

Bergamot & Culver's-root

# The PRAIRIE PROMOTER

*Grassroots Conservation in Action*

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The  
Prairie  
Enthusiasts



## Roadside Riches to Ruins

By Vance Baker

Just a few miles from my northern Wisconsin cabin, coffee in hand for my 3 ½ hour drive back to Milwaukee, I pass a hilltop full of grazing Herefords. I let out an audible gasp and then an “Oh no.”

Thirty years ago, when I bought my land and started to work on a 30-some acre prairie planting, that hilltop had a sandy, 15-foot, sloping edge that abutted the road. It looked like an area that had been excavated at some point but was now healing. It was colonized by a healthy population of lupines. Because this lupine patch and later, cream baptisia, were along the route of my 30-year odyssey driving back and forth from Ferryville to Milwaukee, I grew to know it well.

My prairie restoration project began in 1988 with a species list created with the help of TPE. My dad joked, with a hint of dismay in those days, that I would never be able to retire because I spent all my money on seeds. Alas, at 66, I'm indeed looking at quite a few more years of work, even if it is part-time.

The prairie project proved a more difficult process than I had anticipated, and to be frank, it didn't go well through the years for a plethora of reasons, including weather variations, equipment failures, battalions of weeds and not enough help. I'm a tenacious, obsessive, nature-loving nut, so despite many setbacks, I wasn't about to give up. I started to pick my own seeds, choosing diverse areas with roadside access along my endless trips back and forth across the state.

I came to know all the spots where groups of prairie plants still thrived. The



*Cream indigo, also known as cream baptisia, in full bloom.*  
(Photo by Debra Noell)

*Continued on Page 4*

## 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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## Editorial Volunteers

**Chippewa Savannas** - Joe Maurer  
[theprairieenthusiasts.csc@gmail.com](mailto:theprairieenthusiasts.csc@gmail.com)  
**Coulee Region** - Jim Rogala  
[jrogala58@gmail.com](mailto:jrogala58@gmail.com)  
**Empire-Sauk** - Cate Harrington  
[charrington@tnc.org](mailto:charrington@tnc.org)  
**Glacial Prairie** - Alice & Walter Mirk  
[wamcp70@charter.net](mailto:wamcp70@charter.net)  
**Many Rivers** - Deanna Pomije  
[pomijelynn@hotmail.com](mailto:pomijelynn@hotmail.com)  
**Minnesota Driftless** - George Howe  
[howe93@acelogroup.cc](mailto:howe93@acelogroup.cc)  
**Northwest Illinois** - Rickie Rachuy  
[rr.lonetree@frontier.com](mailto:rr.lonetree@frontier.com)  
**Prairie Bluff** - Tom Mitchell  
[tnmitchell@tds.net](mailto:tnmitchell@tds.net)  
**Prairie Sands** - Ray Goehring  
[raygoe@yahoo.com](mailto:raygoe@yahoo.com)  
**Southwest Wisconsin** - Linda Lynch  
[wondrelfarms@mhtc.net](mailto:wondrelfarms@mhtc.net)

**Prairie Promoter Editor** -  
Debra Noell  
[promoter@theprairieenthusiasts.org](mailto:promoter@theprairieenthusiasts.org)

(Front page photo of Bergamot & Culver's root by Debra Noell)



## Executive Director Message

Chris Kirkpatrick, Executive Director

This year, TPE has approved six new land protections. It's been exciting to support chapter leaders and landowners as we have negotiated these purchases and easements.

The projects are led by local volunteers working with members and landowners in their chapter areas. The St. Croix Valley Chapter has been managing Alexander Savanna near River Falls, Wis., for the past several decades. Now with funding from the WI DNR's Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, along with the generous support of the owners, Dick and Joan Alexander, TPE is scheduled to purchase the 40-acre property this summer. The site consists of dry prairie remnants surrounded by oak savanna and includes habitat for rare plants such as kittentails, buffalo bean and prairie turnip. There's a celebration of this acquisition from 1-4 p.m. Aug. 12 at the site (see *Field Trip Flyer*, pages 18 - 23).

Other chapters are working on new land protection projects, including Chippewa Savannas and Coulee Region chapters, which both are working with TPE landowner members to place a conservation easement on their properties. We also closed on our first land protection project earlier this spring, accepting a small 3-acre conservation easement from the Natural Land Institute (Rockford, Ill.) to buffer the Prairie Bluff Chapter's Brigg's Wetland in Rock County, Wis.

It can take years for these projects to come to fruition. It takes relationships, trust, involvement of local chapter members, and guidance from the Chapter Support staff to be successful. I serve as a point of contact for our chapter leaders, as well as TPE landowner members who are interested in knowing more about land protection options. You can reach me at 608-638-1873 or [executivedirector@theprairieenthusiasts.org](mailto:executivedirector@theprairieenthusiasts.org)

Together we can ensure the perpetuation and recovery of the prairies, savannas, and associated ecosystems of the upper Midwest.

## Welcome New Members

Feb. 16 - June 16, 2018

Tim Abel  
Karen Ackroff  
Brooke & Zachary  
Alexander - Green  
Hills LLC  
Judie Barnes  
David Baukol  
Cheryl Breunig  
Bryan Buffington  
Alon Coppens  
Bob Costanza  
Robin Draves  
Brooke Dreshek  
Nancy & Rainer  
Dronzek  
Sally Farrar  
Joe Gartner  
Sarah Crittenden &  
Alex Gemrich

Bill Gregg  
Dale Halink  
Peter Hartman  
Walter Kugler Jr.  
Peter Herman & Kristi  
Langhus' Uffda Farm  
Scott Leddy  
Julia Leichtenberg  
Alexandra Lerch-Gaggl  
Richard Merten  
Robert Rolley &  
Karen Mesmer  
Minnesota State  
University-Mankato  
Joshua & Stef Morrill  
Elisa & Marshall  
Onellion  
Ken Owens  
Andre & Bonnie  
Paquette

Amy Delyea-Petska  
Tim & Betsy Pierce  
Christopher Purdy  
Corey Raimond  
Scott Rebholz  
Riemer Family Farm  
Heather Romaine  
Mandy Roush  
Christine Schaefer  
Lynn Schultz  
Chuck & Kandy Sonnek  
Judith A. Stark  
Erin Syth  
Marc Udelhofen  
Lynn Werner  
Wildlife Bureau/DNR  
Paul Williams  
Gloria Yaeger, The  
World of Faeries





## President's Message – What's in a Name?

Scott Fulton, President

As the end of my first 2-year term as president fast approaches, I have been reflecting on what distinguishes The Prairie Enthusiasts from other conservation organizations. Our deep focus on, passion for and knowledge about the prairies and savannas of our region, together with their unique plant, insect and animal communities, certainly makes us stand out. Very few other groups have as much enthusiasm for and experience with the use of fire, chainsaws, herbicides, seed collection, processing and distribution, and other tools for land management and restoration.

For me, however, it's the grassroots, chapter-based character of TPE that really sets us apart. TPE is composed of passionate and dedicated local human communities who have undertaken responsibility for protecting and restoring some very specific, cherished local natural communities. During my term as president, I have had the privilege of visiting all eleven of our chapters several times, getting to know many of their members, and seeing firsthand the incredible work they do on the land. The diversity of our efforts is mind-boggling and, like the amazing biodiversity of the prairie and savanna habitats we cherish, our diversity provides a great strength and resilience in the face of change.

The TPE Board has been working hard on our strategic initiatives looking at how our staff and other parts of the overall organization can better serve the needs of the local chapters. One concern that has been raised is simply what we call the

larger TPE organization. Traditionally, we have used the term "Central" to refer to the staff, board and board committees, together with the collective infrastructure, such as our office in Viroqua, Wis., our financial assets, our 501(c)3 non-profit status, our website and more.

The problem with calling all this "Central" is that it creates a sense of separation (and maybe even a bit of alienation) between the local chapters and the larger organization. Some have even referred to "Central" as a "12th chapter" with its own needs and agenda. For many conservation organizations, this is an appropriate reflection of the way they really carry out their mission.

However, if we truly believe (as I do) that TPE's unique heart and soul is the relationship between local human communities and local natural communities, our larger organization, and the way we think about it, needs to reflect that heart and soul.

At our last board meeting in May, we talked about the question of the name, and decided that we should try to replace the term "Central" with "Chapter Support." We believe this more truly reflects the purpose and focus of the larger organization – to provide the services and shared infrastructure that the local chapters need to carry out their work on our collective mission.

"Chapter Support" – it's just a name change, but sometimes what we call something really does affect how we think about it. Please let me know what you think ([president@theprairieenthusiasts.org](mailto:president@theprairieenthusiasts.org)).



## Accuracy Builds a Foundation of Trust

Debra Noell, Editor

Just remembering Jane Clark intimates me.

I can still see her, my "Intro to Reporting" instructor, as she slowly lit her cigarette and glared at the naïve journalism students

watching her in awe. She seemed to wait for the effect of the smoke to soften her permanently scowling face. "Accuracy," she said, staring hard at us, "is everything."

Back then, it was easier to assure accuracy. Back then, when CNN had just begun its 24-hour "all news, all the time" model that many believed would never succeed, back when we used typewriters and pens, back when people trusted newspapers, we considered our pledge to accuracy sacred.

But today, the theater of ideas floods our lives – hundreds of thousands of voices and words spew at us constantly from cell phones, televisions, pod casts, web casts, radios, even newsletters. Discerning between opinion and fact makes the pursuit of accuracy overwhelming, if not impossible.

So what is our responsibility at *The Prairie Promoter* to accuracy?

I've thought a lot about this since taking over as editor 16 months ago. I do believe people look to TPE for facts, not opinions, for truths, not manipulations. But when the field is so broad and the knowledge base mostly untested and undocumented, how do we provide accurate guidance? How do we help each other? Some of the work we do is backed by scientific studies. Some of what we have to learn and teach each other comes from practice wisdom. Aren't both valid?

In my opinion, yes, there is room for both in *The Promoter*.

To help guide these principles, the Communications Committee at TPE has decided to institute a small "advisory group" of scientists who can screen for inaccuracies, clarify why certain outcomes may have occurred due to a particular intervention or experience, and add their voice to the story. In rare instances, they could keep a story from publication.

I want to use this group to clarify claims, not censor ideas. But we can't forget what Jane Clark said, accuracy is the foundation of good journalism – it leads to credibility, trust and the pursuit of truths.

If you wish to be part of this small group of scientific experts, please let me know via [promoter@theprairieenthusiasts.org](mailto:promoter@theprairieenthusiasts.org)



*Cream indigo seed pods.*

*Roadside Riches ... continued from Page 1*

row of cup plants that grew along County Road J just north of the white Lutheran church; the spiderworts that shined along Hwy 14 just east of Gotham; the prairie dock that stood tall along the railroad tracks a few miles west of Middleton. There was also the rough blazing-star along Hwy 133 outside of Muscoda, the prairie coreopsis in the dry, sandy soil along the railroad tracks near Blue River, the tall boneset, blue vervain and common ironweed flourishing in a wet pasture on Hwy 35 south of Ferryville.

I don't want to miss mentioning any of my friends, although I'm sure I have. I want to testify to their continued existence and stand witness to their tenacity, despite the prairies around them that were destroyed long ago.

To pick prairie seeds is to become entwined in a very intimate way with the species. First, you identify its bloom and the time of year it occurs. Then, you learn where it's growing, its moisture and its soil preferences. Next, you have to check on it week by week to learn when its seeds are ready to pick. Like Goldilock's porridge, the timing has to be just right. For many species, this would take a number of years as I drove by them - one year too soon, another year too late.

Picking seeds enabled me to spend time with them one last time in the open spaces where they lived. I could also engage in a leisurely outdoor activity that made me slow down and be more mindful. Some seeds essentially clean themselves when picked. If you waited long enough, gray headed cone flowers fell apart as you gently pulled the seed heads off their stems. Indian grass easily came off in an amazingly satisfying way as you ran your hand up its tall seven-foot stems.

Next, I invited the seeds into my home. My condo in Milwaukee was filled every winter with paper shopping bags full of seeds. I spent winter nights on the floor separating and cleaning them. Hours and hours of intimate touching and rubbing, with each one having its own character, smell and texture. Cream gentian flower heads flake apart like a fine Greek pastry, their tiny seeds easily tumbling out as I rubbed them between my hands. Pale purple cone flower heads would cut my hands if I didn't wear gloves. Cup plants, compass plants and rosin weed, all of the same family, easily separated when rubbed between my hands, but I learned to spread them evenly on a table top to dry after picking or they became moldy in the bags awaiting cleaning. Sneezeweed

lived up to its name as I sneezed non-stop while cleaning and inhaling its seeds. Bee balm filled the room with its lovely fragrance, making it obvious why it's used in potpourri.

A mix of all these friends would slowly permeate every inch of my living space and nasal cavity as the contents of my condo became covered with a fine prairie dust that also turned my Kleenex black when I blew my nose.

After cleaning the seeds, I picked up sawdust from the local lumber mill and used it as mixer and filler to spread my seeds. I would get down on my hands and knees and mix the seeds into a huge pile of sawdust, ultimately emerging covered from head to toe with the fragrant mix of oak and forbs. As my prairie planting expanded, it would take seven large trash cans of this mix to cover the area.

The final stage of my growing intimacy with these friends would be to watch them grow, mature, bloom and spread in their new home.

My relationship with those lupines on the edge of that hillside followed a similar path. I spread their seeds on a dry, nutrient poor area, hoping their magical ability to pull nutrients out of the air gave them a competitive edge in poor soils. One year, while exploring the sight for more lupines, I wandered up above that sandy cliff into a field above. It was surrounded by barbed wire but hadn't been grazed in a while. There I found a couple dozen mature and healthy cream baptisia. It was one of my most precious finds in those days of seed hunting. I collected seeds for a couple years and planted them on a drier, west-facing hillside on my land.



*Lupine (Photos by Debra Noell)*





*The author picked lupine seed here and savored its beauty before it was destroyed by bulldozers. (Photo by Vance Baker)*



*Lupine (Photo by Debra Noell)*

Afraid of a poor take if I hand broadcast this most precious of guests, I walked up and down the hill with an old broom handle, a hammer, a pouch of seeds attached to one side on my belt and a bag of dirt on the other. I would pound a small hole with the broom handle and hammer, drop in a couple seeds, and then cover them with dirt, gently stepping on the spot before moving on. As is often the case, years later after I all but forgot about planting those seeds and accepted the fact that my efforts had failed, I started seeing mature baptisia plants starting to bloom.

One year six plants, the next year 15, and now there is a wonderful population of three or more dozen thriving cream baptisia plants on my hillsides.

Years ago, a trailer appeared on the dirt drive near the lupine patch. This was followed by a moment of sorrow when the new inhabitants excavated that area for sand and destroyed all of the remaining lupine. That scenario has been repeated over and over again the last decade as I have watched these patches of survivors mowed, covered in wild

parsnip, overcome with crown vetch, killed by herbicides, bull dozed and developed. There is never any fanfare with these exterminations.

Despite becoming accustomed to the losses, the morning I saw those Herefords grazing in what used to be rare, native patches of cream baptisia, my eyes welled with tears as I gasped, sighed, slowed the car and stared. No funerals had been held, no proclamations made. My quiet grief seemed to be the only testament to their existence and their passing.

My sorrow remains, but it's tempered by the thriving prairie I continue to manage and love today.

When I stand on that west-facing hillside shared with the cream baptisias, the golden sun of a summer evening illuminating the cumulous-shaped tree tops of the huge cottonwoods that line the trout stream winding through the prairie, my spirit begins to rise. As I look out and see all the friends I have invited here over the years, now thriving and smiling back at me, I can't help but rejoice.



*This green, lush hillside for Herefords once included a magnificent display of cream indigo. (Photo by Vance Baker)*

# TPE Endowments – a Creative Way to Give

By Jack Kussmaul

The Prairie Enthusiasts has historically been dependent on annual giving and grants to support its financial needs. Many non-profit organizations have supporting endowments that provide a guaranteed and dependable source of income. Harvard University, for example, is supported by an endowment valued at more than \$36 billion. While we never expect to be in the same league as Harvard, TPE has begun to develop its own endowments. Increasing their size is critical to the long-term strength of our organization.

TPE Trust is a separate entity that has been created to manage the investments we have. The trust manages a number of separate endowments. Most endowments are to support a specific site. At the end of 2017, for example, these ranged in size from \$5,551 to \$378,727. The total was just over \$900,000.

The terms of the trust provide that an annual distribution can be made that is equal to 4% of the average value of the fund at the end of the previous 12 calendar quarters. This is a common method of determining the amount of distribution in the non-profit world. It's designed to accomplish two things. First, because it's not based on the value at the end of one quarter or one year, the amount of distribution is not subject to dramatic swings in the stock market. Second, it's small enough that even after the 4% distribution is made, the value of the endowment should continue to grow and keep up with inflation.

Up to this point, most site stewards have declined to take the annual income to which they are entitled. This income has been added to the endowment to enable it to grow.

Not all endowments are for sites. For example, due to the generosity of Olive and John Thomson and of Dennis and Joan Thomson, TPE has an endowment to hire interns to work at Schurch-Thomson and at Mounds View. At the end of 2017, this endowment held more than \$137,000. The 2018 distribution should be over \$5,000. This has funded a very successful internship program. In preparation for this article, I asked Grace Vosen, a former intern, for her observations. She wrote:

*"I was an intern with Empire-Sauk in 2015. We worked at three sites: Mounds View Grassland Preserve in Blue Mounds, Pleasant Valley and West Dane Conservancies in Black Earth. I had never seen such vibrant prairie remnants, and it delighted me to visit them day after day. An experienced volunteer or restoration professional guided us at each site. Although we spent most of our time controlling*

*invasive species, we had lessons on plant ID, seed collecting and ecosystem management. These lessons helped me realize that I love getting up close and personal with native plants.*

*I was already studying natural resources in college, but the internship narrowed my focus. In 2016 and 2017, I returned to Mounds View to work part-time as a seed collector. I also began leading work parties and attending Empire-Sauk chapter meetings.*

*Of the six interns that year, two (including myself) are now at UW-Madison pursuing master's degrees related to restoration. Two perform restoration and horticultural work at the UW Arboretum. One is helping with a bird and small mammal monitoring project in Texas, and the sixth is Field Manager for the Canyon Country Youth Corps in Utah."*

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**The TPE endowments are relatively small compared to many organizations. This is in part because we are a relatively young organization. The largest gifts come to endowments through estates, whether it's through a will, trust, beneficiary designation or otherwise.**

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Grace's account is testimony to the fact that the internship program is not only having a positive effect on the sites in which they work but on the interns as well.

We also have endowments to support easement monitoring and legal defense. Monitoring is required annually. The monitor checks each site to report on the current status and whether there are any violations of the easement terms. The legal defense fund is

there to handle litigation if we find easement violations.

The TPE endowments are relatively small compared to many organizations. This is in part because we are a relatively young organization. The largest gifts come to endowments through estates, whether it's through a will, trust, beneficiary designation or otherwise. We urge you to consider TPE Trust in your estate plan. If you have a site you especially care about, you can designate your gift to be used for that site.

And remember, we also appreciate funds for the endowment, which provides for any site where the need is greatest. If you want it to be used to fund interns, you can designate it for this purpose. We also have an endowment to fund operations, unglamorous but critical to the organization. If you have questions on specific endowments or on methods of making your gift, you may contact Chris Kirkpatrick, our Executive Director, at [executivedirector@theprairieenthusiasts.org](mailto:executivedirector@theprairieenthusiasts.org) or 608-638-1873, or Jack Kussmaul, Chair of the Fund Raising and Endowment Committee at [jack.kussmaul@gmail.com](mailto:jack.kussmaul@gmail.com) or 608-988-4309.

Please remember, the financial health of TPE depends on your generosity.



# Violet Wood-Sorrel Blushes Bluff

By Tom Mitchell

This spring, the star of the colorful flower show at Muralt Bluff was the violet wood-sorrel (*Oxalis violacea*). Blooms were abundant in May along the prominent northwest rim and down the steep slopes of TPE's property between Monticello and Albany in Green County.

Every spring on the bluff, there's red and blue zones of flowers - prairie smoke and bird's foot violet - covering a wide swath that is noticeable from afar. This year, the zones had a visible pink and lavender rash from the prolific wood-sorrels and shooting stars, and later blue again from the spiderwort.

Fall fire and unusual spring weather seem to have stimulated dormant wood-sorrel plants to a full-flower display, showing off a range of hues from white to pink to deep purple. Thousands of these shy, low-growing plants occur on both the dolomite cap rock and the sandstone slopes below.

On cold, rainy days, the flowers stay closed but open to the sun on clear days. This colorful plant sends up leaves and flower stalks from an underground bulb. We even found one plant growing in a quarter-inch of dirt in a shallow depression on a slab of carbonate rock. Their three-part leaves have a distinctive fold in the middle.

Other spring blooms at Muralt's northwest bluff were wild strawberry, prairie ragwort, pussy-toes, pasque flower, prairie smoke, kittentails, bird's foot and prairie violet, yellow star grass, hoary and fringed puccoon, false toadflax, shooting stars, thimbleweed, blue-eyed grass, sand cress, wood betony and Mead's sedge.

This time of year, you could find alum root, spiderwort, yellow coneflower, Hill's thistle, Carolina rose, hairy hawkweed, small skullcap, stiff sandwort, flowering spurge, pale spiked lobelia, June grass, needle grass, panic grass, prairie dropseed, side-oats gramma and lead plant. Fall inhabitants include little bluestem, whorled milkweed, gray goldenrod, showy goldenrod, aromatic aster, heath aster, flax-leaved aster and stiff gentian.

The shrub-tree layer on Muralt's northwest bluff produces hazelnut, sumac, gray dogwood, chokeberry, hawthorn, raspberry, dewberry, prickly ash, riverbank grape, as well as black, red and bur oak.

In the *Atlas of Wisconsin Prairie and Savanna Flora*, Theodore Cochrane and Hugh Iltis write that violet wood-sorrel has a range in Wisconsin "south of the tension zone," which is a transition zone including the southwestern third of the state in sandy, gravelly or rocky soil - a perfect description of the bluff. *The Flora of Wisconsin* consortium of herbaria states that the etymology of *Oxalis* is from the Greek *oxus* for "sour," referring to the pleasantly lemony taste of the leaves and stem. Related plants include the common yellow wood-sorrels, edible plants with a refreshing chew, a taste derived from its high content of oxalic acid. Warning though, graze lightly; it's toxic in large quantities.

Worldwide, wood-sorrels are as widespread as mustards, but this species is confined to North America, east of the Rocky Mountains.

In *Flora of the Chicago Region*, Gerould Wilhelm and Laura



Violet wood-sorrel (photo by Tom Mitchell)

Rericha list ants in the genus *Formica* as "regular visitors" to the petals of violet wood-sorrel, while bees of the genera *Augochlorella*, *Ceratina*, *Halictus* and *Lasiglossum* visit the inflorescences (flower heads). Grassland birds eat the fruits.

The Wisconsin State Herbarium has specimens from our chapter's three counties - Lafayette, Green and Rock, which date from 1860 to 1993, collected by botanists of note, including Increase A. Lapham, Steven C. Stuntz,

Norman C. Fassett and Lytton J. Musselman.

Lapham (1811-1875), known as Wisconsin's first scientist, collected this plant in 1860 near Beloit. Stuntz was a junior at Monroe High School when he collected *Oxalis violacea* near his hometown in 1891. Fassett, a UW-Madison professor and curator of the Herbarium from 1925 to 1954, took a specimen in 1928 at Pine Bluff (near the covered bridge at Clarence) and another in 1930 at the summit of Platteville Mound (labeled as Lafayette County). In May 1969, Musselman collected *Oxalis* from a gravel hill prairie north of Happy Hollow Road between Beloit and Janesville.

Some of these herbarium sites - including Muralt Bluff (Richard Horton, 1991), Vale Prairie (Andrew Williams, 1993) and Oliver Prairie (Robert H. Reed, 1969) - are places that still have healthy violet wood-sorrel

populations. It's also found at Butenhoff Prairie, Iltis Savanna, Stauffacher Prairie and Avon Ridge.

There are other herbarium specimens from other sites in our area. In May 1947, Elizabeth A. Kirk collected it a quarter-mile south of Juda. In May 1946, Peter K. Nelson collected it three miles southeast of Darlington near Ames Branch School. It was found in May 1989 by G. Schefdore on the north shore of Yellowstone Lake in a wooded area on sandy soil. In June 1972, Marion M. Rice found it along a roadside east of Skinner Hollow Road and north of Hwy 81.

Violet wood-sorrel is just one of many reasons for prairie enthusiasts to get out and look over our preserves in any season. See the ever-changing parade of flowers, butterflies and bees; listen for the melodic notes of the meadowlarks and the buzz from grasshopper sparrows; enjoy the cool breezes and take in the long view from the bluff tops.



Wood-sorrel drawing by Gary Eldred

# Empire-Sauk Burn School Sparks Inspiration

By Grace Vosen

It's 2 p.m. on St. Patrick's Day, and three dozen prairie enthusiasts stand stiffly, staring at the ground. The air crackles with tension as these prescribed burn students await their final exam. With the midday sun warming their backs, they watch an instructor light a test fire. Everyone exhales as it crawls along, burning against the wind. But then the burn boss shouts: "Shut it down." Groups of students armed with rakes, flappers and backpack water pumps step up and suppress the flames.

Nearly 35 "students" - landowners, volunteers, interested locals and combinations of the three - turned out for the inaugural Empire-Sauk Chapter burn school training. Some had burned before; others were true greenhorns. All were in for a morning packed with valuable information. TPE member and trainer Rob Baller's slides on burn techniques, equipment and safety were reviewed. Scott Fulton's lesson on prescribed fire methods was enhanced by anecdotes from chapter volunteers. By hearing stories

straight from these experienced burners, students gained a better idea of what to do and not to do on a prairie burn.

As usual, the chance to swap stories and to socialize was just as valuable as the training itself.

Afterward, students had a chance to put their new knowledge to use. As payment for using the Berry Town Hall, the class agreed to burn the Kahl Halfway Prairie Park next door. Although the damp vegetation made for a tame fire, the students practiced their skills using tools of the trade. They left the training with a certificate of completion and the beginning skills for burning in their own corners of the world.

Before any fire reached the ground that day, a pair of sandhill cranes flew over the assembled class. They wheeled downward into a stand of cat-tails, their calls echoing across the prairie. Their presence was a reminder to students: when we burn prairies, it's not simply to benefit us. Restoring the fire regime of our Midwestern landscape helps ensure a future for the living things around us.

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**By hearing stories straight from these experienced burners, students gained a better idea of what to do and not to do on a prairie burn.**

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## New Insect Record for Lafayette County

By Marci Hess

Lafayette County, Wis., has one more reason to be proud! A queen rusty-patched bumble bee (*Bombus affinis*) was documented on May 2 at Driftless Prairies (TPE members Jim and Marci Hess's land) near Blanchardville. This also is the first 2018 sighting in the U.S., as recorded at [www.bumblebeewatch.org](http://www.bumblebeewatch.org).

This bumble bee has declined 87% in 20 years, per an article in USA Today. It's on the brink of extinction and is the first bumble bee to be listed as federally endangered. Decline is due to loss of grasslands and prairies, intensive farming, pesticide use and climate change, according to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife website.

The queens emerge from their underground overwintering home in early spring and are the last to hibernate. This lifestyle requires a constant supply of blooming flowers from April to September.

Any opportunity you have to create or maintain native plants along our roadsides, bordering your croplands and pastures, or in your garden, it will benefit the rusty-patched bumble bee and our other important insects, too.



(Photo by Marci Hess)



(Photo by Marci Hess)



# "Prairie Flora Guide to Blue Earth County" - Book Review

"Prairie Flora Guide to Blue Earth County: An Illustrated Guide," by Addeline R. Theis & Dr. Matthew A. Kaproth (2017).  
Published by Minnesota State University Press, Mankato.

By Dr. Robyn Ceurvorst

**P**rairie Flora Guide to Blue Earth County (Minn.) provides a recent, extensive research effort and publication for prairie enthusiasts seeking a comprehensive, locally detailed field guide and key to forbs in the county, which is located about 90 miles southwest of Minneapolis.

The prairie flora guide provides 61 pages of instructions, visual glossary and key, plant descriptions in alphabetical order, bibliography and glossary. It fits easily into a field pack and could withstand some elements of the field over time with its thick cover and pages. The book's large, clear sketches of each flower help the reader match field samples with life-size illustrations and flower characteristics.

Characteristics detailed include flower type, flower arrangement, leaf arrangement, leaf type and leaf shape in the visual glossary. After the visual glossary and key, the guide offers two pages for each plant description with a large sketch of the flower on the left, and a full page of flower characteristics and key features in detail on the right page.

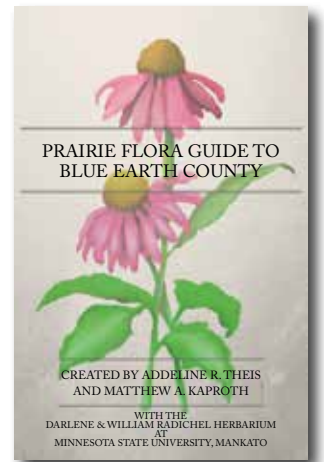
After speaking with Kaproth, one of the authors, I learned that the body of the work started as a graduate student research study funded by the Radichel Herbarium at Minnesota (Mankato) State University, and blossomed into a full-fledged field guide for the entire county. I would surmise this guide to be extremely useful for practitioners and enthusiasts in southern Minnesota and northern Iowa as well. The organization and presentation of this highly relevant forb information provides an accessible, affordable handbook

to identify flowers and species classification, as well as common species name.

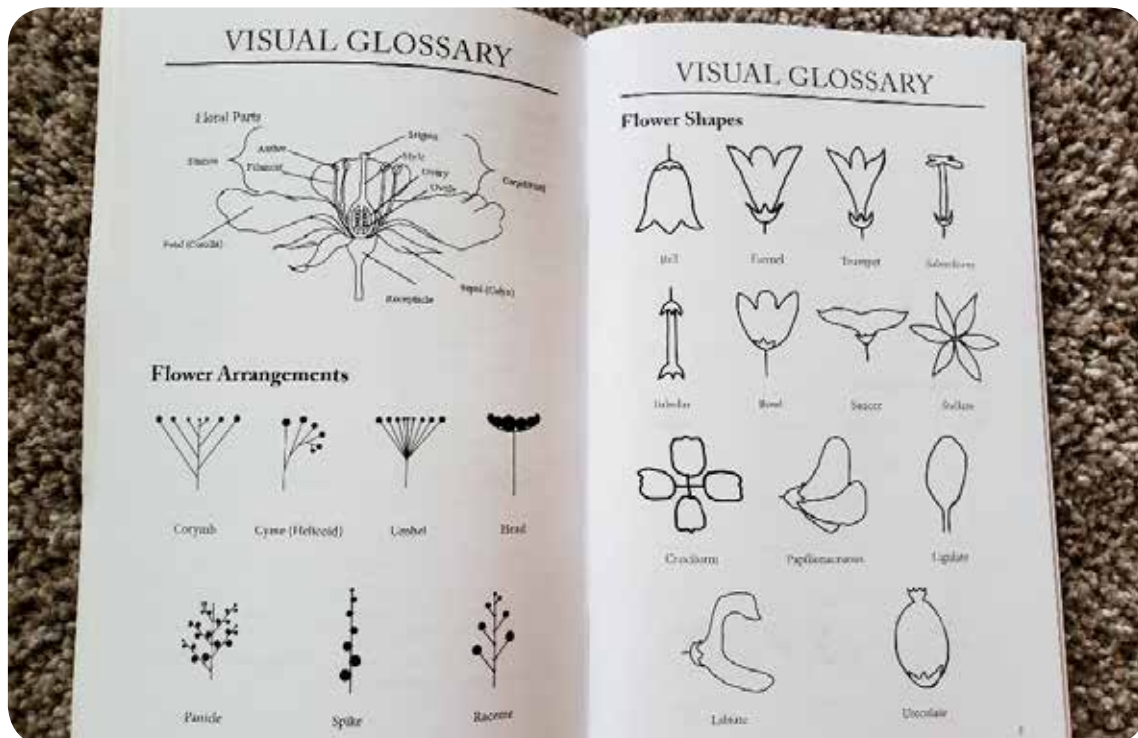
Rather than clutter each page with all seven levels of the Linnaean classification system for each flower, the writers focus on the flower's common name, species name, family, leaf characteristics, height, bloom, life cycle, notes and key, as well as a full-page illustration.

I had been searching for a local guide for several years of Blue Earth County's prairie plants. As a higher education professor who teaches several field courses and conducts applied research at parks and conservation areas, I grew frustrated over the years that regional and state field guides lacked the comprehensive detail and key that this guide delivers.

Rhett Johnson published *A Field Guide to Common Minnesota Prairie Grasses* (2013), which proved helpful to my educational and research efforts. But when I finally stumbled upon this guide at a TPE Many Rivers Chapter meeting this spring in Mankato, I knew I found my solution to identifying local flowers.



Cover of book



Visual glossary makes identification simple.

# Member Profile – Karin Strenski

By John Day

Karin Strenski is treasurer of the Northwest Illinois Chapter of TPE (NIPE). At first thought, it's a bit difficult to write a brief article about someone involved in the finance of any kind of operation. Where's the drama? Where's the excitement or intrigue? Then, like a ray of sunshine finding its way through the clouds, the answer becomes clear.

Karin's efforts and role in the NIPE operation far exceeds what might be called: "Nothing but numbers." Karin, along with her husband Ed Strenski and Ed's mother, Dian Strenski (affectionately called "Mom" by volunteer regulars) has played an exceptional role in NIPE successes, and its day-to-day functions.

"The accounting is pretty basic stuff," Karin said. "Putting numbers in the proper columns along with the appropriate code is the most important aspect of our system. But as for trying to make NIPE successful, I believe that it's been pretty much a family effort here at our house."

A family effort is indeed a good way of describing what the Strenskis have been doing for NIPE since 2006.

Yes, Karin makes sure the invoices received from vendors are correct. At each board meeting, Karin presents budget reports and provides any necessary financial information. Then, she goes above and beyond, working with Ed (when he's not clearing

brush, managing a controlled burn or cutting a firebreak) as well as Dian, who jumps in to help.

The extra duties shared by the trio include keeping track of NIPE tee shirts and caps, acting as an administrator on the NIPE Facebook page, helping with an inventory of Pollinator seed mixes sold to bee keepers and other interested parties, as well as handling NIPE's big seller, our home-made seed picking aprons produced by Team Strenski and sewn by "Mom."

Karin and Ed have played key roles in the success NIPE has had at annual TPE Conferences and meetings. The Strenski Team acts as the marshaling point for donated items that will be a part of raffles or auctions at these events and assures that those pieces arrive at the event.

So, for all those who think accounting may be a dull job, take a look at Karin. When you put in a little extra and get the whole family working with you, it can go a long way. Thank you Karin, and Team Strenski for all you do to make NIPE and TPE successful!



# Hanley Savanna's Deep Roots

By Rickie Rachuy

Our Northwest Illinois chapter lore always says that Hanley Savanna was founded in 2003, but its history has roots much deeper and much closer to home.

I met the landowner, Jim Lewis, back in 1978 when we were both working in the same building on Michigan Avenue in Chicago. He would stop in the plant and gift shop where I worked from time to time, a charming man who loved to flirt.

Sometime after I had begun dating one of his co-workers, he invited both of us for a weekend at his place "in the country," which turned out to be Hanover, Ill. He owned a house in town and land - both on the bluff overlooking the Mississippi River (the upper farm) and on the floodplain that bumped up against what was then the Savanna Army Depot (the lower farm). He had bought the land in the early 1970s sight unseen to help a friend who was having financial difficulties.

That weekend I fell in love with the countryside and with the 43-acre parcel that was for sale next door to the upper farm. I bought that acreage, and Jim and I became neighbors.

There were many amusing rumors floating around Hanover about Jim - that he worked for the CIA was a persistent story; that he made his fortune importing bird seed to England during WWII, was another. I know the first was untrue, and I'm not sure about the second, but I do know that his environmental roots went way back and ran deep.



James R. Lewis 1923-2009



The pines being removed at Hanley, Winter 2005

A direct descendant of Civil War Gen. John Buford, James Hanley took his step-father's name when his mother, Leah Hanley, remarried, and became James Lewis.

The first acres of land to be donated by Jim, and his neighbor to the south, became the beginnings of the Hanover Bluff Nature Preserve (HBNP), which was dedicated in 1987. A few years later, Jim donated an adjoining 115-acre parcel to The Nature Conservancy. This land connects the 'upper' and 'lower' farms and is adjacent to HBNP, which is now a 1,200-acre protected natural area.

In 2003, Jim sold the remaining 110 acres of the 'lower farm' to TPE and created a conservation easement on the residual 89 acres of the 'upper farm' held by the Natural Land Institute. My own acres were also protected by a conserva-



tion easement at that time. In 2004, another 44-acre parcel was purchased by TPE from a lower farm neighbor, Gene Roberts, completing the 160-acre tract known as Hanley Savanna.

The importance of this parcel cannot be overstated - it connects Hanover Bluff with the Lost Mound Fish & Wildlife Refuge, creating the largest protected natural area in north-west Illinois with prairie, woodland, barrens, wetland and savanna.

TPE restoration work began at Hanley in 2003 with the seeding of the West Savanna, Lark Prairie (named after one of Jim's daughters) and The Sandbox. I remember The Sandbox seeding well. True to its name, it's a sandy dune where prairie diva Barb and I were tasked to seed porcupine grass. We had collected the very long (3- to 8-inch) awns with sharp, spiral twists during late summer and had laboriously bundled them by the dozen with rubber bands. Planting included unbundling the seeds, pitching them high in the air and watching them self-seed into the sand.

In 2004 and 2005, we planted Bumblebee Prairie, which gets its name from the prolific insect life there and Aster Prairie, named for the large population of azure asters. The earliest seedings contained about 85 species; these days we use more than 100 species in our restorations.

In the winter of 2005, the pine plantation was harvested and work began on restoring "The Pinelands." We were lucky to be paid a nominal amount to remove this non-native species and work toward restoring it to oak savanna. After many years of work, we were astonished to find that yellow-breasted chats had moved in from the neighboring Lost Mound Wildlife Refuge, along with grasshopper and lark sparrows. Based on these finds, we're rethinking our management strategy for this area.

Restoring the Roberts and Lewis prairies were priorities



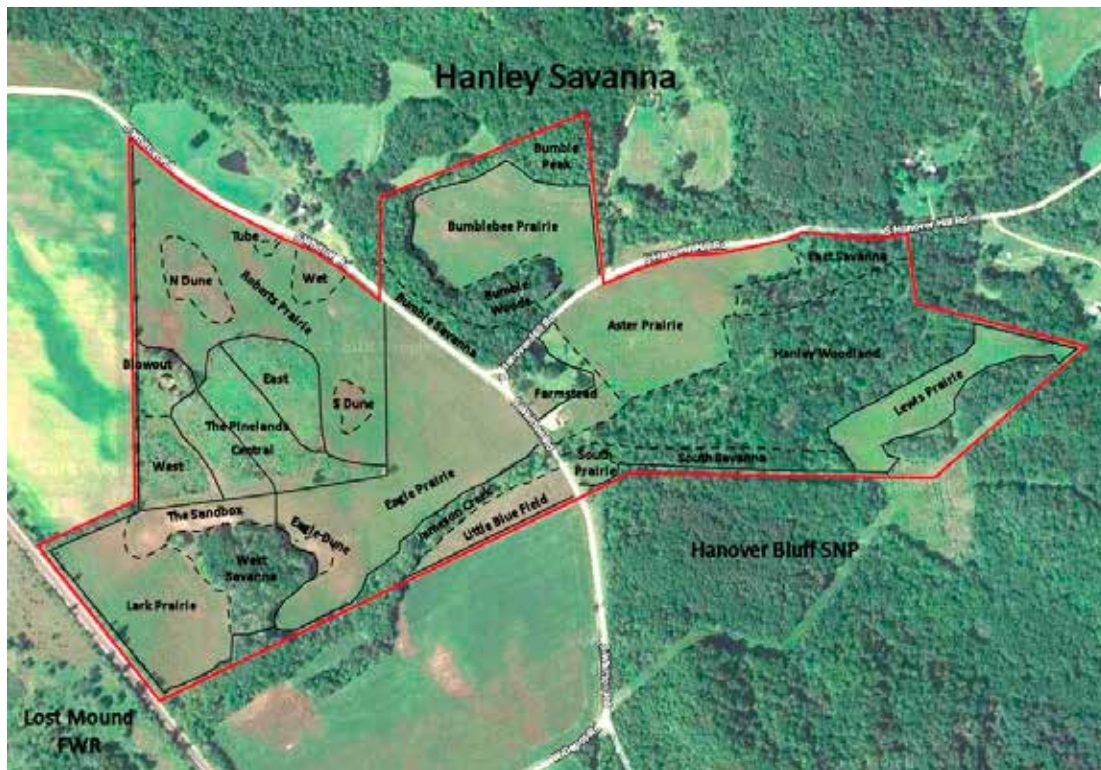
Lark B. Lewis (R) with her daughter Kit (Kelsey) Stewart at Lark Prairie, 2010. (Photo courtesy the family)

in 2006, followed by 2007 focus on Eagle Prairie, named for several Bald eagles we saw there one winter. The little blue-stem field was created and an over-seeding was completed at the East Savanna.

By 2008, the entire property had been restored. Of course, that work is ongoing. Every year brings new opportunities and new challenges. Some years we find new species, some years we find new weeds. We've learned that restoring a prairie is almost easier than maintaining it.

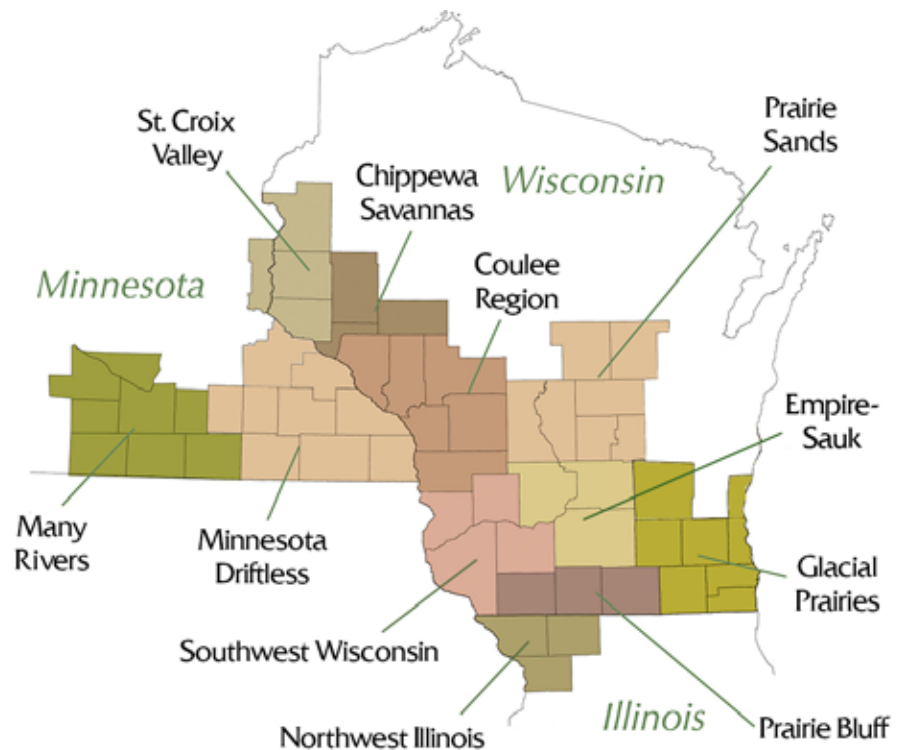
Currently, we have a grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation to advance our management of Hanley Savanna to the next level. By collecting detailed ecological data over the entire site, we'll be able to create a new management plan to adaptively manage the ecosystem.

As always, we invite you to come out to Hanley Savanna, enjoy the prairies and the wildlife, and help us with our restoration efforts.



Hanley Savanna

# Chapter Updates



## Coulee Region

### Leopold Land Ethic Workshop a Success

Don Nelson

The Prairie Enthusiasts' Coulee Region Chapter, Friends of Kickapoo Valley Reserve and the Valley Stewardship Network, in conjunction with the Aldo Leopold Foundation, sponsored a Land Ethic Leaders workshop June 1-2 at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve's Visitor Center near La Farge, Wis.

The 25 participants met Friday to view *Green Fire*, a documentary detailing Aldo Leopold's life and his environmental legacy. On Saturday, the participants used Leopold's "Observe, Participate and Reflect" framework to explore the outdoors, share their environmental experiences and interests, engage in guided discussions and consider the impact of their own environmental decisions.

Leopold believed that ethical behavior toward the natural world evolve in the "minds of a thinking community."

The workshop's participants formed such a community as they explored their personal land ethic and learned how their perspective might align or differ with those of others. While Leopold and his work were a central focus of the workshop, the participants learned that many individuals have sought a more ethical relationship between people and the larger land community.



*Participants in the Leopold Land Ethic Workshop dug deep to better understand themselves and the natural world.  
(Photo courtesy Aldo Leopold Center)*

As a result of the workshop, participants will design and implement an environmental service project that emphasizes ecological inquiry, purposeful work and active reflection. The projects will provide additional opportunities for the participants to explore, renew, and deepen their own personal connections to the land.



## Prairie Talks in the Coulee Region

Jim Rogala

Presentations on prairies serve to educate people on the value of conserving prairie, and we hope, inspire them to participate in conservation efforts.

I was provided the opportunity to educate attendees at a couple recent gatherings. At the Coulee Region Audubon meeting on May 16 in La Crosse, I gave an overview of the complexity of prairie ecosystems entitled “Prairie Ecosystems: Looking beyond the grasses.” The talk, which barely mentioned birds, was aimed at developing a fuller appreciation of the diversity of biota and functions of a healthy prairie.

Using some of the same concepts, I presented “Why Are Native Prairies So Difficult to Reconstruct?” at the June 6 EnviroWednesdays program at the La Crosse Myrick Park Center. This talk described the complexities of attempting to reconstruct native prairies and offered some methods that can deliver more successful reconstruction results within the obvious constraints.

## Coulee Region Values Chapter Support

Jim Rogala

Finding volunteers for workdays isn’t difficult, but there are many other tasks that are less attractive and sometimes take skills not found in all chapters. That’s the strength of having TPE Chapter Support (previously named “Central”).

One example of the support available is the planning and execution of a successful TPE Conference each year. Our chapter hosted the 2018 conference and relied heavily on TPE Chapter Support staff to make it a success. Seeing that this annual event requires time and effort by staff and chapter volunteers, the profits from that event are typically shared equally between Chapter Support and the hosting chapter.

To show our commitment to Chapter Support, our chapter decided not to split the profits this year and make those funds available for use by Chapter Support. We’re looking forward to continued support that allows our chapter to help complete the mission of TPE.

## Empire-Sauk

### Dane County Expo Report

Rob Baller

Volunteers from Empire-Sauk staffed a booth at the Dane County Garden Expo Feb. 9-11. The popular Expo, which is attended by thousands every year, is perennially held at the Alliant Energy Center in Madison. It includes vendors and speakers on innumerable subjects related to gardening, food preparation, yard decorations and the domestic out-of-doors.

Visitors to the TPE booth this year received free information about the mission of TPE. Some sought counsel on how to plant or maintain their prairie gardens. A lovely dried prairie display was provided by Karen Agee, and posters of native birds and fish were available free to all young people.



A young enthusiast walks away with a free fish poster, while her father watches. Volunteer Grace Vosen (wearing TPE hat) receives visitors at TPE’s Dane County Expo booth. (Photo by Rob Baller)

## How to Stop Mass Mowers

Rob Baller

A half mile west of Cross Plains, Wis., between a railroad track and Hwy 14, lies about 100 yards of mesic prairie. County Road KP intersects from the north nearby. As declared by TPE member Scott Sauer, the site was included in studies for The Vegetation of Wisconsin by John Curtis (UW-Madison, 1950). It’s still home to abundant prairie dock, yellow coneflower, prairie thistle and more. But there’s not much grass.

The remnant has been partially weeded by Sauer and myself the last few years. Parsnip is still doing well. The county road crew mows it sometimes, usually when the parsnip has dried seed, weaving between and often flattening the signs placed by Sauer that said “Native Plants – Control Mowing.”

In August 2017, Sauer and I retrieved the abused signs and pounded in a row of new ones. The new signs say “WISDot Prairie Stewardship Area – No Mow, No Spray.” They were donated by Department of Transportation ecologist (retired) Gary Birch; Dane County Park Naturalist Lars Higdon donated the new metal posts, and Quercus Land Restoration owner Jim Ellison loaned his post driver. Thank you very much all. Now we just need more help weeding.

Take that, Dane County road crew.



Volunteer site stewards Scott Sauer (L, in hard hat) and Rob Baller (R, in soft hat) with new and old signs at the Hwy 14/KP Prairie. (Photo by Sauer’s camera placed on a step ladder)



Photos taken at Hwy. 14 and KP. Mowing signs aren’t always effective. (Photo by Scott Sauer)

## Many Rivers

### Seeking Land Owners for Data Collection

Dr. Robyn Ceurvorst & Dr. Matthew Kaproth

This year, through our work with Minnesota (Mankato) State University, we asked for grant funding to partner students and TPE to gather data on Minnesota prairies. Although we didn't receive state funding, we continue to look for TPE members willing to keep written records of their management practices, successes and failures.

We are recruiting 20 prairie restoration projects to follow for two to three years. The tentative goals include:

- Coordinate methods and data reporting to complement statewide efforts
- Survey prairies (remnant and restored) in Central (Anoka Sand Plains) and Southern Minnesota
- Identify methods of prairie management linked to success
- Archive surveys so the methods of successful prairie management can be identified and used elsewhere

Those participating can choose to keep their location or other specific information confidential. We also plan to submit reports and articles to TPE, and provide workshops / seminars on campus. If you're interested, contact us at: [mthew.kaproth@mnsu.edu](mailto:mthew.kaproth@mnsu.edu) or [robyn.ceurvorst@mnsu.edu](mailto:robyn.ceurvorst@mnsu.edu)

## Northwest Illinois

See our web-page [www.nipes.org](http://www.nipes.org) for current news.

## Prairie Bluff

### TPE Member Awarded Outstanding Achievement

Marci Hess

Jim Hess was presented one of Wisconsin's 2018 awards for Outstanding Achievement in Citizen-based Monitoring (CBM) at the organization's March event in Eau Claire. Hess was given this award for his years of dedicated service to various Citizen Science projects.

Hess has a bluebird trail consisting of 27 boxes, and since 2008, he has fledged 757 bluebirds. The comeback of the bluebird is a great success story as they were nearly extinct in 1970. Hess sits on the board of the Lafayette County Bluebird Society and works with the American Kestrel Partnership. Since 2013, he has installed nine American kestrel boxes and fledged 65 of the birds. The Western Great Lakes Breeding Bird Survey from 1999 – 2009 shows that Wisconsin is experiencing a 6.3% annual decline in our smallest falcon

numbers. The cause of this decline is unknown, making this data collection imperative to the understanding of what's happening.

Since 2013, Hess also has monitored six bat boxes, participated in two large bat counts at Lake Yellowstone, and assisted with bat banding. The Wisconsin Bat Program was established in 2007 when white nose syndrome was first identified. Our state had the incredible foresight to begin data collection to ascertain baseline population numbers.

Each December since 2001, Hess has participated in The Christmas Bird Count, which provides data for understanding bird populations and trends. The numbers come from the National Audubon Society, which has sponsored the count since 1900.

His most recent project is the Monarch Larval Monitoring Program, which will begin this year. Last year, there was a 14.8% decline in monarchs overwintering in Mexico, continuing the downward trend that has resulted in an overall 90% decline from the population high 20 years ago, according to the National Wildlife Foundation. The data collected will help researchers better understand the needs and distribution of this important insect.

Other volunteer activities include serving on the board of Southern Wisconsin Trout Unlimited. As its conservation chair, he sets up annual work days. For TPE, he serves on the Landowners committee.



Jim Hess (L) receives the award from Eva Lewandowski, Citizen-based Monitoring Coordinator for WI-DNR.

### Burns by the Numbers

Tom Mitchell

Volunteers from Prairie Bluff Chapter put fire on the ground 23 days during the spring of 2018, burning 39 units at 31 sites in Green, Rock and Lafayette counties.

Our first fire occurred at Henry Hill on March 18, and we finished up at Vale Prairie, where we burned on May 23; we



Prairie Bluff burn crew after a successful controlled fire. (Photo by Tom Mitchell)



did 10 burns in March, 18 in April and 3 in May. Our crews burned a total of 225 acres, with 17 of the burn units at less than four acres.

An unusual feature of the long winter of 2017-18 was the cold and dry weather that extended well into April, punctuated by a snowstorm April 16-18 that kept the ground frozen for most of burn season. This extended the dormant season into late April when the rains came, and cool season grasses began to green up.

We conducted 26 burns for 19 different member/land-owners, and we burned seven sites that we either own or formally manage. With just a few minor spots onto our mowed firebreaks, we didn't have any escaped fire, and we were fortunate not to have any accidents or incidents.

At the fire at Briggs Wetland, five members of the Town of Beloit fire department joined our crew, so their rookies could get some experience with grassland fire, ignition and suppression techniques. Landowners often joined our crews, some as observers or apprentices, and we appreciate their work on firebreaks.

For the burn program our chapter has a pair of 4-wheel drive trucks that carry 100-plus gallons of water. On large burn units, we deploy an ATV (all-terrain vehicle) with Frank Grenzow as fire ranger to look for spots and escaped fire as the crews separate in circular ignition.

Thanks to all our team of volunteers: Chris Roberts, Steve Hubner, Jerry Newman, Jim Freymiller, Harvey Klassy, Diana and Denny Oostdik, Gary Kleppe, Mike (Monroe) Davis, Ralph Henry, Frank Grenzow, Dan Gartzke, Tina Duemler, Nick Faessler, Fred Faessler, Mike (New Glarus) Davis and Beth Kazmar.

At the last chapter meeting, we decided to offer TPE's new basic fire crew training in September or October 2018. We encourage all chapter members without any fire experience, who may wish to burn with the chapter, to attend and get qualified as a crew member for TPE prescribed fires.

## Prairie Sands

Ray Goehring

Members of the Prairie Sands Chapter have been busy this spring with prescribed burns and invasive species management.

Most of the 10 chapter members who received prescribed burn training last fall from Jeb Barzen of Private Lands Conservation LLC assisted as crew during the active spring burn season for Healthy Grown Farms program or burning their own prairies.

On June 2, David and Shelley Hamel hosted 16 guests on the first of our chapter's Private Lands Field Trips with a cool, pleasant hike through the dry sand prairies and savannas of Hugh Iltis Prairie and Savanna, followed by a picnic lunch overlooking their Pitcher Plant Bog.

Our private lands field trips included visits June 16 to Dick Hansen Prairie and Savanna in Wautoma, and June 24 to Alan and Laurel Bennett's Prairiehill Farms in Pardeeville. To learn more about the Bennetts story, read "Life in an Oak Opening" on their website: <https://prairiehillfarm-ecological-restoration.site123.me/>



Kurt Waterstradt from US Fish & Wildlife Services talks about the Partners for Wildlife program that worked with the Hamels at Hugh Iltis Prairie and Savanna (Photo by Ray Goehring)

## Upcoming Tours:

- Aug. 4, 10 a.m. – noon at James and Ruth Schultz's Clintonville Prairie (members only)
- Oct. 13, 9 a.m. – ? at Mekan Prairie in Waushara County with John Shillinglaw. Schedule includes:
  - 9-10:30 a.m. Work at the site
  - 11 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Savanna tour
  - 12:30 p.m. Picnic lunch – bring a bag lunch if you come for the tour. Lunch will be provided for workers. After lunch, John says we can do more "prairie-ing" or if you bring canoes or kayaks, he will show you where to put in on the Mekan River or Mekan Springs.



A local Amish artisan paints the Sonnenberg red barn, a memorial to Dan Sonnenberg who died earlier this year. The barn will be covered with painted and wooden butterflies. There's also a plot on the property where lupine seeds will be planted as the start of a butterfly garden. (Photo by David Hamel)

## Southwest Wisconsin

Jack Kussmaul

Members of the chapter held a retreat on March 10 at the home of Pat and Roger Smith in Rural Boscobel. The purpose of the retreat was to look at long-term challenges and opportunities for the chapter. New by-laws were adopted. We agreed that the old by-laws must be around somewhere, but no one knew where.

A chapter board was elected, including Gary Adams, Gary Eldred, Steve Querin-Schultz, Roger Smith and Linda Lynch. Jack Kussmaul was elected President; Rose Sime, Secretary, and Jaye Maxfield, Treasurer. George Riffin declined the opportunity to serve on the board but assured us he would be there at all times to keep us honest.

There was a summary of possible new projects. Martha Querin-Schultz offered to set up a chapter Facebook page. The group, without hesitation and with enormous excitement and enthusiasm, accepted her offer. The site was up and running 24 hours later. Thank you Martha for taking on this important project!

Jaye offered to help provide burn training for anyone interested when they burn Eldred Prairie. Several people showed up when the event took place. Most exciting, Jack announced that an anonymous donor had pledged more than \$20,000 to start an endowment for the chapter, and that this resulted immediately in another \$5,000 pledge for this purpose.

We had long agreed that our volunteer base was growing more slowly than our holdings, and we needed to have endowment funds to help support our efforts. After years of discussion we have a start! Now we need to challenge others to contribute.

In other activities, the chapter had a successful burn season. Burns took place at Eldred, Double Oak, Sylvan Road, Borah Creek, Iris Drive and Thomas Wet. Land ownership on two sides of Eldred changed hands, each case involving a neighbor who wanted us to build new fence on our portion of the line. A great volunteer crew, spearheaded by Roger Smith, rose to the occasion and made our neighbors happy.

The annual chapter picnic will take place at Gary Eldred's home on Aug. 11. There will be a tour of his restoration and possibly other sites. Gary assured us he will have the house cleaned up for us. And last but not least, Gary agreed to fill the vacancy as chapter representative to the Chapter Support Board. Thank you Gary!

## St. Croix Valley

### Teamwork Launches Prairie Restoration

Theresa Gibson

In February, Hudson Middle School teacher Gwendolyn Conklin requested help on St. Croix Valley Chapter of TPE's Facebook page. She wanted assistance restoring the approximately half-acre prairie at the school. "A prairie was started several years ago near our school forest," she wrote. "It has not been taken care of for years, and we would like to restore it. It is small in size and has signage including student paintings".

Evanne Hunt saw the post and sent an e-mail to TPE members requesting volunteers willing to help out during school days. Alex Bouthilet and I volunteered, and a meeting was set at the school to meet the teacher and students, and to check out the site. We also invited Jim Schreiber, retired district educator and local business owner of Plantables, LLC.

Teacher Gwendolyn and students Ryan and Ella from the sustainability club were present for the meeting. Also in club but not present was student Shloke. (See comments below from the students and teachers.)

At our April meeting, there was still snow on the ground, but Alex was able to identify some species growing there, including bergamot and some invasives, including spotted knapweed. We also observed the student-designed signs that listed the species that were originally planted there, with hand-painted pictures and written information about animals and pollinators that might visit the prairie.

We came up with the following goals for the project:

- Re-establish the native plant species listed on the signs.
- Add more diversity by planting native grass and flower species, especially those with blooms in the spring and fall so students can see the prairie flowers with visiting pollinators.
- Control invasive species with some biological controls, burning, mowing and manually pulling the weeds.
- Conduct prescribed burns this fall when the students are at the school and can observe.
- Plant seeds and plugs this fall.

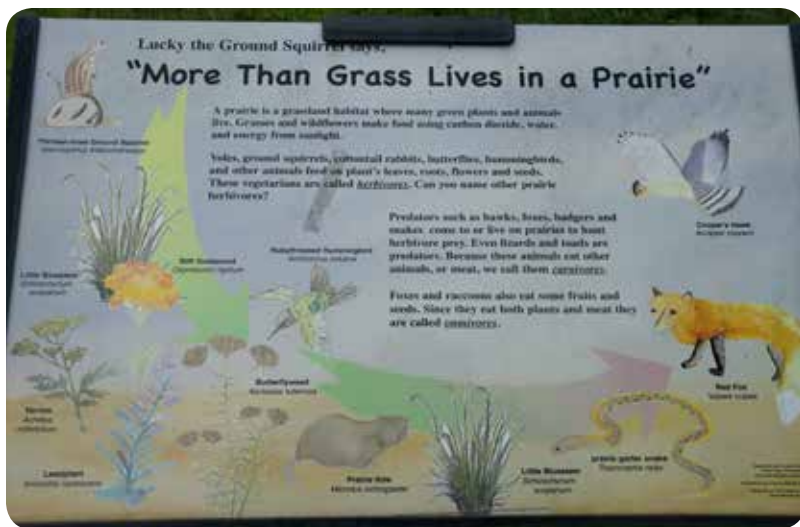
Alex offered to write a burn plan, help with prescribed fire, and identify plants that are present and could be added to increase the native diversity. He also offered to donate some seeds and plugs, and to coordinate the burn in the fall.

Jim offered to donate some seed, a lot of knowledge and enthusiasm, and possibly some labor for the project. Jim taught Special Education at Hudson High School for 12 years and previously worked at the middle school. From their website, Plantables LLC is described as "a worker-focused business in Hudson ... that utilizes the skills and talents of its workers to create products that will beautify your garden and enhance the environment for bees and other pollinators." Their website is [www.plantables.net](http://www.plantables.net)



Theresa Gibson





Hudson prairie sign

I'm a stay-at-home mom and member of TPE. My background is in horticulture, including courses in prairie ecology and fire management at the University of Northern Iowa and Iowa State University. I'm donating communication support and labor for the project.

But the real inspiration comes from the teacher and students who are asking us to partner with them. Here is what a few students wrote about their interest in the project:

**Ryan:** "I am a 7th grader at Hudson Middle School, and am a part of the Sustainability Club there. I have been a Boy Scout for about 2 years now and I am on the road to being an Eagle Scout. (Yes, it is allowed to be an Eagle Scout at 13). I want to restore the prairie because it is currently just a bunch of weeds and not a very good thing to look at. I also wanted to help the natural wildlife by putting in natural plants that they can benefit from. I feel that the natural wildlife here deserves to be in a place that their ancestors once were hundreds of years ago, before humans destroyed that paradise." (Ryan is making the restoration part of his Eagle Scout Project.)

**Ella:** "I am an 8th grader at HMS, and have been in Sustainability Club for the past 3 years. I joined Sustainability Club because I feel that it is important to help the planet, as it is the only home we get. We need to work together to preserve the Earth. Restoring the prairie is just one of the ways that we can help the Earth."

**Shloke:** "(I am) a seventh-grader who is enthusiastic about every mental sport there is. (I've) participated in MathCounts, the National Spelling Bee, the National Geography Bee, as well as Science Olympiad, all at the state level. As a budding poet who loves rapping, (I) decided to restore the prairie because I want to make a difference in the world, and ... we need to conserve the planet for the sake of the future human race."

**Gwen Conklin (teacher):** "I have been a middle school science teacher for 30 years with 17 years at Hudson Middle School. I have been the Advisor for Sustainability Club for 15

years. Some things we have accomplished are having a Student-led recycling program, football clean-ups with proper recycling, creating educational videos on YouTube, helping initially with obtaining grants for the school forest and gardens, which created the learning center down by the prairie."

Thanks to everyone who is fueling this project with their enthusiasm, time, donations and expertise. This project truly represents how partnerships between TPE and community members can accomplish great things. We will keep giving updates about this project in future newsletters and on the website.

Check out the site on the east side of the running track at the middle school on Carmichael Road. If you want to help, contact me at [telumbygibson@yahoo.com](mailto:telumbygibson@yahoo.com) or Evanne.

## Word from the Intern

My name is Brooke Dreshek, and I have a bachelor degree in Conservation and Environmental Planning. I have always loved being outdoors but working with the environment became a passion of mine after my first internship as a Vegetation and Refuge Management Intern. After graduation, I was lucky enough to land an internship with TPE as a Habitat Biologist.

I'm so thankful for a position that allows me to be creative and independent. The primary focus of my position is creating maps of three properties that are managed by TPE for field trips, and mechanically and chemically managing invasive species.

By the end of the summer, I plan to have a map that shows exact locations of invasive species, as well as rare or endangered plants found on each property. I will also be involved in a few surveys to get a better understanding of the flora and fauna present.

I've already learned so much and look forward to what the rest of the field season has in store.



Brooke Dreshek

# Thank You Donors

We thank the following who donated to TPE between Feb. 16 - June 16, 2018.  
These gifts include those from our annual appeal, are beyond membership dues  
and are truly generous and appreciated.

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Please consider The Prairie Enthusiasts in your will or estate plans. If you've already done so, please let us know, so we can thank you personally for ensuring future generations will have access to prairies and savannas. For more information please contact Chris Kirkpatrick, Executive Director at 608-638-1873 or [executivedirector@theprairieenthusiasts.org](mailto:executivedirector@theprairieenthusiasts.org).