The PRAIRIE PROMOTER

Igniting Relationships with the Land

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The
PRAIRIE PROMOTER

Igniting Relationships with the Land

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IN THIS ISSUE

The Prairie Enthusiasts

President's Message
Improving Our Internal Collaboration

Jim Rogala, President

The Prairie Enthusiasts often strive to collaborate with other like-minded agencies and organizations, but we often overlook the great opportunities to collaborate among our chapters. We have maintained our chapter structure to keep our stewardship as local as possible. That has been a very successful model. However, this model can lead to poor communication among chapters and a less than optimized use of all the talents of our volunteers across chapters. In some cases, it even leads to competition rather than a unified approach. To best achieve our mission, we need to increase that internal collaboration among chapters.

We have continued to make progress in our recent planning efforts. The overall Prairie Enthusiasts 3-year Picture and 1-year Plan are nearly completed. One of the visions in the draft 3-year Picture is: "The Prairie Enthusiasts chapters are more engaged and have regular opportunities to collaborate and learn together". That is a rather noble goal, but, like many other organizational goals, relies on success at the chapter level. Fortunately, our planning efforts include having visions and plans for each chapter. As Debra and I meet with chapters to work on plans, we bring up this point related to collaboration to encourage adding goals to enhance collaboration among chapters.

There are other efforts within our organization that are also addressing inter-chapter collaboration. Chapter Support has organized regular "Mission Advancement Collaborative" meetings where interested chapter leadership volunteers come together to discuss various topics that transcend individual chapters. Some topics covered to date have been grant opportunities and getting useful membership and financial reports to the chapters. We have also had a re-formed Education Committee that can provide an avenue for sharing education materials and programs rather than reinventing these within each chapter

Aside from the efforts being pursued by the leadership of The Prairie Enthusiasts, individuals can also play a role in increasing collaboration. Have you ever considered attending an event like a field trip or workday sponsored by a chapter other than your own? Have you learned something about managing land that can be shared across the entire membership? Is there a land acquisition project outside your home chapter area that you could donate to? These types of questions are strongly related to two of our Core Values: 1) Working Together and 2) Sharing Knowledge. I encourage all of you to help increase our internal collaboration, while still maintaining our chapter-level successes to more effectively carry out our mission. ■

Our 2022 Annual Report will be available online in August 2023!

Hanley Landscape. Photo byJohn Day

Hanley Savanna - A Work in Progress

By John Day

Prairies are — by their very nature — a work in progress. Whether a prairie is a remnant that begs for help or a new restoration that is ready to be reborn, the prairie in our time is, and will always be, a work in progress.

Hanley Savanna peacefully stretches across the horizon in northwest Illinois, tucked into the Hanover bluffs near the Mississippi River. As a restoration, many have asked, "just how old is it?" To be precise, it's about 18,000 years old. The birth of Hanley Savanna began when the Wisconsin Glaciation came to its end. Ten thousand years ago, colossal amounts of melted water came roaring south and created what is now the Upper Mississippi River Valley.

Over time, the landscape evolved, as any work-in-progress would. As the climate began to warm, forests began to retreat. The landscape changed as massive parts of the Midwest became savanna and grassland. This new landscape welcomed its first human inhabitants. Lightning strikes, as well as fires started by the new residents of the prairie, aided in the expansion of the prairie.

By the 1600's, European exploration and settlement began to have a negative effect on the landscape. Fire suppression allowed non-native species to migrate into the grasslands and woodlands. Civilization, roads, and sprawling farm fields eliminated burning in this fire dependent ecosystem. By the late 19th century, the tall grass prairie and savanna had become nearly extinct. Where a seemingly endless prairie once stretched along the mighty Mississippi, there was little evidence that it had ever existed.

The conservation movement recognized the need to restore the health of our planet, and so it began for Hanley Savanna. In 2003, The Prairie Enthusiasts Northwest Illinois Chapter (NIPE) purchased 110 acres of farmland in the Hanover Bluffs and created a conservation easement on an additional 89 adjacent acres. Over the next twenty years, Hanley Savanna would be reborn. Planted pine trees were removed. Non-native trees and bushes would be taken off the land. Determining soil types and quality and mapping out a plan was an awesome task. Because Hanley was so large and diverse in soils, NIPE gave areas within Hanley their own names: Sand Box, Bumble Bee, Roberts Prairie, Aster, and Eagle to name a few.

The reintroduction of native grasses and forbs was laborious. Barb Siekowski began working for NIPE in 2004 picking seed. Siekowski is now the Seed Collecting Coordinator. She said, "To collect certain species' seeds, volunteers often spent hours walking back roads and railroad embankments in search of wildflowers and grasses that were survivors awaiting their second chance."

Continued on Page 8

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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Cover photo is the 2023 annual photo contest winner by Gary Shackelford.

Photo by Jerry Newman

Executive Director's Message — Working Together

Debra Behrens, Executive Director

Places where large populations of violet wood sorrel bloom and blue racer snakes weave between the grass are increasingly rare. They persist through your devotion to them. This spring I was privileged to visit West Dane Conservancy for a tour with Doug Steege and Kris Euclide. I was in awe of the thriving ecosystem they are stewarding and struck by not only the decades of service they have invested, but the collective impact of many others that have been a part of their story.

Doug and Kris purchased their property in the 70's, smitten by the abundant Pasqueflower blooms. They first got a helping hand from Larry Sheaffer, a long-time prairie enthusiast who assisted them with prescribed burns and other land management. In 2011, Kris and Doug donated a perpetual conservation easement to The Prairie Enthusiasts to ensure the property would never be subdivided or developed and that the jointly developed management plan would be followed with compliance monitoring performed annually. Then, when Andy Sleger started working for The Prairie Enthusiasts, he began helping Doug and Kris liberate oak trees from brushy invasives like honeysuckle, among other heavy-duty work. The property is also enrolled in a Conservation Reserve Program through the Natural Resources Conservation Services. Many former Empire-Sauk Chapter interns recount memories of working at the site with funding for their work provided by an endowment that Kris and Doug established for management activities. The enthusiasm Doug and Kris feel for this place has inspired friends to help with prescribed burning and gathering seeds, and they frequently host educational tours. Their efforts are laudable, but at its heart, their story demonstrates how a community of people, each with their own unique ability to contribute, is stronger than even the most dedicated among us would be on our own.

Our community of prairie enthusiasts is strong because of the knowledge, experience, resources, and willingness to work that each of us contributes, according to our unique ability. That looks a little different for each of us. And your local chapter is also unique–each choosing to advance our mission with the tools and resources available. Some are rich in remnant prairies to work on. Others are abundant in volunteer interest. Some have strong partners, and others have strong leaders. The Prairie Enthusiasts Board President, Jim Rogala, and I met with each of our chapters this spring to talk about their future plans and were inspired by your grassroots energy! You see what is possible, and you are thinking creatively and resourcefully about how you can get it done. You are hungry for collaboration–opportunities to learn from one another, to share resources, and to get more done by tackling projects together.

The message for our entire community is this: right now, before it is too late, before we miss our opportunity to make a difference, before another threatened species is lost, THIS is your chance to contribute whatever you've got. We are looking for leaders, doers, artists, advocates, financial supporters, land stewards, and friends. You have something to contribute, and together we can build a thriving community that, decades from now, will inspire devotion from a future generation of budding prairie enthusiasts seeing their very first Pasqueflowers in bloom.■

2023 Spring Conservation Congress

Story and Photo by Tim Eisele

Voting results from the 2023 spring Conservation Congress questionnaire, shows public recognition of a problem when powerline companies conduct mowing and disintegration of low vegetation under powerlines during the summer.

Mowing the low vegetation, often on private land, mows down milkweed which is needed by monarch butterflies, as well as killing the newly hatched caterpillars and eggs. Milkweed is the only plant that monarch caterpillars eat.

The proposal, "that the Wisconsin Conservation Congress should advise the Department of Natural Resources Natural Heritage Conservation Bureau to request powerline companies refrain from mowing during the summer months and encourage powerline companies to work with private landowners to manage powerline vegetation that provides habitat for insects and wildlife" was passed in each of the eight counties where it was introduced.

Voting results on the proposal urging powerline companies not to mow low native vegetation in the summer was introduced as a local resolution by eight citizens in the below counties:

By mowing in mid-summer, the power companies not only destroy the plant but with it any eggs that are left on the leaves by adult monarchs. In addition, this vegetation is often native vegetation, that nobody planted under the powerlines, and the shrubs provide nesting habitat for late nesting songbirds, wild turkeys, and shade for amphibians.

A private landowner in Crawford County said that the "mowing" operation on their property last July took vegetation that was diverse and two and three feet high, including milkweed, purple milkweed, leadplant, hoary puccoon, and dogwood, and reduced it down to a moonscape.

Because of the public interest, the Conservation Congress will now consider the question and if its Land Use Advisory Committee and its Leadership Council agree, the question could be asked of the public statewide next spring.

Advocates of prairie, native vegetation, and private landowner rights should pay attention to powerline issues. For questions contact the author at timeiseleoutdoors@gmail.com. ■

County	Voted Yes	Voted No	No Opinion
Brown	102	27	50
Columbia	53	8	28
Crawford	11	6	0
Dane	522	42	127
Grant	22	8	2
Milwaukee	77	20	42
Ozaukee	56	16	14
Vernon	28	8	3

Mowing under this powerline where milkweed once stood was turned into a moonscape.

Bergamot

By J.M. Allen

Every mid-summer July blooms the wild bergamot.
And in southeast Minnesota, it often is found a lot.
The round flowers are lavender-ish pink.
Come out to the prairie and see what you think.

It has a minty smell, and the bees like to visit them.
They are about a yard long, to the end of their stem.
They are often found in groups or bunches.
Come out to the prairie and bring your lunches.

The coneflowers also bloom about the same time.
Show me your favorites, and I'll show you mine.
Glad it's a native plant, not an invasive pest.
Come out to the prairie and see it in its best!

Poem from Allen's book "Real Rhyming Poems" which is available at many public libraries.
Photo by Jay Olson-Goude

ANNUAL PICNIC

HOSTED BY THE MANY RIVERS CHAPTER

2023

SUNDAY, JULY 16
10AM – 5PM

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Camping:
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"I'll always remember walking through rows of cornstalks on sand prairie, looking around and thinking this will never recover. Staring at the ground I saw a prickly pear cactus. I was stunned. Today, we have bird's foot violet, hoary tick-trefoil, and sawtooth sage to name a few and all the essential plants that make Hanley a prairie."

Over time, Hanley Savanna grew and flourished. The work of removing invasive plants, collecting seed, reseeding, and tree removal as well as reintroducing regularly prescribed burns was achieved by a dedicated volunteer force. Long time volunteer, Pam Richards said, "The colors and fragrance of the prairie is something magical. Seeing the flowers return after the blaze of burning seems miraculous. It's amazing how all of this comes together. The scene is majestic. My mantra has become: Take me to the prairie."

This is the twentieth anniversary of the Hanley Savanna rebirth, and it remains a work in progress. So, let's all keep on workin'. ■

Finch nest in a compass plant. Photo by Pam Richards

Compass plant picking with NIPE volunteers. Photo by Pam Richards

Update From The Education Committee

By Jessica Bizub, Chair

Empire-Sauk Burn School. Photo by RS Baller

The Education Committee has been busy behind the scenes conducting a needs assessment to identify the gaps between where we are and where we want to go with our educational activities and resources. We've completed the first phase, which involved detailing who our audiences are (now and in the future), our goals, and revising the committee's charter. One of our overarching goals for new audiences is to help them "see" fire-dependent ecosystems. How can we touch the lives of more people or build support for our mission, if there is little awareness of or appreciation for prairies and related ecosystems?

A quick personal story about that: I attended Prairie View Elementary School, and I concluded from the name that a prairie must be nearby. The school grounds consisted of soccer fields, basketball courts, playground, and mowed lawn. I knew none of that could be a "prairie." Surrounding the school property was agricultural land growing hay, alfalfa, and corn, as well as wooded areas—also decidedly not prairie. Across the road was a long, fallow agricultural field with taller grass and opportunistic, non-tree plants. My kid-brain decided that this must be the prairie! I imprinted on the idea that a prairie is basically any treeless field.

That limited and uninspiring mental image for "prairie" remained unchallenged until I attended the Wisconsin Master Naturalist program at Schurch-Thomson Prairie. I signed up for the training with The Prairie Enthusiasts because it was the closest offering that fit my schedule and hadn't already reached its registration limit, not because I had a specific interest in prairies. That changed when we walked the land, and I was shocked by the diversity of plants, most of which I could not identify. Over the weeks of our class, I witnessed dramatic and subtle changes in color, sound, and texture on the land—changes that express the natural rhythm of prairies, and I became hooked. That was in 2021. That is one example of the power of learning to "see."

Admittedly, the needs assessment is not fast or flashy work. It involves gathering a lot of information and talking through different perspectives about who we are and what we should be doing—not always simple conversations! But the process has been productive, and I think developing a shared understanding of our audiences, goals, structures, processes, and roles will provide a solid foundation for the committee and organization well in the future.

To move forward with our project, the Education Committee is currently learning more about what is happening at the chapter level, including what resources are needed and what local successes could be shared with other chapters. (Thanks to all who have responded so far to the survey! For any chapter leaders who haven't yet responded, there is still time. If you need the survey link, please email me.)

Watch for more to come! In the meantime, please check out the blog on our website, where you'll find some helpful articles from Jim Rogala about land management techniques and other inspiring articles and reflections. ■

Change & Persistence Among Prairie Grasses

Story and Photos by Dan Carter

Iowa Dry Mesic Prairie

There are many misconceptions about prairies that cloud restoration, reconstruction, and management. Prominent among these is the tallgrass prairie "big four," a concept that situates big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*), Indiangrass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*), and little bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) atop the dominant hierarchy of plants on tallgrass prairie. The "big four" has far-reaching influence on grassland management, scientific study, and seed mix design. It's Tallgrass prairie after all!

The "big four" are indeed co-dominant in many places where prairie vegetation occurs today. But, except for little bluestem, they were not historically the most dominant grasses on much of the prairie landscape, nor are they most dominant on many of the best remaining old-growth prairies.

John Curtis (1959)[1] described the composition of the least disturbed old-growth prairies in Wisconsin. Big bluestem was present on all studied mesic prairies, but porcupine grass (*Hesperostipa spartea*), Leiberg's panic grass (*Dichanthelium leibergii*), and prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*) were the most frequent grasses. Frequencies from Curtis are the percentage of square meter quadrats a species occurs within for a given community type—basically how likely the species is to be at your feet if you are walking in the prairie. Porcupine grass was twice as frequent on mesic prairie as big bluestem! Big bluestem was the fifth most frequent grass on dry prairies behind little bluestem, side-oats grama (*Bouteloua curtipendula*), long-stalked panic-grass (*Dichanthelium perlongum*), and prairie dropseed; and third most frequent on dry-mesic prairie behind little bluestem and side oats grama. Only on wet-mesic prairie was big bluestem the most frequent among the grasses. Still, on wet-mesic prairie little bluestem's frequency was about three quarters that of big bluestem. Prairie cordgrass (*Spartina pectinata*) and Canada blue-joint grass (*Calamagrostis canadensis*) were the species most often present (frequency data lacking) on wet prairie.

In Iowa, The only grasses noted by Ada Hayden (1919)[2] among the "principal" species of prairie remaining on the gently rolling uplands (mesic) immediately north of Ames, Iowa were porcupine grass and prairie dropseed. Later, Brotherson (1969)[3], Kennedy (1969)[4], and Glenn-Lewin (1976)[5] studied composition on three old-growth prairies in northern and western Iowa and found prairie dropseed, Leiberg's panic grass, and porcupine grass to be the most common on uplands at the respective sites.

In the Red River Valley of NW Minnesota, Dziadyk and Clambey (1980)[6] described old growth prairie communities dominated by blue grama (*Bouteloua gracilis*) and porcupine grass on dry ground, prairie dropseed followed by little bluestem on gentle slopes, little bluestem followed by prairie dropseed on

moderately well-drained level areas, and big bluestem and slim-stem reed-grass (*Calamagrostis stricta*) together on low prairie over poorly drained soils.

Weaver's and Clements' (1938)[7] concept of "true prairie," which they extend to a region stretching from Illinois to Nebraska and northwest Minnesota to Oklahoma, is co-dominated by mid grasses—Porcupine grass, prairie dropseed, rough dropseed (*Sporobolus compositus*), little bluestem, side-oats grama, and needlegrass (*Hesperostipa comata*, in the west). Weaver worked extensively on prairies in the western part of the tallgrass prairie during the first half of the 20th century, including early study of fire effects at the Agricultural Experiment Station just north of Manhattan, Kansas. There, little bluestem and Junegrass (*Koeleria macrantha*) were initially the top two grasses (big bluestem was third). Composition shifted toward big bluestem with annual late spring burning but not late fall burning or earlier spring burning.[8,9] Indeed, late spring burning in the western and southwestern tallgrass prairie region to promote big bluestem for cattle pasture is part of why prairie composition changed there during the 20th century. Weaver and Clements observed these changes occurring and attributed them to the grazing and burning practices of the time, saying that the result was "that their [the mid grasses'] tallgrass competitors, notably *Andropogon*, gradually moved up the slopes and today appear to be essential members of the prairie relicts" (page 458).

Why did European land use sometimes drive compositional change towards the tall grasses like big bluestem?

Late spring burning favors the growth form of long rhizomatous, warm-season grasses. Their growing points remain below the soil surface until very late spring or early summer, so growth of their active shoots can continue uninterrupted despite damage to aboveground foliage with late spring burns. The growing points of most bunchgrasses (e.g., porcupine grass, prairie dropseed, Leiberg's panic grass, little bluestem, Junegrass, etc.) rise above the soil surface and become vulnerable to fire shortly after they initiate growth. If these are burned off, the bunchgrasses must activate reserve buds to replace the lost shoots. That alone puts them at a disadvantage, but their reserves of buds tend to be small compared to long-rhizomatous big bluestem and Indiangrass[10], so their regenerative capacity is sooner exhausted (meristem-limited) in response to removal of active shoots. The cool-season bunchgrasses are hit especially hard by late spring burning because of their early growth, but even little bluestem, a warm-season species, can be harmed by later spring burns due its difference in growth form. Prairie dropseed, another warm-season grass, is harmed because it initiates growth nearly as early as the cool-season species despite its warm-season physiology. On most upland old growth prairie, late spring burning favors a subset of native grasses that was not historically so abundant.

The effect of fire exclusion on composition can be similar to those of frequent late spring burning. Species with elongating rhizomes are better able to emerge

Iowa Mesic Prairie

through excessive accumulations of thatch. Hensel (1923)[11] observed this 100 years ago in the Kansas Flint Hills. Little bluestem increased with annual early spring burning, but big bluestem replaced little bluestem atop the dominance hierarchy when fire was excluded. Weaver and Rowland (1952)[12] also observed this in eastern Nebraska in the absence of burning, haying, or grazing:

"Consequences of the effects of the mulch upon the environment were production of a nearly pure, but somewhat thinner than normal, stand of *Andropogon* [big bluestem]. The understory of upland prairie had all but disappeared. The usual mid grasses of upland were few or none. Only a few taller forbs remained."—Page 19

Burning in the presence of excessive litter accumulation, which often occurs on prairies that are occasionally burned (as opposed to frequently), can also kill or weaken little bluestem[13] and other bunchgrasses (e.g., needlelegrass)[14]. Their buds are at or just above the soil surface and vulnerable to increased fire duration when excessive litter has built up. This is not the case for the deeply buried buds along the rhizomes of big bluestem or Indiangrass. Interestingly, excessive litter

Konza mid-spring burn

may interact with fire to affect prairie bunchgrasses and certain invertebrates (skippers: *Hesperia ottoe* and *H. Dakotae*)[15] in similar ways, with responses contingent on the amount of litter accumulation!

Native bunchgrasses decrease for many of the same reasons in response to confined grazing. Porcupine grass is very palatable and emerges before most other prairie grasses, so it disappears quickly upon pasturage[16]. The long-rhizomatous prairie grasses also decrease in response to grazing[16], but they persist and recover relatively well during rest periods because they have greater reserves of belowground buds available for recovery and their elongating rhizomes help them colonize openings where vegetation has been thinned by disturbance. The position of buds on these long-rhizomatous grasses an inch or two beneath the soil surface also protects their regenerative capacity from mechanical disturbance.[10,17] Weaver recognized the importance of rhizomatous habit for recovery from disturbance, but not bud depth or number. Nonetheless, where grazing was too intense and prolonged, most prairie grasses were replaced by long-rhizomatous, cool-season species like Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*), except on the driest sites.[1,2,16]

The work of Weaver, Curtis, Hayden, and others adds important context to our interpretation of more contemporary studies of prairie. They help us discern between research and management outcomes from altered grasslands that no longer retain old growth composition, and prairies that still do. Porcupine grass, little bluestem, prairie dropseed, side-oats grama, and/or Leiberg's panic grass are usually among the prominent grass species on the best remaining old growth, upland prairies. All of those species differ from big bluestem in their ecologies in ways that have implications for management. Except side-oats grama, many of those differences stem from clumping growth form, cool-season physiology, or both. Earlier work on composition also highlights the amazing persistence of well-stewarded and less historically exploited old-growth prairies in the face of unprecedented change. Upland old-growth prairies that retain much of their composition have typically experienced:

- fewer periods of excessive litter accumulation.
- fewer late spring burns and more burns between fall and early spring—the more frequent the better.[9,18,19] True prairie composition was and is an expression of the ancient indigenous cultural practice of dormant season fire.
- minimal fenced grazing. Free-roaming deer, elk, bison, and their predators/hunters are separate issues.
- less fragmentation[19], but consider that small, less exploited prairies that are well-stewarded retain more of their historical botanical composition than landscape grasslands in the western tallgrass region. Little prairies are more vulnerable to neglect, which argues for their protection and care.

While the confluence of these conditions is tragically rare, the persistence of what remains is reason to keep hope. True prairie in the Midwest has been home to members of east-west and north-south expanding and contracting flora, fauna, and cultures for millennia. Even an island of old-growth prairie carries with it immeasurable ecological memory and wisdom. We can kindle that and facilitate its recovery through stewardship and by building connections among prairie places and prairie people...especially if we can get our hands on more porcupine grass and Leiberg's panic-grass! ■

Check out this article on our website's blog to see Dan Carter's information references.

Go to: ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org/Blog

Blue Sky Botany — Thimbleweeds (Anemone)

Story and Photos by RS Baller

Two thimbleweeds (*Anemone cylindrica* and *A. virginiana*) reside here in Wisconsin, one trending in the prairie and the other in oak savanna. Both have slender, stiff stems rising from the earth like antennae. Both produce a whorl of highly dissected, pointed, palmate leaves that emerge maybe half-way up the plant. Within this circle of leaves are a few more antennae; these become the stalks that bear a single flower on each antenna, somewhere between knee and waist high. All have five to six petals, and some people claim they are off-white or pale green or bland yellow. If these two different thimbleweeds accidentally sprout close to each other, as they are won't to do, we get confused, because they look mighty alike. Especially when there are no flowers, but only seed heads.

Prairie thimbleweed (A. cylindrica)

June-July. Knee high. Sunny prairie, on steep and rolling hills and everywhere in between that's pretty dry. Though I have not seen it in sand; let me know if you have. The seeds of this plant grow tightly compacted in a fuzzy, inch-long vertical cylinder the diameter of a pencil, and that shape helps name and identify this species. The color is usually whitish. The sides of the seed cylinder are parallel.

Tall thimbleweed (A. virginiana)

June-July. They tend to begin flowering a few weeks later than the prairie thimbleweed, but they do overlap. Shin to waist high. In part shade, from mesic to rocky ground, such as steep stony slopes with oak savanna, and on a variety of lightly shaded sites, making it possible to grow within feet of a bona fide prairie thimbleweed but not usually. Flowers are much like the prairie thimbleweed, but I believe more yellowish and a little larger on average even. The wooly seedhead thimble is oval. Its sides are not parallel. And it appears more golden colored.

The best, most reliable feature for distinguishing these two cousins is that prairie thimbleweed has only one whorl of leaves along its elongated flowering stems. Tall thimbleweed has an extra tier of leaflets; first there are the regular leaves, and then, higher up, are another grouping of smaller leaflets.

It is tempting to describe how the leaves and/or leaflets of these species differ in shape and form. I feel they can be too close to call, confusing the innocent. Even my treasured reference book, Wildflowers of Wisconsin by the esteemed Merel Black and Emmet Judziewicz, appears to have a suspect photo of *A. cylindrica*, its leaf shape not quite right in my view. Perhaps there are regional variations I don't know about. So, I won't say anything. ■

Old Land, New Eyes

By Jessica Bizub

On an unusually warm Sunday afternoon in late October, eight members of the Glacial Prairie Chapter and a Tall Pines Conservancy staff member cleared glossy buckthorn from a fen owned by Becky Fedek and Pete German. Adjacent to Genesee Oak Opening and Fen in Waukesha County, a Wisconsin State Natural Area our chapter works on regularly, this privately-owned site, dubbed "Pearl Forge Fen," was discovered through a site visit conducted by Dan Carter, The Prairie Enthusiasts Ecologist. In 2022, he and Pat Trochlell conducted floristic quality assessments, documenting the presence of rare Wisconsin plant species in the calcareous fen and southern sedge meadow areas of the property. Due to the quality of the site, our chapter was on-hand to remove buckthorn to expand the fen next to springs that feed Genesee Creek.

For me, this workday was something of a homecoming. I was raised fewer than two miles (as the crow flies) from the site, and although I didn't fully appreciate it at the time, I was surrounded by the landscapes of Southern Kettle Moraine prairies, oak savannas, and spring-fed wetlands. I have many fond memories of exploring the relatively wild spaces of the grasslands and woodlands along the edges of agricultural fields behind my childhood home, areas now mostly converted to housing subdivisions. As we worked, the past mixed with the present, vague memories stirring of seeing similar plants in the small ephemeral wetland and on steep slopes that served as excellent sledding hills near my childhood home. At the risk of sounding corny, actively doing something positive for the environment in a place that looked like the place I grew up felt overwhelmingly wholesome. I would guess many Prairie Enthusiasts have had similar experiences.

I learned a lot too! While we wrangled buckthorn, Dan Carter explained that the dense roots and rhizomes of the sedges prevent water of the many seeps and springs from cutting channels down through the peat mound. That erosion would drain the mound, and the resulting aeration of the peat would mean the eventual loss of its stored carbon to the atmosphere. Encroaching brush shades out those sedges, allowing that erosion to occur, which is part of the reason our work that day was critical to restoring degraded fen. He pointed out Wisconsin-threatened marsh valerian, and we learned that skunk cabbage—its pungent presence often regarded as an early sign of spring—actually blooms in late winter because it can create temperatures well above the surrounding air temperature by metabolizing starch stored in its roots.

The day at Pearl Forge fen was satisfyingly tiring and somewhat tedious in the way that clearing buckthorn can be, but we made more progress than expected. With Alison Reinhoffer wielding the brush saw at her usual inspired pace (i.e., Tasmanian Devil fast), the rest of us couldn't keep up, even with multiple Makutus, and we had to greatly expand the space for the brush pile to accommodate all the felled buckthorn. When we were done, we enjoyed relaxed conversation over snacks and refreshments generously provided by Becky and Pete and assembled for a group photo.

I am grateful for having encountered The Prairie Enthusiasts, so my love of nature and latent desire to learn more about the land under my feet could ignite into something tangible, much like how a good prairie burn encourages wildflowers to bloom.■

Left page:
Glacial Prairie work crew. Photo by Alison Reinhoffer.

Right page:
Left: WI-threatened marsh Valerian (Valeriana uliginosa). Photo by Dan Carter.

Right top: Tufa formed by calcium carbonate precipitated from the mineral rich water emanting from springs at the fen. Photo by Dan Carter.

Right bottom: Massive buckthorn brushpile. Photo by Alison Reinhoffer.

40 Acres of Land Protected by The Prairie Enthusiasts

Giordano Oak Barrens and Sand Prairie. Photo by Dan Carter

When Wisconsinites think of their landscapes, they rarely envision sandy areas where cacti could thrive. So, it may be surprising to learn that within the Wisconsin River Valley, such an ecosystem has survived the changes of the last century and is now permanently protected by The Prairie Enthusiasts.

This 40-acre parcel, now named Giordano Oak Barrens and Sand Prairie, was donated to The Prairie Enthusiasts by Ron and Darla Giordano on May 16, 2023. As The Prairie Enthusiasts take over the management of this property, they join a long history of caretakers. The Giordanos took an interest in the area many years ago, and for ten years, they called the original owner twice a year, asking if he was interested in selling. When the day finally came, the original owner asked to meet the Giordanos to ensure they were people who would care for the land. Satisfied with the Giordanos' intent, they were sold the property and quickly began making improvements.

They contacted the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to survey the land and understand its history; they planted trees and removed dead brush. Their stewardship was driven by the goal for the land to be a haven for the natural world, and for others to enjoy its splendor.

The property has a beautiful view overlooking Lake Wisconsin and the Merrimac Railroad Bridge. It also has various native ecosystems that are now rare but once were common.

With the help of Groundswell who led negotiations with the owners, made arrangements for the closing, and helped cover costs associated with the closing, and with the help in part from a generous donation provided by the Giordanos to support initial management of the site, The Prairie Enthusiasts can now ensure the continued vitality of this area. The property is located near a 12-acre nature preserve, making this parcel part of a potentially larger tract that could provide an increasingly critical ecosystem for rare species and native plants that require sand habitat.

The Prairie Enthusiasts is grateful to the Giordano's, Groundswell, and the many volunteers who helped protect this property for generations to come. Current and new volunteers will now work towards the goal of bringing this ecosystem back to its original state of sand prairie and oak barrens, which was its condition when the Ho-Chunk Nation was caring for the land for thousands of years. Until management plans are finalized, the preserve is not open to the public. Those interested in volunteering to restore this ecosystem should email us at info@theprairieenthusiasts.org

Darla and Ron Giordano with Debra Behrens, having just signed the title over.

We All Like to Think We Can Take the Heat: Burn School Helps Us Get There

By Kelly Carlson

Hanley Prairie burn. Photo by Pam Richards

So far, this spring has brought rivers of rain, valleys of wind, and a flood of people outdoors at the sight of the sun. These are conditions that, yes, bring joy to midwestern folk who've been huddled indoors for months, but also, conditions that sprout life—native and invasive—in our prairies. The best way to keep species in these ecosystems healthy and balanced is, I've learned, with fire.

"Prairies, savannas, and barrens are all fire-dependent ecosystems which hold a large diversity of rare, endangered, and specialist species, while also being some of the most imperiled landscapes in Wisconsin," Katie Hahn, a true prairie enthusiast, said. With less than 1% of our prairies left, these ecosystems hold immense ecological value, and need to be burned periodically to maintain their health. "The fire, to a large degree," Hahn said, "relies on us."

On April 1st, 2023, The Prairie Enthusiasts Chippewa Savanna Chapter (CSC) hosted "Burn School," a 4-hour lecture and 4-hour burn session that would allow community members to learn about the benefits of fire in the field. Mark Leach lectured on fire ecology, Kathy Ruggles on weather, John Thomas on tools, Julia Chapman on plans, and Keith Gilland covered burning procedures for an all-encompassing lesson. They focused on how burns affect the landscape, how it serves to nurture the prairie, which tools are used to do it, which procedures to follow, and how the weather affects the schedule.

First, they create a detailed plan that passes through several levels of approval, taking into consideration the type of plants being burned and different acceptable combinations of weather conditions (wind speed and direction, humidity, temperature, etc.) to ensure a safe and effective burn. Next, before burn season, firebreaks will be created around the unit by clearing vegetation down to mineral soil or green grass so that fire is far less likely to escape the perimeter. When good burn weather arrives, the burn team (usually a minimum of 6) will burn around the prairie, initially going against the wind to slow flames, and end with the fire moving with the wind to eventually meet the initial burned area. The blackened grass, I'm sure, is a sight to get used to.

"The black soot left on burned prairie enhances warming of the soil, which favors native warm-season grasses," Julia Chapman, The Prairie Enthusiasts CSC Interim Vice Chair and Communications & Outreach Coordinator, said. "While animals, including pollinators, may be forced to temporarily abandon an area during a burn, they can find refuge in adjacent areas. It is common to leave an unburned portion as refuge or burn different sections of a prairie in rotation over several years to help reduce negative impacts on wildlife."

As someone new to prescribed burns, burn school taught me to reframe the way I viewed fire, at least, in this region. The burns, while detrimental for individuals in certain areas, are vital to protecting the larger ecosystem at play.

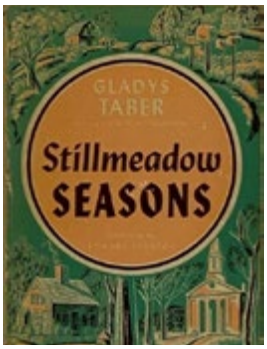
"[Burning is] a valuable land management tool if used correctly, but depending on where people live and what their experience with fire is, they can have very different opinions about it," Chapman said. "Learning about prescribed burning and its benefits can change negative opinions and create more support for organizations like TPE that are using prescribed fire safely for prairie restoration and management."

Whether burning to volunteer, learning a new skill, refreshing what you know, or applying it to your own property, burning is an essential ecological tool that benefits your native plants, animals, and pollinators, all in one go.

Unfortunately, with each wet drop of rain this spring, the field portion of burn school has yet to happen for me. But I look forward to putting on my leather boots, grabbing my equipment, and heading out to the field when the time comes to take the fire into my own hands (for the sake of the prairie!) ■

The Good Life & Stillmeadow Seasons

By Scott & Helen Nearing and Gladys Tabor (respectively)
Reviewed by Chuck Wemstrom



Years ago, at the library, I picked up a book by Scott and Helen Nearing, Living The Good Life. In my whole life, if there was a transformational moment, that was it. Of course, I didn't realize it. I simply thought it was a book about gardening, building your own house, having time to read and visit with neighbors and playing music on Sundays. Great, I'll check it out.

I had always had an itch, in the back of my mind, buried deep inside, hidden in some crevice, that there was another way to live, a different model. The Nearings' book is just that: a different model based on a different set of values, for living a completely different kind of life.

Scott Nearing was a distinguished economics professor at The University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Economics. He was fired for speaking out against child labor. Children, because they were small, made ideal coal miners. He was fired again from another leading university for opposing the US entrance into World War I. He had been a successful and popular textbook author, including an undergraduate introduction to economics and civics textbook. Macmillan, the publisher, withdrew the book from distribution. Unable to find work, he took up homesteading. He and his wife supported themselves selling maple syrup and later blueberries. They gardened, built their own homes and outbuildings, and continued to write books.

They both loved to teach. They turned their home into a teaching experience. Every summer, nearly 2,000 visitors were introduced to their simple, frugal lifestyle. Scott also lectured in the winter traveling by train. One of their most important ideas (not new of course) was that we should work four hours a day for ourselves, work four hours a day for our bread, and four hours a day for our community. Sadly, when we spend our days getting and spending (sometimes out of necessity) we have little time for ourselves, our families or our community. Over thirty-five years later, sadly the world of work seems even more demanding.

A few days later, I took the Nearings' book back to the library, dropped my daughters off in the children's section as quickly as possible and hurried to see if I could find similar books. I was immediately rewarded with Stillmeadow Seasons by Gladys Tabor. Tabor was quite different from the Nearings. She wrote country books about her life in rural Connecticut, novels, and a monthly column for popular women's magazines and commuted to Columbia University where she taught in the English Department.

Like the Nearings, she loved the country, the outdoors, but she particularly loved rural Connecticut, the small towns, which were still alive and thriving in the 1940s and 50s, and she especially loved her neighbors and the townspeople. Whenever I reread one of her books today, I think of the great aunt we all wish that we had had and I can imagine spending an evening around the fire, eating popcorn and reading Keats, Shelly and the Brownings out loud. Today I'm sure she'd add Mary Oliver and Wendell Berry to her repertoire.

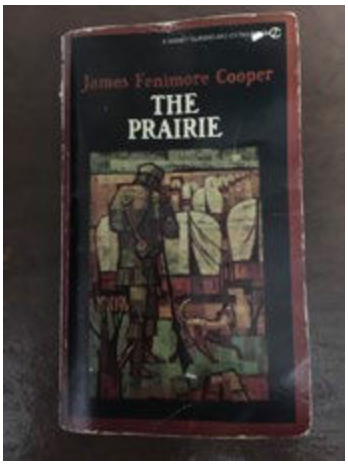
One time they bought 60 acres, a former woodlot which had just been harvested and all that was left were the cut over stumps. Over the next twenty years they restored the wood lot. Everyone assumed that they would harvest the wood for sale. They donated the land to the county which would manage the woodlot in perpetuity.

There are few prairies in New England, but Scott and Helen cared for the land just as lovingly as we do in the Midwest

They were among the founders of the back-to-the-Earth movement. The reason many of us are restoring prairies, raising bees, keeping a few grape vines, even a bat house is because we, even if we haven't read their books, have been influenced by their work. ■

Natty Bumppo Meets the Prairies of Long Ago

By James Fenimore Cooper
Reviewed by Jon Rigden



The Prairie is one of the five novels that make up the Leatherstocking Tales written by James Fenimore Cooper from 1823 to 1841. It was the third book in this series published in 1827, but is the last book in chronological order depicting the life of the main character Natty Bumppo. Natty, or Deerslayer, Hawkeye, Pathfinder as he is variously called through the novels is named Trapper or simply Old Man in The Prairie. Still robust in his mid 80's, Trapper lives alone on the prairie sometime around 1806, somewhere in the middle part of Nebraska, about 500 miles west of the Mississippi River, having moved away from the east in an effort to escape the ever-growing number of people and the incessant sounds of "civilization" including the chopping down of trees. This would put him in the "mixed grass prairie" between the tallgrass prairie to the east and shortgrass prairie to the west. This "ecotone" is said to be richer in biodiversity than either the tallgrass or shortgrass prairies and runs north and south from northern Texas, into parts of Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, South and North Dakota and even further north into Canada. After many years living here, he meets a group of settlers or "squatters" traveling west led by Ishmael Bush who are also escaping into the open prairie for different reasons. The story revolves around Trapper's interaction with this group and the indigenous people living in the area.

Cooper was a popular American writer in the United States and throughout the world in the early 19th century, but his reputation has waxed and waned since that time. D. H. Lawrence called The Deerslayer, the last published but the first book chronologically in the Leatherstocking Tales, "one of the most beautiful and perfect books in the world." Victor Hugo called Cooper "one of the greatest novelists of the century." But Mark Twain was a harsh critic calling Cooper's works "overly wordy" with unrealistic romantic plots. Cooper's most lasting and famous work is the Leatherstocking Tales, of which The Last of the Mohicans is the best known and considered by many to be his masterpiece. In this novel, Natty is called Hawkeye. This nickname has been used by many since then including in the popular television series M*A*S*H in which the main character is known as "Hawkeye" Pierce, a name he grew up with because it was said on the show that The Last of the Mohicans was the only book his father ever read! The University of Iowa "Hawkeye" nickname is also thought by some to have come from this series.

The Prairie is worth reading for those of us who love prairies, in part, because of its description and perspective of this part of the country in the very early 1800's. Despite what is now known as a rich ecosystem, in the initial chapters of this book this area is described as one where "nature had placed a barrier of desert to the extension of our population in the west." It goes on to say, "In their front were stretched those broad plains which extend with so little character" and "that bleak and solitary place," "The meager herbage of the prairie," "From the summits of the hills the eye became fatigued with the sameness and chilling dreariness of the landscape...Not unlike the ocean...the same waving and regular surface, the same absence of foreign objects, the same boundless extent to the view," "Here and there a tall tree rose out of the bottoms, stretching its naked branches abroad like a solitary vessel." And further, "may you journey in these open fields, in which there is neither dwelling nor habitation for man or beast." Last, "It is likely that you will continue west until you have come to land more suitable for a settlement" from "the endless waste of the prairies." This perspective gave rise to the term "Great American Desert" that is still sometimes used today to refer to that part of the Great Plains just to the east of the Rocky Mountains.

What harsh words for a place that many of us have come to treasure! But, this was a common perspective for those first settlers traveling west from a land full of trees in forests that stretched widely across the landscape. Trees at that time were felt to be a necessity on the frontier, as much as water and fertile soil. Land without trees was shunned, felt to be foreign and useless, a wasteland. Not until later when wood products from elsewhere became plentiful and when the John Deere "self-scouring plow" was invented in 1837, which could slice through the tenacious roots of the prairie plants while shedding the soil that stuck to older versions of plows, did the area become attractive and the rich soils of the prairies open up and eventually become known as "America's Breadbasket."

Today, of course, only a sliver of those original prairies remain and are appreciated by many for their beauty, amazing diversity, and the rich habitat they provide for many plants and animals. Let's dream of the day prairie restoration is described in the history books and credited for bringing back those wide-open spaces so that "the same waving and regular surface, the same absence of foreign objects, the same boundless extent to the view" is said with exultation and triumph! ■

And Then A Miracle Occurred

Story and Photo by Alice Mirk

Many years ago, when I worked for the State of Wisconsin, we were starting to plan a new project which seemed impossible at the outset, and my boss put up a cartoon on the wall. It was a professor in a lab coat writing a formula on a board, and in the center of the formula there was a cloud drawn with the words "and then a miracle occurred" in the center, followed by an "equals" sign and the expected result. I think this is sometimes how we feel when we first visit a landowner's site where there are possibilities, but the process feels like it could be endless and insurmountable!

That cloud and miracle really did happen at the property of Sue and Bob Volonec in Jefferson County. They are retired farmers who settled in the town of Lake Mills but quickly tired of town life and purchased a small farm (37 acres) near Waterloo in 2019.

The property is located on a drumlin in an area where uplands were historically composed of oak woodlands and oak openings and lowlands composed of wet prairies, sedge meadows, and shrub carr. The Volonecs had open oak savanna pastures and cultivated ground, which had been invaded by woody vegetation (all the usual suspects) and exotic cool season grasses (smooth brome, reed canary grass and Kentucky blue grass). Very little native prairie vegetation remained.

What they did have is ancient open-grown bur oaks, white oaks and the rusty patch bumblebee! This was enough for Sue and Bob to begin a very aggressive restoration/reconstruction plan. They have burned regularly, taken out brush and freed the oaks, and girdled and basal-barked their way through the property. They then planted thousands of prairie species which were cultivated from seed by Sue and then transplanted where it used to be pasture.

Here is a description by Sue of their winter work:

"We weren't able to make it to the Dorothy Carnes work day which was disappointing. We seeded the 3.5 acre ag field by the road, seeded 5 acres of cleared savanna, burned 46 brush piles, completed our second prescribed burn, are all set to plant over 3000 plugs, and we hauled out 5 truckloads of logs over the winter. We have a verbal agreement with Mike Engel to seed another 5 acres of ag field in the early winter. We can't thank you enough for all the guidance and support you have given us. "

Well Sue and Bob, we can't thank you enough for your work, particularly as you have all the neighbors admiring the results and asking questions. ■

The Pronghorn Exhibit

By Hella Cohen

Did I miss happiness?
Or did I assume it was a feeling.
I thought we pack our children into cars and strollers and bike pods
and search for it.
I've seen this once.
I tried it, too.
At the pronghorn exhibit in July of the pandemic.
The stunning absence of others,
the deafening ghosts of ring-pop wrappers
and dino squeeze bottles.
The cicadas' flat crescendo of love—
I, waiting for some slippage from dissonance to consonance,
my children harrying me away from it,
making me drunk for the words of it!
Do katydids perform a tonal shift?
Wait, wait—has anyone listened long enough?
The soundtrack of that hilly amphitheater of buttery scruff,
hot breezes and deceptive monochrome,
a simulated reminder of the last remnants of oats and brome,
tails of foxes and stems of blue.
Were it older, something wiser and blacker in its roots and pitch.
Instead, it offered me an almost-truth,
more questions than answers.
I thought it was a mother's voice on the air six feet between us
or the soft whine of my baby in the pram
that kept stealing knowing from my grasp.
But maybe there is something about the sedge and its arrested endlessness,
the opening yowl of its foreclosure—the pronghorn's memory for memory,
the bib of the turmeric-stained meadowlark and his dream for dream
that scatter knowing the way bobolinks flick seed husks.
We were moved along.
Did I at least come away with a misreading,
replacing knowing's loss with other meanings?
"I have to quit my job."
"I have to do something with the prairie."
"Do I miss the ocean?"
Is happiness an idea, or a feeling in retrospect?
Who is the sage of the savanna whose words reach infinitely and circle back?
Is presence possible amongst the muttering wind and gouged-dirt roads?
Are we standing on Azayamankawin's wash line?
How do we know when it's time to come home for dinner?
With a kee-yah!, will the loudest red-shouldered hawk call out to us from above?

Photo by Jay Olson-Goude

Upcoming Events

Wildflower Walk at Borah Creek led by Gary Eldred.
Photo by Donna Williams-Richter

The Prairie Enthusaists Picnic & Annual Meeting

July 16 - Noon to 5:00 PM

Location: St. Peter, MN

Join the hosting Many Rivers Chapter for a potluck, conversation and tours of local prairies.

Southwest Wisconsin Tour

July 22

Location: Loren Wagner & Al Slavik restorations near Gays Mills

Butterfly Field Trip
St. Croix Valley

July 29 - 10:30 AM to 12:00 PM

Location: Alexander Savanna

Join us for a butterfly survey and learn butterfly identification, how to capture them without harm, and how to photograph them.

Northeast-Midwest Prescribed Fire Science & Management Workshop

August 29-31

Location: Madison, WI

A workshop for all wildland fire management partners across the 20 state NE-MW region to share region-wide, science-based, fire ecology information oriented toward expanding and maintaining the use of prescribed fire across all landscapes, jurisdictions, and fire-dependent ecosystems.

Land Trust Days Celebration
Glacial Prairies

September 10 - Noon to 4:00 PM

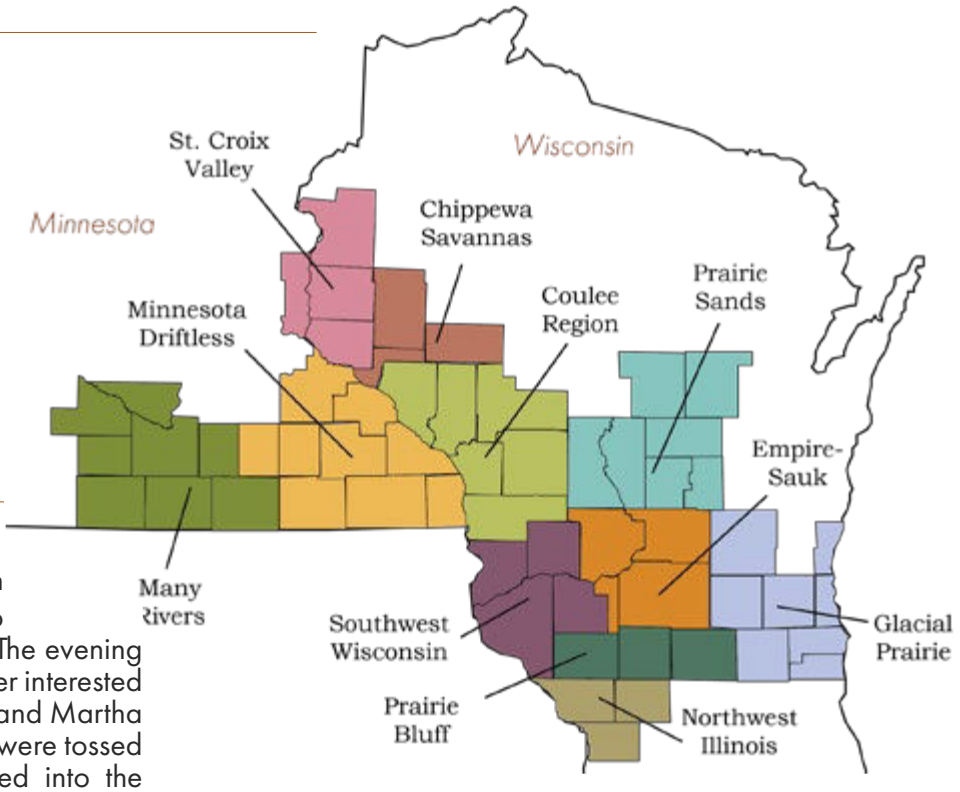
Location: Southern Kettle Moraine State Forest

Learn about the prairie and oak savanna remnants of Southeast, WI. Then take a guided hike through the kettle moraine.

Visit our website for the latest and most comprehensive list of our events! ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org/events-calendar

LAND TRUST DAYS
HAVE FUN OUTSIDE

Chapter Updates



Southwest Wisconsin

By Jack Kussmaul

The Chapter has found inspiration from the request by Chapter Support to create a one year and a three-year plan. The evening of March 31, the full chapter board and other interested chapter members met at the home of Steve and Martha Querin-Schultz to brainstorm. Lots of ideas were tossed about for the one-year plan. Incorporated into the plan was continuing to make improvements to the barn at Borah Creek so that events can be held there, and to actually start holding events. Our plan included setting up joint work parties with other chapters and organizations. We intend to apply for and receive one new grant this year. We will publish 3 to 6 articles in local publications. Most important, to make sure there is follow up, people were assigned to lead each of these initiatives. Other ideas were accepted, but—knowing our limits for one year—are being put off to another year.

In good news on management of our sites, we coordinated with Trout Unlimited to have two joint work parties at Sylvan Road. The goal was to clear out junk vegetation, largely box elders, from along a trout stream. Amazingly, approximately 30 volunteers showed up for each event. Volunteers from Trout Unlimited vastly outnumbered Prairie Enthusiasts volunteers. THANK YOU, TROUT, UNLIMITED! By celebrating the success at Sylvan Road, I do not mean to diminish the contribution of the many volunteers we have who are out working on their sites week after week. We could not maintain our sites without them. We want to specifically thank Roger Smith for offering the services of himself and his skidder to drag trees downed by a tornado off good prairie at Sime Bald.

The brushing was also completed at Sylvan Road to comply with the terms of a $10,000 grant. Site steward Tom Hunt has shown himself to be successful at searching out and obtaining grants. This may be attributed to the time he spent doing this when he was in academia.

In bad news on site management, weather caused multiple cancellations of work parties at both Double Oak and Sime Bald. We had plans for and burn plans filed to enable us to do more volunteer burns than we had last year. Snow and rain, followed by heat and wind, followed by rain and snow, prevented us from carrying out any volunteer burns. We did get one burn completed in late March at Eldred Prairie. This was done by Adaptive Restoration and covered the front half of the property.

We also helped sponsor a day-long burn school on April 7 at Folklore Village Farm near Dodgeville. The school was led by Dan Wallace and was well attended. Unfortunately, we were not able to provide the participants with the chance to do spring burns. We look forward, however, to providing them with the opportunity this fall. ■

Burn at Eldred Prairie. Photo by Jack Kussmaul.

Prairie volunteer crew. Photo by Jerry Newman

Prairie Bluff

By Charles Harmon & Rebecca Gilman

During the summer and fall of 2022, members of the Prairie Bluff Chapter joined other Prairie Enthusiasts in a collaboration with the Wisconsin DNR's State Natural Areas Volunteer program. The goal was to collect enough seeds for a new prairie planting at Stauffacher Prairie SNA located along Highway 59 between Monroe and Albany.

The new planting was planned for a former soybean field along the highway. The field is known as "Gap Prairie" because it sits across the highway from the historic Gap Church, built in 1856.

The planting marked the chapter's fourth partnership since 2013 with Jared Urban, Volunteer Coordinator for the Wisconsin State Natural Area (SNA) program. Along with Urban, DNR land managers Mark Martin, Matt Zine, Nate Fayram, and crew chief Bridget Rathman have directed the chapter's restoration work at Gap Prairie.

Working alongside Urban, chapter members spent a total of eight months and 75 work days collecting seeds from eight of the properties owned by Prairie Bluff Chapter as well as from four that it manages. Seeds were also collected from several SNAs in the area.

Collecting began on May 28 with seeds from Pasqueflower (*Anemone patens*), pussytoes (*Antennaria sp.*), and bird's foot violet (*Viola pedata*). Collecting continued through December 2 when seeds from late-blooming asters, goldenrods, and gentians were added to the mix.

Highlights from the summer included: visits to Avon Bottoms SNA for lupine and spiderwort seeds; an October visit to Skinner Prairie and Muralt Bluff SNA, in which Jared Urban used the DNR's seed stripper to collect little bluestem and side oats gramma; and a terrific day at Yellowstone Lake SNA on October 29, when 29 volunteers turned out to collect bag after bag of raw seed.

In total, volunteers collected almost 500 pounds of seed from 138 species to restore Gap Prairie. Once the seed was processed, volunteers lined up—literally—to hand sow on a chilly morning in early December.

Special thanks to Jared Urban for his direction and commitment to the project. And, we want to give a huge shout-out and thank you to the seed-sowing crew, many of whom were seed collectors during the summer and fall.

SNA volunteers included Heidi Hankley, Jan Axelson, Georgene Kunze, and Brad Kunze. Prairie Bluff Chapter volunteers included Gary Kleppe, Steve Hubner, Jerry Newman, Ralph Henry, John Ochsner, Mike Davis, Merilee Pickett, Tom Mitchell, and Stephanie Eastwood.

After the seed was sown, everyone was invited back to John Oschner's house for lunch and hot tea (or brandy or both). Glasses were raised to a successful summer partnership and the promise of prairie to come! ■

Line of spreaders. Photo by Jared Urban

Snowshoe tracks crisscrossing the Oxbow area at Dobbs Landing after a late February seeding work day. Photo by Keith Gilland

Chippewa Savannas

By Julia Chapman

Despite the weather's best attempts to thwart our activities, we were able to accomplish some great things this winter and spring. A few hearty volunteers braved the treacherous, snow-covered road to Dobbs Landing to get some seeding done in the southern Oxbow area in late February. A huge thank you to Jessica Boland, Keith Gilland, and Kathy Stahl for donning your snowshoes to get those seeds out!

Our chapter hosted a prescribed burn training on April 1 at the University of Wisconsin-Stout campus. Despite the several inches of snowfall Menomonie received the night before (an April Fool's Day prank by Mother Nature, perhaps?), we had 28 attendees join us to learn about fire ecology, weather influences, proper burning procedures and safety, and how to write a burn plan. We had a wonderful group of instructors (Kathy Ruggles, John Thomas, Mark Leach, Keith Gilland, and Julia Chapman) who were excited to share their knowledge and experience of prescribed burns. We are looking forward to having some new faces among our burn volunteer ranks and hope to get in many safe, effective burns this spring!

Joe Maurer and Katie Hahn had a great time meeting new people and sharing information about The Prairie Enthusiasts at the Earth Week Open House at Brewing Projekt in Eau Claire on April 20. Visitors to our booth had a chance to admire Joe's artwork, including a painting of Morsbach prairie and a fascinating video of bumble bees visiting flowers. What a great way to connect with folks over a shared love of all things prairie! ■

Many Rivers

By Jim Vonderharr

On February 9, we co-hosted a presentation by Carmen Fernholz, an acclaimed pioneer organic farmer in Western Minnesota. His presentation was titled Organic Farming, Living the Tuition. He led us through his journey into becoming an organic farmer, in the midst of a typical mono, row cropping environment. One of the main messages he left with us was that organic farming is an ongoing learning process. There is no "one size fits all." You learn as you go, thus his reference to tuition. He also shared his newest project, the introduction of Kernza® a perennial wheat-type grain. (see article). Over 50 participants (farmers, students, faculty and Prairie Enthusiasts) enjoyed hearing his story.

We held a general chapter meeting on February 24. In addition to regular business our guest speaker, Tim Pulis regaled us with information on the Bison herd at Minneopa Park in Mankato. Their introduction has taken Minneopa from near the bottom to now in the top 10 in Minnesota State Park attendance.

A Burn Trainer Refresher course was held on March 24.

We are also hosting the annual TPE picnic at the Gustavus Adolphus Arboretum in St. Peter, Minnesota on Sunday July 16th. Prairie tours are being planned as part of the festivities. Stay tuned for more details. ■

Bison herd. Photo by Tim Pulis

St. Croix Valley

By Evanne Hunt

UW-River Falls Student Scholarship

Becky Kleager and Evanne Hunt attended the UW-River Falls Scholarship and Awards Program on April 20. We met Ellie Gruber, the student awarded our $1,000 scholarship for the 2024 school year. In her thank you note, Ellie wrote, "I am beyond grateful to have received it and am looking forward to continuing my education in conservation."

UWRF scholarship award. Photo by Eric Sanden

Inspired by the Southwest Wisconsin chapter, our chapter created a $1,000 scholarship at UW-River Falls. This scholarship supports a student majoring in Conservation and Environmental Planning, with a Restoration Management emphasis.

If you would like to contribute to this scholarship, indicate your donation is for the "Scholarship Fund." The bookkeeper will ensure that it is a restricted donation to the scholarship. Please make your donations before October 1 of each year.

New UTV

Mike Miller picked up our new Polaris Ranger 1000 Sport UTV from AirTec Sports in Roberts, WI on April 7. This summer, it will be outfitted with new a 100-gallon water tank and new pump. We have submitted an application for a DNR Turkey Grant, but decided not to wait to purchase. The discounts from Polaris and AirTec were too good to miss. The new UTV starts easier and hauls more, making burns at remote sites such as Alexander oak savanna safer and easier.

Polaris 2023 Ranger 1000 Sport Photo by Evanne Hunt

Earth Fest and Earth Day 2023

Ed Parsonage and Evanne Hunt answered questions at Earth Fest 2023 in River Falls on April 22. Over 2,000 people attended, and many stopped by our table.

Katharine Grant and Evanne answered questions the next Saturday (April 29) at Earth Day in Hudson. People were eager to tell us about their prairie plantings and savanna woodlands.

Earth Fest. Photo by Evanne Hunt

Prescribed burn class

Alex Bouthilet taught The Prairie Enthusiasts Prescribed Burn class on April 30 at The Acreage in Osceola. The turnout was excellent: 50 attendees! The weather — not so nice. The hands-on portion, equipment review and a burn were cancelled because the wind was 45 mph.

The Acreage generously provided the venue for the class and the prairie. The non-profit embodies the vision and legacy left by Horst Rechelbacher, founder of Aveda and Intelligent Nutrients. This property once served as Horst's residence, farm, and retreat, now serves as a model for sustainable conservation methods, a center

Burn Class. Photo by Evanne Hunt

Crystal Cave. Photo by Evanne Hunt.

for land and water stewardship, a place to learn, and gathering space for creatives, visionaries, and change-makers.

Attendees came from as far away as Waushara County (WI), Farmington (MN), etc., showing the need for more training throughout our region!

Spring Prescribed Burns

Thank you to our awesome burn crew members! Burns are hard work and the energy and dedication it takes speaks to the enthusiasm of our volunteers!

We were successful in burning only one of our remnant prairies. Blueberry Hill was burned April 10. Regulations protecting the rusty-patched bumblebee limited us to burning one acre. We were excited to welcome five apprentices to their first burn.

However, we also completed five burns on our chapter members' property. Since we charge for these burns, $2,000 was added to our chapter funds. Most importantly, an additional 10 apprentices were trained!

Videos of Burns

Videos of our 2023 prescribed burns can be view here: https://tinyurl.com/TPE-SCV

Collaboration with City of River Falls

Bob Marquis and Evanne met in April again with River Falls Public Works employees to update them on our work on a pollinator corridor from the Foster Conservation area through Rocky Branch savanna up to County Road F in River Falls. Through the winter, Prairie Enthusiasts volunteers cleared buckthorn along the Kinnickinnic River Trail. The City is pleased with our work and several people noticed our signs and contacted us about volunteering. ■

BBH Burn. Photo by Evanne Hunt

Hazel Olle-LaJoi enjoys a grape vine swing. Photo by Evanne Hunt

Mayville students working on the prairie. Photo by Alice Mirk.

Glacial Prairies

By Alice Mirk & Jessica Bizub

After a busy spring, which included workdays every Saturday plus spring burns at Benedict Prairie, UW-Milwaukee at Waukesha Field Station and two burns at the Urban Ecology Center, we have moved on to summer activities. Here are some highlights:

Field Trip to Smith-Reiner Drumlin Prairie

Dan Carter, Glacial Prairie volunteer and ecologist with The Prairie Enthusiasts, along with Gary Birch, site steward, led a field trip on June 4 to Smith-Reiner, located just over the chapter border in far eastern Dane County. The site, managed by The Prairie Enthusiasts, contains 13 acres of upland prairie remnants with 106 native plant species that are on two northeast to southwest-oriented glacially sculpted ridges (drumlins). It is a diverse site, with deposits of sand and gravel, creating a blend of dry, dry-mesic, and some small pockets of mesic prairie that vary in soil acidity. Thanks, Dan, and Gary!

Education Collaborations

Alice and Walter Mirk continued working with Mayville 5th graders to improve their school prairie by planting 200 plugs. They also consulted with the Village of Lomira on planting a prairie in a village park, with the anticipation that students will use it for science projects.

Chapter Annual Picnic

The Glacial Prairie Annual Picnic will be held on July 30, and is generously hosted by Charles Heide in conjunction with an open house on his property. In addition to The Prairie Enthusiasts, other organizations in attendance will be the Racine Watershed Protection Committee and UW-Parkside. Our chapter will hold its annual meeting before lunch is served, and then join in the open house festivities, including a lavish buffet, a showcase including Beaver Creek Gardens CSA (community supported agriculture), hay wagon rides, and tours of Hollowsteel Prairie, a remnant prairie which has seen significant growth in the number of plant species onsite since its active management starting in 2012.

Tour of the Driftless Area

Late in June, chapter members conducted a "grand tour" of sites in the Wisconsin Driftless Area, including a visit to Muralt Bluff Prairie, a site of great significance to the organization, where the Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts concept started. John Ochsner generously and expertly guided us at Muralt Bluff. The tour also included several Wisconsin State Natural Areas: Gasner Hollow, Woodman Lake Sand Prairie, Boscobel Bluffs, and Blue River Sand Barrens. The group scouted false heather in the sand dunes and were treated to a brilliant display of leadplant, butterfly milkweed, and pale purple coneflower in bloom atop Gasner Hollow.

WDNR Volunteer Recognition

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) presented Nancy with the 2023 Invader Crusader Award. For over two decades, Nancy has reared and distributed Purple Loosestrife biocontrol beetles to great effect. She has eradicated this species at one site and documented substantial reductions in her new work area along the Glacier Drumlin Trail at Scuppernong Creek. Her enthusiasm and experience have made her a knowledgeable teacher and partner.

Fortunately I learned about the award from Jared Urban, State Natural Areas Volunteer Coordinator. Nancy is not a person who talks about all she does—she performs her volunteer work rather quietly, enthusiastically and efficiently.

Nancy likes to maintain as small a carbon footprint as possible, so tends to focus on volunteer stewardship opportunities within approximately 25 miles of her home in eastern Waukesha County. Fortunately, the Glacial Prairie Chapter has 7 sites that meet her criteria and Nancy can be found at each of them on a regular basis. She is easy to identify—Nancy is consistently the last person to leave the field, often 20 minutes after everyone heads for their vehicles.

Nancy also has a "pet project"—Fox River Sanctuary, within the city-owned wooded corridor along the Fox River. Nancy doggedly removes invasive species such as buckthorn and honeysuckle with hand tools. City policy forbids the use of power tools (including cordless drills!) by volunteers, but Nancy is undeterred by having to carry out her volunteer work with one hand [figuratively] tied behind her. She always works with dogged determination.

Those of us who know Nancy cherish her friendship and, speaking personally, she is the sister I have wanted for many years. Congratulations, Nancy, for a well-deserved award! ■

Left: Randy Hoffman. Photo by RS Baller.
Right: Tm Hansel. Photo by Robert Streiffer

Empire-Sauk

By Willis Brown

Randy Hoffman and Tim Hansel were selected as 2022 Volunteers of the Year for the Empire-Sauk Chapter. Randy is currently the site steward for our Hauser Road property. This 45-acre parcel just north of Waunakee contains about 30 acres of remnant prairie. Hauser Road has an abundance of the early blooming Pasqueflower. The prairie also has several state-threatened and special concern plant species. It is also a nesting site for several grassland bird species, a cohort of declining species. While working for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Randy wrote "Wisconsin Natural Communities" and other books.

Tim has helped with prescribed burns and is chair of the Empire-Sauk Chapter Education Committee. He is lead instructor of the Master Naturalist Program, produced the Birds of Mounds View brochure and helped lead workshops on birds and night-flying insects.

In recognition for their efforts, Randy and Tim received a copy of "Pollinators of Native Plants" by Scott King, and published by Heather Holm, the keynote speaker at this year's annual conference. Thank you, Randy and Tim! ■

Prairie Sands

By Mary Goehring, David Hamel, Marc Johnson and Laurel Bennett

It has been a busy first quarter and we would like to start our report with a hearty thank you for the behind-the-scenes work done by Jill Schuettpelz for the chapter contribution to this year's Annual Conference Silent Auction. Jill organized all the left-over items from the Schultz estate bequest, added quite a lot of her own items, and transported and displayed them at the annual Prairie Enthusiasts conference and this effort resulted in our chapter raising $482 to go into the Prairie Sands bank account. Thank you, Jill!

Some congratulations are due to chapter member, James Schultz, for giving a successful prairie talk for the Wild Ones on March 11. **[We are saddened to report that James passed away unexpectantly on May 26. Because of the timing of this publication, we will be providing a more in-depth memorial for James in the fall issue.]**

And to Neil Diboll for publishing a wonderful new book titled The Gardener's Guide to Prairie Plants. Neil said, "The contents of the book are based upon over 45 years of experience with these plants and the ecosystems they comprise. I hope you find it useful." (see a review of the book by Laurel Bennett on our website's blog.)

On April 13, David and Shelley Hamel hosted 24 chapter members to tour their bog, listen to spring frogs and discuss restoration strategies over a meal at their second "Frogs, Bogs and Hot Dogs" event. David said, "We got to see the earliest Pasqueflowers, and buttercups. We got to hear the wood frogs and the spring peepers. We swapped a lot of experiences with attempts to raise a prairie."

Speaking of prairie conversation, Marc Johnson, a new member to the Prairie Sands Chapter, has inspired us with a way to interact more within our chapter by launching a trial online discussion forum called, Prairie Devotees. It is a trial run for our chapter members at the moment but, if this is successful, this may roll out to the greater Prairie Enthusiasts audience. You can find the link to the test forum and ways to gather more information on the Prairie Sands Chapter Page on The Prairie Enthusiasts website. Thank you, Marc. Many of our chapter members have expressed a desire for more inter-chapter communication and a place to brainstorm and ask questions. This forum gives us that chance. Your enthusiasm is very much appreciated, and we look forward to many great discussions on the forum. ■

Right:
Frogs, Bogs, and Hot Dogs event. Photo by David Hamel

Prairie Enthusiasts Remembered

Memorial gifts dedicated between March 5, 2023 and May 24, 2023

Joyce Powers

June 28, 1936 — April 24, 2023

By Amy Staffen

As I reflect on the legacy of Joyce Powers, I reflect on my own journey with growing native plants. I have a dirty little family secret to share: My mother was a regular plant poacher! Growing up on the west side of Madison in the 1960s, there certainly weren't any native plant nurseries. My mother taught me not only how to appreciate the beauty of native wildflowers, but also how to plant them in our garden! To this day, I have progeny in my home gardens of plants poached from Owen Park. How wonderful that Joyce pioneered the native plant nursery industry, providing an outlet for people like my mom and me to acquire and enjoy native plants sustainably! She answered the market need for large quantities of locally derived native seeds and plants as the practice of ecological restoration blossomed, thanks in no small part to her outreach and advocacy. Through trial and error, she innovated viable methods for propagating, harvesting, and cleaning native plants, with specific protocols for hundreds of species. Joyce also worked with others to refine the best approaches for planting prairies and maintaining them. She was also generous in sharing her knowledge with other conservation partners. As an adult, I have enjoyed restoring native ecosystems as a volunteer and a professional, applying the methodology innovated by Joyce and others. As I appreciate the beauty and ecosystem services offered by the vast acreages of prairie plantings throughout the state, I offer thanks to Joyce for this tremendous conservation legacy!■

Larry Sheaffer

August 27, 1948 — January 31, 2023

By Doug Steege

Photo of Larry Sheaffer leading a burn at West Dane Conservancy. Photo by Kristopher Steege-Reimann

I met Larry Sheaffer in 2004 after he called and said he had driven by our land, and it looked like we had some prairie remnants on our ridge tops, could he stop by and take a walk to look them over. He said he was a retired grade school teacher from Illinois. He had a cabin in Iowa County, not far away. Talking more, I learned he liked working on prairies, some work he got paid for and he had started a company called Prairie Partners. On some prairies, like the Drachenburg and The Prairie Enthusiasts Swenson Prairies, he worked for his love of plants and insects. Starting early the next spring, Larry became the first manager at our property, West Dane Conservancy.

For twelve years, Larry made sure we were accomplishing what we needed to do to restore and reinvigorate the prairie remnants, that had been neglected and were in danger of being shaded out by cedars and invasive species. Larry hired neighbor high schoolers to help with the stacking and burning. He began our annual sweet clover control measures and nearly eradicated our spotted knapweed infestation that was dominating our west ridge plant population.

The remarkable thing about Larry was he was always excited about the latest find whether it was new plants to add to our species inventory or a insect that had been absent the past couple of years. It didn't matter that he was dog tired with sweat stinging his eyes, he was an

example and inspiration for keeping an eye on the good things no matter how tough the job was.

Larry supported The Prairie Enthusiasts (TPE). He encouraged and contributed to our documentation when we worked on the management plan for the conservation easement we granted to TPE. Larry will be fondly remembered and missed by many. I will remember Larry every time I go back and look at an aerial image of our property from 2005 and see the progress that was made under his care. More importantly, I will remember him when I see the next "good thing" on the ground.

Larry asked that people wishing to honor him after his passing make a donation to The Prairie Enthusiasts. ■

In memory of

Audrey Moniken
Remembered by Logan Winner

Ed Brick
Remembered by
All Saints Assisted Living Center, Inc.
Mary Estle
Lynn Leazer
Sue Reddan

Gus Pausz
Remembered by Deb Pausz

Joseph Steingraeber
Remembered by Mark Steingraeber

Larry Sheaffer
Remembered by
Martin Haak
Laura Hechtel
Sharon Maske
Connie Sue Schmidt
Marion Tippet
Carolyn Wondrow

Patricia O'Hare
Remembered by Shel Ohare

Robert W. Richardson
Remembered by
Don Amphlett
Nancy Anderson
Kathryn Barry
Bobbi Bernet
Michael Furgal
John Glynn
Jeri Johnson
Curtis Kubly
Sharon Palmer
Penelope Patterson
David Richardson
Kathy May Richardson
Jerome W. Schwaiger
Walter Stewart
Carol Watson

Ronald Moen
Remembered by Harvey Halvorsen

Rosemarie Hughes
Remembered by Christopher Hughes

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Welcome, New Members!

March 5, 2023 to May 24, 2023

Chippewa Savannas
Jane Anklam
Catherine Lucas

Coulee Region
Vicki Miller
Charles Schauberger

Empire-Sauk
Bonnie Concordia
Curtis Kubly
Lynn Leazer
Ann & David Moffat
Sharon Palmer
Penelope Patterson
Susan & John Reddan
Duncan Schultz
Walter Stewart
Lea Wuethrich

Glacial Prairie
Bob Ahrenhoester
Jan & Herb Sharpless

Many Rivers
Judith Beckman

Minnesota Driftless
Linda Griggs
Breanna Wheeler

Northwest Illinois
Debbie Barron

Prairie Bluff
Craig Carter
Michael Furgal
John & Donna Glynn
Mark Pernitz
Kelly & Pam Ruschman
Ryan Rodriguez & Patty Smith
Logan Winner

Prairie Sands
Marc & Leigh Johnson
Scott Toutant

St. Croix Valley
Alan MacQuarrie

Unaffiliated
Judith Anibas
Christine Miller Barneson
Kathryn Barry
Gail Beaver-Woletz
Teresa Bicknese
Greg & Jenna Bjork
Luke Breitenbach
Katlyn Brinker
Kelly Carlson
Cindy Chamberlain
Patrick Collins
Susan Dickey
Gary Don
Mary & George Estle
Martin Freeman
Allen Freiermuth
Aaron Frederick
Charles Gable
Ronda Gappa
Melissa Gorman
Bradley Grewe
Martin Haak
Steve Hanson
Laura & Keith Hechtel
Elizabeth Heywood
Sandy & Mark Hoffmann
Seth Hudson
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Katherine Kaufmann
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