticks annually, thus reducing Lyme disease in rattlesnake inhabited areas.

Females have rockier path

For pregnant females, life is quite different. They have built up fat reserves in the year or two prior and rarely feed during pregnancy until they give birth. Mating has taken place the previous summer to early fall, and both sexes may have multiple partners. This results in multiple paternities in

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some litters.

Sperm is stored by the female over the winter, and the eggs are fertilized the following spring after ovulation. Rattlesnakes give birth to live young, not eggs. Pregnant females seek out open canopy, usually large table rocks, logs or even man-made structures, where they remain until giving birth in late August or September. Some of these sites (known as birthing rookeries) are used by multiple females and may serve for decades as long as the canopy remains open, and the structure is unchanged.

Some females leave the rookery to give birth in sheltered areas nearby, but the majority have their litters at the gestation site. Fidelity to a gestation site finds females returning for successive pregnancies.

Due to the fragile population in the Midwest, it's difficult to easily recover from the loss of even one mature female.

Due to the fragile population in the Midwest, it's difficult to easily recover from the loss of even one mature female. Many females have a single litter in their lives, and few have two or three litters. In my 30-year study, lifetime reproductive events break down as follows: 48.4% had a single observed event, 29% had two events, 9.7% had three, 6.5% had four, and just one female each had five and six litters in her life. Reproductive cycles for females with multiple pregnancies are usually two to three years.

Reproductive maturity locally may occur as young as 4 years. I witnessed mating of a female with a complete rattle string (when the end button is present on the rattle, age can be estimated with some accuracy). Several experts agreed with this age after viewing photos. If she became pregnant the following year from this mating, she would have given birth at age 5. The Eastern populations mature slower and may be as old as 7-9 years before being able to reproduce.

After giving birth, some mothers remain with their neonates (newborn snakes) until they complete their post-natal shed, usually within 10-14 days. But most females I've observed leave the newborn snakes after a few days of recuperation. (Pregnancy exacts a high cost, and postpartum females are extremely emaciated. Some don't recover.) Upon emergence the following spring, they remain in poor physical condition with visible loose skin folds on their depleted bodies.

The young (litter size 1-11, mean of 5.6) are born with a gray coloration, pre-buttons on their tails and are about the size of a fat lead pencil in length and girth. After their molts, they look more like the adults in color and possess a button. Each successive shedding adds a segment below the button. When rattles reach lengths of five or

Managing Land for Timber Rattlesnakes

Management of timber rattlesnake-inhabited lands consists of a two-prong approach.

First, as in the physicians' code, do no harm. Care should be taken with all prescriptive burns during their active months of April to October – and in active snake habitats, no prescribed fire during this time. Studies have shown mortality when fire sweeps through areas where rattlesnakes are foraging or traveling from or to dens. Also, critical basking rocks needed for gestation and post-emergence molting should be undisturbed. When tree and brush removal is carried out, care must be taken not to displace or cover these rocks. Certain favored rocks are used year after year, and rattlesnakes are sensitive to their exact position and resulting microhabitat.

To assist their habitat, maintain an open canopy over gestation sites and other basking rocks. One of the biggest problems for timber rattlesnakes today is the shading over of critical habitat. Whereas foraging is mainly done in closed canopy forests, reproduction relies on open canopy rocks where pregnant females can bask, thus helping to develop their young. With the rampant growth of woody plants and forbs over bluffs and talus, many gestation sites are no longer amenable for gestational basking.

Certain favored rocks are used year after year, and rattlesnakes are sensitive to their exact position and resulting microhabitat.

Clearing of trees, brush and tall herbaceous plants at known or likely basking areas will benefit the snakes. Studies have shown that opening the canopy over suitable rocks will draw pregnant females when shading has eliminated favored sites.

Gene flow in this species is accomplished by males traveling into ranges of neighboring populations and mating with those females. As with many species in trouble today, connectivity is critical to allow this travel. Rattlesnake dens may be too far apart for males to reach others, or the habitat between dens may not be suitable. Managers may benefit this gene flow by opening the canopy over rock outcrops and talus located between known dens. By this action, rattlesnakes from both dens may meet in the newly opened area and mate.

~ Brian Bielema

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six segments, they increasingly become prone to breakage. Old rattlesnakes rarely maintain their end buttons, and the three-lobed broken end segments can easily be distinguished from buttons.

Younger snakes tend to have tapering rattles, and charts prepared by several researchers can help determine age. Timber rattlesnakes are long-live, with some reaching 45 or 50 years old, and by then have straight-sided rattles with almost no taper.

Rattlers are amazing creatures

As we learn more of the secret lives of timber rattlers through radio telemetry, videography and innovative experiments, we discover abilities beyond our previous understanding. Sociality and kinship recognition are present and important.

Newborn snakes have the ability to find a den site within days of birth. With the mother gone, securing her own meal after her long fast, the neonates leave the birthing site, forage for food (but the remaining yolk allows them to overwinter without securing a meal), and if luck is with them, find the scent trails of older rattlesnakes moving back to the den. The young imprint on this den site and return here for the rest of their lives. In some cases, they may use another den, but there is high fidelity for the initial den. In this manner, some dens have been used for decades and probably centuries as

successive generations continue the pattern. Their “mental maps” allow them to travel far from the den in loops that bring them back in the fall.

Although it’s difficult to determine exact numbers of such a secretive and cryptic species, it’s safe to say timber rattlesnakes in the Midwest need protection. In my native Illinois, it’s listed as a threatened species and afforded legal protection. In the Driftless Area of Northwest Illinois where I study, I know of only three viable populations. I consider a viable population to have 50-100 snakes. Admittedly, I haven’t surveyed this entire corner of the state but would be surprised if there were more than six viable populations left. Throughout its Upper Mississippi River range, most populations are isolated and losing ground as development encroaches.

It took a commitment to save the bald eagle, eventually chosen as our country’s emblem. Timber rattlesnakes, truly American symbols of wild blufflands, deserve to have protection for their remaining populations, too, lest we lose them forever.

For additional citations for this story or for any questions, I can be reached at timberrattlesnake@gmail.com

Brian has a bachelor's degree in zoology from the University of Illinois, and master's in biology from Western Illinois University. His research on timber rattlesnakes began 50 years ago, and he co-authored the Illinois section of the Timber Rattlesnake Conservation Action Plan for the U.S.



Some dens are located in hill prairie rock outcrops such as this. (Photo by Brian Bielema)

Reflections on Living in the Moment

By Chuck Wemstrom

Today, I went through some of my coffee table books and found one more that you'll love. Today, we're going to go to Japan, and we're going to remember to live in the moment. What does all of this have to do with prairies in the Driftless Area? Lots.

Years ago, Rich Mattas and I were picking seed at Rickie and Jim Rachuy's Lonetree Prairie in Northwest Illinois. Over the years, they have taken an old run-down farm and turned the crop ground into a beautiful prairie. Actually a model of how restoration is done—lots of science and lots of love. We both stopped – exhilarated – and looked around. It was one of those drop-dead gorgeous October days. The sun was shining but not too brightly; there was a soft gentle wind; the sky was clear, bright blue but soft at the same time. Rich turned to me as he grabbed another seed head, nodded toward the sky and said: "This is what it's all about."

Another time, the same kind of perfect day, Ed Strenski and I were part of a NIPE crew picking seed, and when we passed, he said: "Incredible." Years later, he said days such as this convinced him to retire early, move to the country and plant prairies for the rest of his life.

In *Kyoto in Seasons*, the photographer, Katsutoshi Okada, tells the same story about the natural world with pictures. There's no English text except each work has a short title – "Morning," "Evening," "Fog," etc. It's just you and the photos.

Kyoto is the ancient capital of Japan, and it's still world famous for its gardens, pagodas and surrounding hills. The pictures of the sky, the rising and setting sun, the mists and fog, the cascading falls and rushing streams, the blossoms on the trees and bushes, are beautiful. Okada's pictures show feelings - from petals that coat the ground like snow to otherworldly bright red maple trees. You won't be able to turn the page even when you know that the next page has an even lovelier photo. I'm not suggesting that we all run out and plant Japanese maples, but after seeing the pictures you'll agree that in their natural place they're some of the most beautiful trees in the world.

The colors are incredible. In one picture, a bamboo tree is growing along a mountain path. The color of that one bamboo trunk immortalized by the photographer at just the right moment defies words. In your mind's eye, as you imagine walking ever so slowly down the path in the bamboo forest, you may have the sudden urge to get up, go outside and slowly walk around your own prairie, regardless of the season.



(Photos from the book "*Kyoto in Seasons*" by photographer Katsutoshi Okada)

Okada shows us - reminds us - that all seasons in their own way are beautiful. In Japan and in America alike, we need to be reminded to slow down. And, like Ed and Rich, pause for a moment and revel in the beauty of the day, the sky, the sun, the prairie and one another's company. Okada can help us. Take your time. Just a few pages and go back, revisit your favorites and leave the rest for the next time and the time after that. You'll want it on your coffee table, not to show off but to remind you.

As you marvel at the pictures, see the beauty even in rain, fog, mist, cold, in different seasons, in different times of day. And what is the most beautiful? That's the point. Beauty can't be ranked.

Okada reminds us every day is beautiful.



Leafminers of North America – Book Review

By MJ Hatfield

In July 2015, naturalist Charley Eiseman, co-author of *"Tracks & Sign of Insects,"* and his naturalist wife, Julia Blyth, traveled through portions of the Midwest in search of leafminers. He spent time in Wisconsin, Minnesota and Iowa, hosted by TPE members.

One of Eiseman's finds was a leafmining fly, a new species, *Phytomyza hatfieldae* (www.bugguide.net/node/view/1591041). Last June, Eiseman and Blyth again visited the Midwest filling in gaps for the 2nd edition of on-line book *"Leafminers of North America"* (\$90 on-line copy at charleyeiseman.com/leafminers/).



(L-R) Cory Peters, WI-DNR State Natural Area Crew Leader, Julia Blyth, John van der Linden & Charley Eiseman search for leafminers at Hogback Prairie State Natural Area, Crawford County, Wis. (Photo by MJ Hatfield)

I'm writing this because I want you to know
That I am always looking now, and so I am seeing
The loud happy flower-fly raiding the cup plant,
The egg-heavy praying mantis hanging from the top barn-beam,
The bright velvet ant scrambling sideways out of the firepit,
The tiny black beetle tumbling over the face of the sunflower,
The bumblebee announcing her route through the clover,
The grasshoppers flipping open and shut, quick as conjurers,
The intent black wasps examining the garage door,
The brilliant green bees inspecting the mud nests,
The fast dragonflies angling over the tops of the grasses.
Everywhere, they are everywhere I look,
Intricate bits of carbon brighter than diamonds,
Glittering, squirming, darting, soaring, singing,
Ahead of me, behind me, above me, below me,
Ordinary as magic, extraordinary as joy.

Cindy Hildebrand
Summer 2012

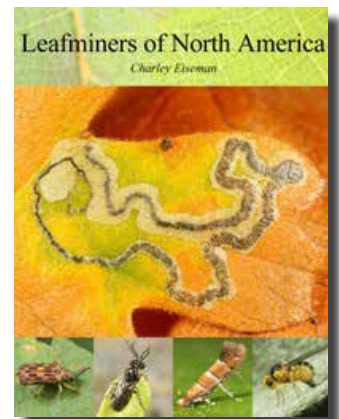
Leafminers are larvae of certain moths, flies, beetles and sawflies that feed between the epidermal layers of leaves. These insects are typically quite host-specific, and the form of the mine varies considerably depending on what insect produces it. As a result, it is often possible to identify the responsible insect using only the hostplant and mine characteristics.

The searchable 1,857-page guide includes a 54-page table of contents, 20-page glossary, 68-page bibliography and thousands of color photographs.

The book provides an overview of leaf-mining groups, the biology of leafminers, and distinguishing features of their mines - from larvae, on structures other than leaves, depth and vertical position, and shapes.

Per Eiseman's website: "For more than a decade, I've been compiling all of the published natural history information for leafminers occurring in the continental US and Canada, integrating my own observations and rearing records, as well as those from various online sources. I have traveled extensively to search for leafminers in different bioregions, and have written or coauthored over 30 peer-reviewed publications documenting some of my new discoveries, including the description of over 50 new species."

During Eiseman and Blythe's most recent visit to the Midwest, they were joined in the field with Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation interns, State Natural Area staff and field crews at Hogback Prairie State Natural Area in Crawford County, Wis.



"Leafminers of North America" (\$90 on-line copy at charleyeiseman.com/leafminers/)



An adult *Eriocraniidae*, a moth whose larva mines in newly opened oak leaves in the spring. (Photos by Charley Eiseman)

Prairie Promoter Remembered - Beth Pomaro

Meribeth "Beth" Pomaro, 76, of Rockford, Ill., died Jan. 15, 2020. She was born in Blue Island, Ill., the daughter of Ray W. Williams Jr. and Margaret Fredricksen. Meribeth was the oldest of six girls. After high school, Beth studied at the Walther Memorial Hospital School of Nursing in Chicago. She graduated as a Registered Nurse Aug. 2, 1964 and worked in nursing for more than 20 years.

In 1991, Beth and her husband, Russ, bought property and built their "dream house" in The Galena Territory where they lived for the next 20 years. Traveling from Galena, Beth attended classes at the Morton Arboretum, Lisle, Ill., and achieved a Naturalist Certificate in 2003. The knowledge she

gained was used in the conservation programs in Jo Daviess County. She was a Galena Territory Greenspace member, a Natural Area Guardian, and a Lost Mound Corps of Discovery participant. Beth and Russ were active members of The Prairie Enthusiasts. Beth helped with prairie burns and led her friends and neighbors by example in landscaping with native plants. In November 2015, Russ and Beth moved to the Peterson Meadows Retirement Community in Rockford.

Online condolences available at www.fitzgeraldfh.com



Welcome New Members

October 1, 2019- February 16, 2020

Richard and Kelle Anderson
Adrian Barta and Kadi Row
Martha Barta
Alexander Belisle
Madison Belland
Silas, Lydia, Lewis, and Ira Bergen
Jered Bourquin
Alisa Cahill
Daniel Carter
Connie Champnoise
Tom Davis
David De Bauche
Anna DeMers
Joni Denker
John Durbrow and Karen Steingraber
Thomas Ellenbecker
Karen Ellzey
Alan Eppers
John Feters
Daniel Fisher
Ken and Rhonda Frank
Brooke Frederickson
Annette Gelbach
Jennifer Grommes

Jane Haag
Greg Heberlein
Glenn Heins
Brian Herian
Joan Hoy
Victor and Carol Illichmann
Lynn Jacobson and Matthew Connell
Erynn Jenzen
Elliot Johnson
Erin Lamley
Brooke and Jon Lewis
Kafryn Lieder
Wah Wah Lwin
Leanne Martin
Gretchen Meyer
Laura Morland
Andy Nelson
Michelle Nightoak and Dale Ivarie
Kaitlyn O'Connor
Maralee Olson
Stephen Packard and Linda Masters
Jan and Jim Papa
Mary Penn
John Peterson
Levi Plath

Jake Pulfer
Eric Ratering
Caitlin Reinartz
Cecile Resop
Cassie Richardson
Nathan Robertson
Michaela Rosenthal
Tom Schmidt
Mikaylah Shealer
J. Todd Shumate
Aditi Sinha
Carol and Michael Shank
Mary Sobol
Dawn-Marie Staccia
Tripp and Allison Stroud
Meg Wise & David Tenenbaum
Dave and Vicki Terpstra
Erik Thomsen
Gof Thomson
Elizabeth Usborne
David Van Dyke
Rachel Walsh
William Walter and Ann Campoll
Scott Western

**Save the
Dates**
**North American
Prairie Conference**



Keynote and featured speakers

- Symposia
- Field trips
- Concurrent sessions

www.northamericanprairie.org

'Shining Oaks' with TPE Easement for Sale

By Laura Cotting

We are beginning our preparations to sell the Ellis Trust property known as Shining Oaks. My siblings and I hope for a buyer with similar morals and principles regarding caring for the land as our parents, and who would carry on their vision for the land as a preserve and educational tool.

We decided a good way to tilt the odds in favor of this happy outcome is to offer a private sale to members of TPE. The offer will be good for a limited time. If no one is interested, we will list the property publicly through a Realtor. The asking price for TPE members is \$665,000, but we welcome any reasonable offer from seriously interested, qualified buyers.

Although our asking price reflects avoidance of real estate commissions, we will still work with a qualified legal representative to ensure all legal requirements are met. This offer is good until May 1 after which it will be publicly listed.

Here is a description of the property:

The 48.42-acre property is located in a desirable rural setting about 5 miles south of the village of Cambridge, Wis. The property includes a well-maintained single-family dwelling, and the land is comprised primarily of vacant woods and agricultural land. The property is in Sumner Township and the Cambridge School District. It's within a 30-minute commute to Madison.



Shining Oak Savanna



Rear of home



Separate pole barn

The ranch-style house was built in 1988 and needs no repairs or remodeling. The above-ground living space is 2,117 square feet, and has six rooms - 3 bedrooms and 2.5 bathrooms. The basement area is also 2,117 square feet and partially finished with a full bath. Heating is LP gas with supplemental electric heat pump, a brand new furnace installed this January. There is a private well and septic system.

Amenities include central air conditioning, an attached two-car garage, fireplace, three-season screened porch, large deck, finished, carpeted loft with skylight windows, and laundry/utility room. Floors are either tile or carpet. Appliances include a dishwasher, disposal, washing and drying machines. Access is via a short blacktop driveway, and the house is fronted by a blacktop parking lot that can easily accommodate about 10 cars. Adjacent to the parking lot is a large metal Cleary outbuilding, built about 2005.

Unique features of the property include:

- The house itself has never had any pets within it.
- Home and property have some of the best views the area has to offer. The marvelous vista from the dining room provides front row seats to watch birds, deer, otters and other wildlife using the pond and grounds.
- Its geography is a central wetland bounded by drumlins and eskers, and two small unnamed creeks flowing through the middle.
- Unusual plant species include kitten's-tails, bottle gentian and turtlehead.
- There is a network of maintained trails suitable for hiking and mountain biking.
- Forty-six of the acres are protected by a conservation easement owned by TPE. The conservation work is performed by volunteers of the Glacial Prairie chapter, and paid for by an endowment made by our parents.

Interested buyers can email Andy Ellis at Andy.dba@gmail.com or leave him a voicemail at 608-347-5663.



Blue Bottle gentian on the property



Blanding's turtle crawls around the property.

32nd Annual Conference & Banquet

By Jack Kussmaul

Nearly 260 prairie enthusiasts gathered Feb. 29 on a beautiful leap-year day at UW-Platteville campus for the 32nd annual TPE Conference and Banquet.

Hosted by the Southwest and Prairie Bluff chapters, with coordination by Chapter Support staff, the team gained access to the building at 6:30 a.m. and scrambled to open for continental breakfast, raffle ticket sale and silent auction displays by 8 a.m.

The keynote address, "Following Flames from Prairie Bluffs to Backwater Pines," by Dr. Lytton John Musselman, Professor of Botany at Virginia's Old Dominion University in Norfolk, peppered humor and research as he compared Midwest prairies and savannas with Virginia's long-leaf pine ecosystem. Both are fire dependent.

Breakout sessions followed in the morning and after lunch. Attendees had three options each hour. Topics included control of invasives, building conservation communities, turtles, timber rattlesnakes and more. In the afternoon, participants had a choice of panel discussions: "Common problems and solutions among conservation organizations," and "Planting seeds: Using programs and social media to foster a love of prairies among all generations."

Everyone appreciated the live music of John Peterson during lunch.

Time was allotted for socializing, exploring exhibits, bidding on silent auction items, and strategically spreading raffle tickets among dozens and dozens of items. According to Evanne Hunt, Board member, the silent auction brought in \$3,469, the raffle \$2,832, with a grand total of \$6,301 to be shared among host chapters.

The banquet dinner included pasta bar followed by the popular chocolate fountain. In the evening, a representative from each chapter gave a brief account of its activities for the



Board President Scott Fulton presents TPE Chapter Volunteer of the Year Award to Sue Steinmann (and Bill Weege, not pictured) for their work protecting the Rattlesnake Ridge Preserve.

year. Executive Director Chris Kirkpatrick spoke to the group about the new initiatives TPE plans with a US Wildlife Services grant of \$245,000. He also described the new capabilities of the recently acquired NationBuilder computer program.

The winner of this year's photo contest was Sue Steinmann's

"The Beauty of the Burn." Haiku winner by Madison Belland was:

They speak, I listen
A strong voice for the voiceless
"Restoration"

Volunteers were honored through the night's program.

Three chapters awarded "Volunteers of the Year" - Empire-Sauk chose Ron Endres, Minnesota Driftless honored Gabe Erickson, and Southwest celebrated Martha and Steve Querin-Schultz.

Awards continued with overall TPE Chapter Volunteer of the Year

Award given to Sue Steinmann and Bill Weege for their tireless work in protecting the Rattlesnake Ridge Preserve. The program ended with Gary Eldred surprising Scott Fulton with a Jonathan Wilde original painting in appreciation of his extraordinary service to the organization during his tenure as Board President.

Keynote speaker Dr. Lytton John Musselman, professor of botany at Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Va.



John Peterson performed beautifully on the guitar and mandolin during lunch. (Photos by Jerry Newman)



Greg Schmidt, private lands' biologist with Iowa DNR, presents on the timber rattlesnake.

Thank you Sponsors:



The Higher Calling of Kevin Clinton

By Jim Vonderharr

In the 1840s, John Quirk, a young Irishman and his family fled Ireland to Liverpool, England to escape from the Irish Potato Famine. His journey continued to the United States through the port of Boston with a stop in Pittsburgh. Eventually, Quirk settled in St. Peter, Minn., where he met his also-Irish immigrant wife, Margaret. They raised 13 children together.

In 1856, two years before Minnesota became a state, Quirk purchased a parcel of native prairie in Le Sueur County, Minn., north of Lake Washington. Over the years, he turned the land into a typical 19th century farm - growing crops and raising livestock, and everyone in the large family played a vital role. Quirk also utilized the abundance of wild game and local fish to supplement the family's diet. This farm remained in the family for four generations.

Quirk's current descendants include his great-grandson Kevin Clinton and his sister. Kevin recently retired as a Catholic priest and resides in Montgomery, Minn., after 14 years of service at St. Wenceslaus parish in New Prague. His vision of restoring part of his great-grandfather's land to prairie started in 1994.

The Rev. Clinton has converted 70 acres of the farm into prairie, which consists of 25 acres of native tall grasses and five more to be added soon. There's also 40 acres of native trees - a remnant woods that served as pasture for most of the farm's history. Thirty of the 70 acres are currently enrolled in Reinvest in Minnesota, a program that will protect and preserve the land into the future. Kevin's long-term goal is to find mechanisms to also protect the rest of his restoration.

The property is home to three ponds that provide habitat for many varieties of nature's wild residents. An unnamed creek meanders through the land, spills into a small pond contained by a rock dam, and discharges into Lake Washington. The water flowing in this channel is from a watershed

that ranges well beyond the Clinton farm's boundaries. This pond/dam system controls the flow into Lake Washington and filters and settles out much of the contaminants

coming from the land outside the farm's boundaries. There is also a cell phone tower on the property, situated on the highest point between lakes Washington and Jefferson. This structure has been home for the last seven years to a pair of Osprey, which has fledged a new family every year.

Kevin has named his prairie *Ladato Si'* (On Care for Our Common Home), in honor of Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical of the same name. The Pope's plea is an "urgent challenge to protect our common home ... to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change."

Now, years later, part of John Quirk's farm has been restored to a prairie that closely resembles the property he originally purchased. Kevin frequently states: "I think my great grandfather would approve of and be proud of what I have done to his piece of Le Sueur County. He had great respect for the diversity and abundance of his adopted Minnesota home."

The circle of creation has been completed.

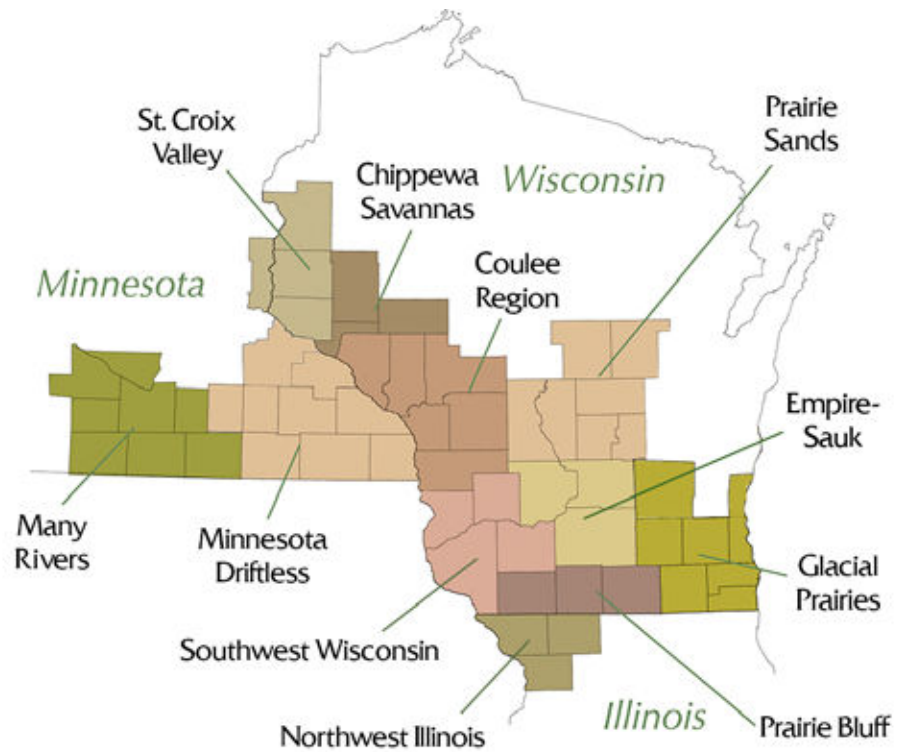


The Rev. Kevin Clinton on his land with Matt Lasch of Applied Ecological Services (AES). (Photos courtesy Kevin Clinton)



Ladato Si' (On Care for Our Common Home) Prairie was inspired by Pope Francis as a way to "bring the whole human family together."

Chapter Updates



Chippewa Savannas

Caroljean Coventry

This year we had our annual Tiffany Bottom Train ride fundraiser in September due to a lightning storm in May. The change was delightful, and our experts made it informative.

This spring, we will be again sponsoring the Tiffany Train Ride on May 16. Contact me at theprairieenthusiasts.csc@gmail.com or 715-698-2609 for more information.

Last autumn, we also continued working on our two project areas - Dobbs Landing and Seymour Prairie. We had the fire that wasn't much of a fire (occasionally prescribed burns do fail!) We collected seed at both sites. Also, Joe Mauer led lupine seed collecting along Hwy. 53 and later broadcast the pods at Seymour. All season Joe kept us informed about what was ready for seed picking. Texts with pictures were a treat.

On a cold blustery day in November, we sowed seeds at Dobbs that had been collected by John Thomas and Kathy Ruggles from their prairies and seeds purchased with grant funds. We're hoping the little bluestem and a few hardy forbs, such as common milkweed, will colonize and stabilize degraded areas where we have done spotted knapweed removal and logging.

Annemarie McClellan and Ruggles seeded around the oxbow and the large pond. They also covered the boggy areas in the former woodland. Thomas, Mark Leach, Matt Wysocki, Kathy Stahl and Lee Boland seeded the southern degraded area and between the low woods and the large pond. Despite raw weather conditions, we had fun. Trumpeter swans flew overhead, and Kathy Stahl provided snacks. We are amazed we accomplished so much (seeding approximately seven acres) with our small, hardy crew!

Big thanks to Matt Wysocki who has learned the new TPE software Nation Builder and has sent wonderful online updates to our members. In other good news, we have preliminary approval on a new \$25,000 grant from USFW for restoration work at Dobbs. We will begin a new area of restoration when we receive final confirmation. Thanks to Kathy Stahl for pursuing this grant!

We will host a training for folks who want to volunteer as crew members on our burns or who are interested in learning more about prescribed burning. Come join us 9 a.m. – noon April 18 at the Dunn Town Hall, E4583 County Road C, Downsview, Wis. Weather permitting, we will burn a prairie after the indoor class instruction. \$25 for members, \$35 for non-members, \$10 for students. For more information contact Kathy at kathyaruggles@gmail.com or 715-664-8368.



John Thomas broadcasts seed at Dobbs Landing, Colfax, Wis. (Photo by Kathy Stahl)

Coulee Region

Jon Rigden

In August 2019, the Coulee Region Chapter, in conjunction with a local group called Friends of the Blufflands, developed a management plan for a remnant prairie called Zoerb Prairie on land owned by the City of La Crosse. The plan was presented to the city and approved in October.

Zoerb Prairie is within Hixon Forest, which includes more than 800 acres of forested land that was protected by private citizens and donated to the City over 100 years ago. Hixon Forest is surrounded by an additional 1,000-plus acres protected through the La Crosse Blufflands Protection Program. Hixon Forest has several remnant prairies on the bluffs east of La Crosse, one of which is Zoerb.

Zoerb Prairie is 2.8 acres, with about 1.25 acres still open and the rest being a buffer zone. As is typical, it faces south and southwest and has dry, thin, rocky soil. Over the years, sporadic efforts have been made by various groups to manage the prairie through clearing woody species and burning. Now, however, Friends of the Blufflands has agreed to become the dedicated site steward and will systematically follow the management plan in a coordinated fashion, with the help and guidance of TPE.



Zoerb Prairie in La Crosse, Wis., contains hoary puccoon, smooth cliff brake and white camass among other important prairie plants.

The primary goal will be to recover and maintain as much of the original prairie as possible and possibly to expand the prairie enough to link up with other nearby similar prairies in the future. Notable plants found on Zoerb Prairie include smooth cliff brake, hoary puccoon, short green milkweed, silky and aromatic asters, white camass, and jeweled shooting star. If you would like to be involved in this effort, contact me Jon Rigden (jonathanrigden@me.com) or Jim Rogala (jrogala58@gmail.com).

Empire-Sauk

Ted Cochrane

Fall 2019 Badger Volunteer Activities

Last fall, our chapter entered into its seventh year as one of some 80 local community partners with the UW-Madison's "Badger Volunteers" program. A team of three undergraduate students, Hannah Mitchell (team liaison; Environmental Studies and History double major), Josephine Ballata (major undecided) and Owen Zinkgraf (Computer Science and Economics), volunteered for three hours (including travel time) each Tuesday afternoon over the course of the semester, joining TPE supervisors Ted Cochrane, Denny Connor and Randy Hoffman on work parties. Students recruited through the program offer their talent and labor while gaining access to the knowledge and resources generated by the hosting organization.

The work parties took place on TPE's Hauser Road Prairie and Groundswell Conservancy's Westport Prairie. TPE not only provided necessary equipment and supplies, but also shuttled the students back and forth between the campus and work sites. The six of us spent a total of 81 hours at eight outdoor sessions. Three sessions were canceled due to inclement weather. The unseasonably cold, wet fall prevented us from demonstrating a test burn, let alone conducting a small, prescribed burn. And weather kept a farmer from harvesting the field that we wanted for a proposed new



Student volunteers (L-R) Josephine Ballata, Owen Zinkgraf and Hannah Mitchell, displaying tools of the trade. (Photo by Ted Cochrane)



Hannah Mitchell wields a brush cutter while the ever vigilant Denny Connor looks on. (Photo by Owen Zinkgraf)

buffer strip, thwarting our desire to sow seed. (Our seed mix was saved for later sowing by Groundswell staff and volunteers.)

At the first meeting, volunteers were told about TPE and given background information on the Empire prairies and the subject of restoration ecology. They were then informed early sessions would consist of collecting native seed for sowing in an ecological restoration project, emphasis being given not only to collection methods, but also the importance of using locally adapted seed. The rest of the meeting and the next two were devoted to collecting seed, followed by one that primarily involved the mowing of burn breaks but also included a demonstration of other equipment and a lecture on species composition of prairies and making site-appropriate seed mixes. Subsequent tasks consisted of cutting, treating and piling brush and small trees (three sessions) and finally, mixing seed and burning a brush pile (one session). Students relished their turns working with power tools while the others used hand tools.

Meetings often began with brief discussions, delivered in transit or on site, of the definitions and distributions of Wisconsin prairies and related communities; differences in species composition along the vegetational gradient; purposes and types of firebreaks; and cutting and treating undesirable woody vegetation. Although disappointed by our inability to pay more attention to prescribed burning, the volunteers said they "thoroughly enjoyed" learning about prairie communities and participating in hands-on conservation work while relishing contact with natural habitats. TPE is very grateful to Mitchell, Ballata and Zinkgraf for their help in contributing to our restoration efforts.

Education, Education, Education

Grace Vosen

The chapter's education committee recently celebrated its first birthday. Chaired by Pat Trochlell, this committee formed late in 2018 with the goal of expanding education and outreach efforts in our chapter area.

The group has some exciting plans for 2020, including a suite of prairie restoration and ecology workshops. Some members are also instructors in the Wisconsin Master Naturalist Program. This will be the fifth year that a Master Naturalist Volunteer training has been held at Schurch-Thomson Prairie. Additional field trips, connections with local schools, and hands-on learning opportunities are in the works.

We are always looking for more voices to add to the conversation. The education committee meets once a month in Middleton, usually on a Wednesday evening. Email Pat at ptrochlell@gmail.com for more information.

Glacial Prairie

Rob Baller

Students Fired up by Burn School

Despite snow, 25 students learned the basics of prescribed fire at the 3rd Glacial Prairie burn school for newbies Nov. 9, 2019 at the UW-Milwaukee - Waukesha Field Station. The day was organized by chapter chair Alice Mirk with cooperation from field station director Teresa Schueller, whose students attended.

Scott Fulton and Rob Baller of TPE taught the class. All were grateful for Mirk's delicious homemade cookies, and emergency lunch pasties. Because of the snow, the students gathered in the driveway and ignited a single shock of little bluestem, which was promptly extinguished by an earnest student. Outdoor burn practice to be continued.



TPE Board President Scott Fulton teaches basic fire at the UW-Field Station near Oconomowoc. (Photo by Rob Baller)

Glacial Prairie 2019 in Review

Alice Mirk

In addition to the burn school, we continue our strong relationships with owners of permanently protected land, as well as our relationship with the WI-DNR, working on state natural areas. In 2019, we worked at Adams Birding Conservancy, Willowbrook Conservancy, Shining Oaks Conservancy, Waukesha's Prairie Home Cemetery, Dousman Inn Historic Park, UWM-Waukesha Field station and state natural areas in the Southern Kettle Moraine State Forest. Our work parties waged war against buckthorn and other invasive species and collected seed to replant degraded areas.

Our focus on education continues with presentations to adult groups around the area. The chapter has developed several PowerPoint presentations that are tailored to prairie enthusiasts, garden clubs interested in natural landscaping and of course, children. The Chapter has developed a comprehensive Wisconsin prairie and oak savanna curriculum that can be adapted by educators and is available at no cost. The curriculum was reviewed by professors at UW-M Waukesha and UW-Whitewater, as well as two retired WDNR scientists. It is already in use by several grade schools and high schools, as well as one UW undergraduate biology class. For more information please contact me, chapter chair, Alice Mirk.

Plans for 2020

As well as continuing our current landowner relationships, the chapter is embarking on a new relationship with UW-Milwaukee. The university owns a six-acre prairie in Kenosha County called Benedict Prairie. This is an original remnant of mesic prairie that contains some areas badly overgrown with brush and some areas of encroaching reed canary grass. In partnership with UW-Milwaukee, we are coordinating a rescue mission with interested people in Southeast Wisconsin. We are planning a burn and some brush cutting and other management activities to restore this remnant of virgin prairie.

The Chapter is also planning a second prairie and oak savanna curriculum, this time focusing on Minnesota. We believe that both children and adults should appreciate and learn about the natural landscapes that covered the Midwest before European settlement. Curricula for Illinois and Iowa are also in various stages of development.



Benedict prairie. (Photo courtesy UW-Milwaukee)



Prairie burn. (Photo courtesy Zach Kastern)

Many Rivers

Jim Vonderharr

To review 2019, our chapter had quite a bit of activity despite limitations of a wet summer.

Highlights include:

- Five work days – removing brush, pulling weedy invasive species, etc.
- Seven controlled burns
- Many trips to New Ulm School District to continue our commitment to establish demonstration and teaching prairie plots.
- Our annual summer picnic and chapter meeting at Brad and Michelle Gaard's gorgeous New Ulm home and prairie.

Fall weather limited our burn plans. But still, 2020 starts with a couple of scheduled membership meetings and excited expectations of spring, the revival of our prairies and big plans for the next growing season.

Northwest Illinois

Pam Richards

NIPE members have collected, processed and distributed more than 2,000 pounds of prairie seed for the 2019 season.

Due to the inclement weather, the 35-acre Oneota Prairie was seeded on snow in January 2020 by tractor. This was another section of an ongoing planting of a 114-acre prairie parcel owned by the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation. NIPE is clearing a fence line of invasive species at Lewis Prairie in concert with staff from the IL-DNR, which owns adjacent property. These prairies are all in the Hanover, Ill., area.

Meanwhile in Galena, there is ongoing clearing on Richardson's property, a 40-acre timber area contiguous to Horseshoe Mound, which has a TPE easement.

NIPE staff and volunteers also continue eradication of invasives on several smaller prairies. An encouraging development this year was the formation of a multi-agency co-op for northern Illinois. This group has shared "blitz days," working together to ease the burden of managing multiple sites. NIPE is one of those participants, and we enjoy working with kindred spirits!



NIPE members, part of the Northwest Illinois Land Stewardship Co-op at a "blitz" burn day. (Photos by Pam Richards)



Barb Siekowski (NIPE's prairie seed diva) organizes the rare seed bags during the harvest and planting this year.



NIPE members Becky Janopoulos, Kyle Van den Bosch and John Arndt mill seed on collection day.



Dust fills the air as NIPE members Ed Strenski, John Arndt and Jim Richards mix seeds.

Prairie Bluff

Chris Roberts

We celebrated with a Holiday get together in early December, which was well attended. As they used to say - a good time was had by all.

We were rained and snowed out for the fall burn season, having only two burn days during which we burned three units. We are hoping for better luck in the spring. We also expanded our workdays from the traditional Mondays, adding Tuesdays and Wednesdays as weather permits.

Winter, and wet, weather have slowed us down considerably. We have spent a number of workdays at Skinner Prairie clearing out a large prickly ash infestation, many hours of hands-and-knees chainsaw work and a lot of hauling cuttings to burn piles.

The result is very rewarding. We can now see through the ravine from one side to the other. The dugout in the side of the ravine where Skinner over-wintered has also been freed of invasive growth. Two new additions to the prairie remnants we care for, an addition to Avon Ridge and the donation of Meinert Prairie, have given new opportunities for us to expand our experience in restoration and management. Both present their own set of challenges to be resolved.

Pulling old fencing out at the land purchased to add to Muralt and Ilitis prairies, and the new remnant at Avon Ridge, netted us more than \$7 from the recycling center in Monroe. We are still discussing how to spend our new-found wealth.

Prairie Sands

Ray Goehring

Parties & Seeds = Success

Twenty-two chapter members celebrated the holidays with their traditional Holiday Party and Seed Exchange. This year it was held at Two20Main Bistro, Wautoma, where we dined on flatbread pizza, salad, garlic bread and chocolate chip cookies.

The guest speaker was Jeb Barzen from Private Lands Conservation Services and also the instructor of our annual Prescription Burn Training Class. He spoke not only of the importance of prescribed burns in restoration ecology but of the importance of training to make sure you are safely conducting the burn. He pointed out that an escaped burn lives



Jeb Barzen of Private Lands Conservation Services spoke after our buffet dinner on the importance of prescribed burns in restoration ecology. (Photos by Ray Goehring)

on for decades in the community's memory.

After Jeb's talk, we had a short meeting and then a seed exchange. You can find the minutes on the chapter page of TPE's website or email Ray Goehring at raygoe@yahoo.com for a copy.

Our chapter is in the process of organizing field trips and workdays for the 2020 season and as of this printing already have three scheduled for spring. More information for these can be found on the website or the TPE Field Trip Calendar.

Southwest

Jack Kussmaul

While things have been relatively quiet for the Southwest Chapter during this winter season, we have a busy schedule planned for the summer and fall.

The weekly crew has continued to work at Eldred Prairie. With funds from the Double Oak Endowment, Walter Mirk has been able to hire David Lowe to assist him in expanding the prairie and oak savanna at the top of the hill. On one glorious, sunny day in October, we had a work party there to assist on the project. The challenge is the long climb up the bluff to get to the site.

We had one work party at Eldred, cutting and treating brush for the purpose of expanding the prairie area. We had a restoration class from UW-Plattville scheduled to come to Eldred to work and learn. Unfortunately, it had to cancel due to illness of the professor.

In November, we had a chapter retreat at the Castle Ridge (Wisc.) Restaurant. We had a good turnout, and lots of ideas were tossed out for 2020. We continued this discussion in the course of a pot-luck at the home of Steve and Martha Querin-Schultz on Jan. 21.

In addition to our regular work parties, we are planning two, day-long tours of private remnant and restoration sites in August, a program on turtles in June, a reception for wildlife artist Mike Riddet and a showing of "Decoding the Driftless." Other ideas are being tossed about. We are all excited about these new events.



In addition to food and spirits, a few fresh ideas for 2020 came together at recent Southwest Chapter gatherings.



Steve Querin-Schultz and Gary Eldred celebrate at the 2019 holiday party. (Photos by Martha Querin-Schultz)

I would be remiss if I did not mention our holiday dinner at the Castle Ridge Inn. We had 18 people, including a few new faces, which are always welcome.

St. Croix Valley

Evanne Hunt

Conversations in the Valley

On Feb. 8, eight chapter members and potential members met at Ziggy's Restaurant and Bar in downtown Hudson. The purpose was to have two conversations: one with Gary Eldred to share observations and questions about climate change, and the second with Scott Fulton, TPE Board President, on the new Landowner Services Program.

Gary and the crowd discussed questions such as: "Do warmer winters impact plant and seed dormancy? Does increased rainfall impact pollination?" Gary brought his 40-plus years of experience and observation, but was eager to hear what others had experienced.

Scott explained the new TPE Landowner Services Program to be implemented in 2020. The landowners present explained what information and help they need to successfully plant a prairie or restore a degraded prairie on their land. The new program is funded by a \$245,000 grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) - see Executive Director's report, Page 2.

Alexander Oak Savanna Goals

Immediately after TPE acquired the Alexander property in 2018 - through a generous bargain sale by Dick and Joan Alexander - our chapter formulated goals and long-term plans for the site.

Of course, we continued to clear buckthorn and other invasive trees, as we have done for the past 20 years. In fact, since the sale in 2018, volunteers have contributed 455 hours to burning, clearing and spreading seed collected by UW-River Falls students.

Our long-term plan is to convert the eight-acre agriculture field to the south into a prairie seed orchard. We will spend 2020 collecting local ecotype seed. In 2021, we will have volunteers spread the seed in a frost planting onto the field. We expect to have plenty of seed for our use within two-to-three years.

The 43-acre Alexander oak savanna is a gem. It's one of the largest restored dry-mesic prairie and oak savanna complexes in our chapter's geographic area. We have identified 120 native species on the site, including buffalo bean, kittentails and prairie turnip - all threatened or of special concern in Wisconsin. Previously documented but yet to be rediscovered at the site are the endangered species Carolina anemone and prairie bushclover. The prairie turnip was a new discovery in 2018, showing promise for the possible rediscovery of the prairie bushclover and Carolina anemone with further site management.



UW-Fall River students cleaning seed.



Aerial photo of Alexander agricultural field, which will be turned into a prairie seed nursery in coming years. (Photos by Evanne Hunt)

Thank You Donors

We thank the following who donated to TPE between October 1, 2019 - February 16, 2020.
These gifts include those from our annual appeal, are beyond membership dues
and are truly generous and appreciated.

\$1000 or more

Marilyn and James Anderson
to the Northwest Illinois
Prairie Enthusiasts
Richard and Kelle Anderson
to Prairie Education Fund in
recognition of Ron Endres'
service to building prairies
Anonymous
to the Empire-Sauk chapter
for the Hanley Farm Trust
acquisition
Mark and Jennell Ballering
Compass Club
Jon & Metta Belisle
from the St. Croix Valley
Foundation to the St. Croix
Valley Chapter from the Valley
Impact Environment & Animal
Fund
Jon & Metta Belisle
from the St. Croix Valley
Foundation to the Coulee
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Kathie & Tom Brock
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for the Hanley Trust property
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Compass Club
Jack Kussmaul
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Doris Rusch
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Doug Steege & Kris Euclide
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for Land Management at
West Dane Conservancy
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Sue Steinmann & Bill Weege
land addition to Rattlesnake
Ridge
Joan and Dennis Thomson
to the Empire-Sauk chapter
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Willi Van Haren
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Ken Wade and Pat Trochlell
to the Empire-Sauk chapter for
land management at Pleasure
Valley Conservancy and
Parrish Savanna
Ken Wade and Pat Trochlell
to the Empire-Sauk chapter
Thomas and Eva Wedel
to the Empire-Sauk chapter
in honor of Pat Trochlell and
Tom Bernthal
Wedel Oak Woods Foundation,
Inc.
to the Empire-Sauk chapter
for the Hanley Farm Trust
acquisition in honor of Pat
Trochlell and Tom Bernthal
Beth Whitaker
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