The PRAIRIE PROMOTER

Grassroots Conservation in Action

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IN THIS ISSUE

The Prairie Enthusiasts

No Limits for Disabled Prairie Owner

By Debra Noell

The physical and emotional toll of ecological restoration tears down even the strongest bodies. Now, imagine doing the work from a wheelchair. If you can't imagine it, as no able-bodied individual truly could, Ken Erickson of Waupaca, Wis., has an important story to tell.

At age 22, Ken was working on a car when it fell on him, fracturing his spine and paralyzing him from the waist down. Decades later, from a manual wheelchair, Ken is in his fourth year of restoring a 56-acre former Christmas tree farm already thriving with Karner blue butterflies.

"Life is exciting and challenging to me," says Ken, a member of the Prairie Sands chapter. "Even before I broke my back, I wanted and sought out challenges."

In 2017, Ken bought his property in Waushara County, about 16 miles from his home and just west of Oshkosh. The land, crowded with non-native Scots

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Ken Erickson at "Karner Island," a part of the land he is restoring. (Photo by Brendan Woodall)

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: "Lone butterfly on South Muralt" (Photo courtesy Mary Zimmerman & Steve Hubner)

President's Message – The Best of Times, the Worst of Times

By Scott Fulton, President and Acting Executive Director

The opening line from Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* seems very appropriate for how I'm feeling right now. On the one hand, it's an exciting time to be in a leadership role at TPE! As described in articles elsewhere in this issue, over the past several months we have added two new staff members and started an exciting new program to provide outreach and support services to private landowners. We've also noted significant growth in the level of engagement of our members, for example, with a tremendous outpouring of amazing photography and naturalist observations.

At the same time, everyone in the world has been forced to deal with the harsh new reality of the COVID-19 pandemic. For TPE, the first impact was a premature interruption of our spring prescribed fire season. It was impressive how much we actually did get burned this year (including a late season burn by our Many Rivers Chapter), but there's no doubt the management of many of our sites was set back.

We have also been forced to think carefully about how to safely conduct field trips, work parties, and other TPE-sponsored events with safe social distancing (a term with which I was unfamiliar when I wrote my last column). The TPE staff and Board developed and issued a new policy and guidelines, and many members have helped work out the practical details. None of us really enjoy having to do things this way, but striking the right balance between carrying on our important conservation work and keeping everyone safe is vital. I'm proud to see how everyone has been stepping up to the challenge.

As if this were not enough, the lockdowns caused by the pandemic have caused a major economic downturn and some of the highest unemployment in our history. Although TPE itself is not seeing too much impact from this yet, like all non-profit organizations and businesses, we are doing what we can to prepare for a potential downturn in donations and other income in the coming months.

Finally, our collective attention has been forcibly drawn to long unsolved issues of racial injustice by the enormous demonstrations of protest in our major cities. This challenge has been with us as a society for a long time, but something seems different about it now. A majority of TPE members are white and often live in rural areas, and for some, it may seem like something remote and not particularly relevant to our conservation work. However, if we truly believe that connecting our human community to the natural communities we love is actually important, we cannot ignore this challenge, and need to take action to help address it in our own way.

With everything that is happening in these best and worst of times, all of us are experiencing more than a bit of fear and uncertainty about the future. As friends and colleagues, we must all take some time to reach out and support each other as fellow human beings who are going through a lot together. We especially need to be supportive of those who have experienced illness, injustice or loss of any kind, and my heart goes out to anyone who has been personally impacted.

As always, please let me know what you think at president@theprairieenthusiasts.org.

TPE Begins Search for New Executive Director

By Scott Fulton, President and Acting Executive Director

TPE has begun an active search for a new Executive Director to assume leadership of the staff and chapter support organization. A great deal has changed since our prior executive director, Chris Kirkpatrick, began work eight years ago, including major growth in our membership and the scope of our activities. That growth and expansion is certainly continuing, and finding the right person to take the helm is more important than ever.

The Board has appointed a search committee to lead the undertaking, including Alice Mirk, Jerry Newman, Evanne Hunt, Henry Panowitsch and myself. We have also engaged an experienced executive search consultant, Kate Greene, president of Human Resource Partners of Traverse City, Mich. Kate has done quite a few searches for non-profit executive directors and has been a tremendous help guiding us through this complex process.

Our plan is to post the position publicly from July 1 – 31, with a possible extension if required. We will then be conducting an extensive series of phone and group Zoom interviews, and then identifying the top 2-3 finalists. The last stage of the process will include time to meet with staff, a tour of one of our preserves, and a final interview with at least the full Board that will include a presentation. The hope is to be able to make a final offer to a candidate by sometime in September.

Conducting a successful search for a major leadership position is largely dependent upon reaching out to a network of contacts. As many of you are involved with other conservation or non-profit organizations, we are asking for help with suggestions or contacts. If you know of anyone who might make a good possible candidate, please let both them and me know. The job description and application information is available on the TPE website at https://www.theprairieenthusiasts.org/job_postings. You can also contact me directly at president@theprairieenthusiasts.org.

Meet the New TPE Staff

By Joe Rising, Communications Coordinator

Hello Prairie Enthusiasts! We are Dan, Diane, Jerry and Joe, and we are the people working for you and TPE as the Chapter Support staff. As you may have heard, we are taking a big leap forward in 2020, adding significantly to our capacity to address the mission of educating, protecting, and restoring the native prairies, savannas, and associated natural communities of our region. The overall goal is to drive growth in membership, volunteer engagement and funding for our mission. We are enthusiastic about our new staff members (Dan and Diane) and hope you will be too! We also wanted to reintroduce you to Jerry and Joe, longtime TPE staff members who each now have slightly different roles.

Dan Carter, PhD, Landowner Services Coordinator

Dan lives for the prairie and knows the prairie inside and out. He is a plant ecologist who has been involved with prairie restoration, reconstruction, management and protection as an educator, researcher, planner and volunteer. Dan has extensive experience in natural area assessment and field botany. His PhD is from Kansas State University in prairie restoration ecology.

One of Dan's favorite quotes is: "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise." Aldo Leopold in *The Land Ethic, A Sand County Almanac.*

Dan started in May in a full-time position that is fully funded by the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) grant for the next three years. He will be managing all contact and support of private landowners, working in close cooperation with the chapters to implement the goals of the grant to restore and improve pollinator habitat on private landowner properties, with a particular emphasis on working lands.

Dan is available to private landowners to help assess the potential to restore, reconstruct, or improve prairies, savannas and associated ecosystems on their properties and to provide support with management plans, funding and finding the necessary resources.

Feel free to contact him with any such requests or other technical questions on his mobile at 319-321-6513, or by email at landowners@theprairieenthusiasts.org.

Diane Hills, Outreach and Development Coordinator

Diane is passionate about connecting people with nature and with others who delight in the wonders of our native ecosystems. She has a Bachelor of Science in Landscape Architecture from UW-Madison with a specialization in Natural Area Restoration and Management. She worked in the WI-DNR Bureau of Endangered Resources and helped to conduct the original Wisconsin Natural Heritage Inventory. She worked as the volunteer coordinator for TPE's Empire-

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Sauk Chapter. Diane also has extensive experience as a landscape architect, sustainability campaign manager, fundraiser and Master Naturalist instructor. Her personal interests are hiking, canoeing, biking, gardening and all things natural.

Diane joined the staff in April as the full-time Outreach and Development Coordinator. Half of her time is funded by the National Fish and Wildlife (NFWF) grant to develop landowner targeted educational and outreach programs. The other half is funded by TPE to work with our chapters and members to develop and publicize outreach events as well as support our organization's many fundraising efforts.

Diane says, "The Prairie Enthusiasts would not be here today without the efforts of the grassroots volunteers who founded the organization and the hundreds that have contributed countless hours and resources to carry on its legacy. My hope for the future is to cover more ground by growing our membership and welcoming new volunteers to share their time and talents to spread the prairie enthusiasm."

Diane believes we all need to stand up for people and our natural environment. If you are looking for resources or support in ways to advocate, educate, or engage people in the preservation of our precious prairie communities, Diane is happy to help. You can reach her on her mobile at 608-239-4699 or email her at outreach@theprairieenthusiasts.org. She always enjoys talking to TPE members and getting new ideas for attracting people to get more involved in what we do.

Jerry Pedretti, Bookkeeper and Administrative Coordinator

Jerry grew up in Genoa, Wis., along the Mississippi River. He is a small business owner and has been the Town of Genoa Clerk for 15 years and has worked with TPE for the past five years. Jerry lives on 86 acres along the Mississippi and Bad Axe rivers in Genoa. When he's not shuffling papers at one of his clerk jobs, or one of the non-profits (he works for three), you'll find him working in his yard, gardening, hiking in the woods – or you won't find him at all because he's off somewhere on a motorcycle searching for the other side of the mountain.

Jerry says: "I believe that life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the things that take our breath away, and that every day you do not learn something new is a day wasted."

Jerry knows his way around financials. He stays very busy handling all donations and other income, paying the bills, and producing financial reports for the Board and chapters. He is also responsible for managing TPE's member and contact information in our NationBuilder database, the administrative aspects of land protection projects, and anything else needed to keep the TPE office running smoothly. This is clearly a man who is not afraid of hard work!

If you want to know more or have a question or request regarding TPE financials, memberships or our other administrative processes, give Jerry a call at 608-638-1873 or email him at bookkeeper@theprairieenthusiasts.org

Joe Rising, Communications Coordinator

Joe loves to get out on the prairie. His goal is to get to know and photograph all TPE preserves. He has a good start as he has been with TPE for almost seven years. Environmental and social justice have always been close to Joe's heart, and communicating for nature is at the core of his non-profit advocacy. He has served eight years on the board of Community Conservation, Inc.

Joe enjoys his role at TPE supporting the enthusiastic, caring and committed TPE membership and volunteers. He works in collaboration with many volunteer writers, photographers, editors and social media managers as a supportive overall editor and publisher of our communications channels, including the eNews, social media like Facebook, the website and *The Prairie Promoter.* As editor, he helps to develop, collect, and refine great written pieces and images from across the organization. As publisher, he helps to make sure the right content is delivered to the right channel at the right time.

Joe's TPE claim to fame came last year when The Land Trust Alliance adopted a quote from him in their promotional materials. "Our land trust is glad to be a part of the accredited land trust community. We are all stronger together, aligned in our approach, and able to relate to each other better knowing we speak the same language of best practices." It's like TPE made the cover of the Rolling Stone and is now in the national land trust spotlight!

Feel free to contact Joe with your prairie stories and photos at tpe@theprairieenthusiasts.org, or call him at 608-638-1873.

Like the prairie, TPE is growing stronger. With a skilled and experienced staff reaching out across our service area, we are now able to serve the chapters and members with greater capacity. We have secured a very supportive grant that will help create a new set of services for private landowners. We all stand ready to help you carry out the TPE mission with ***Grassroots Conservation in Action!***

TPE Events Go Online

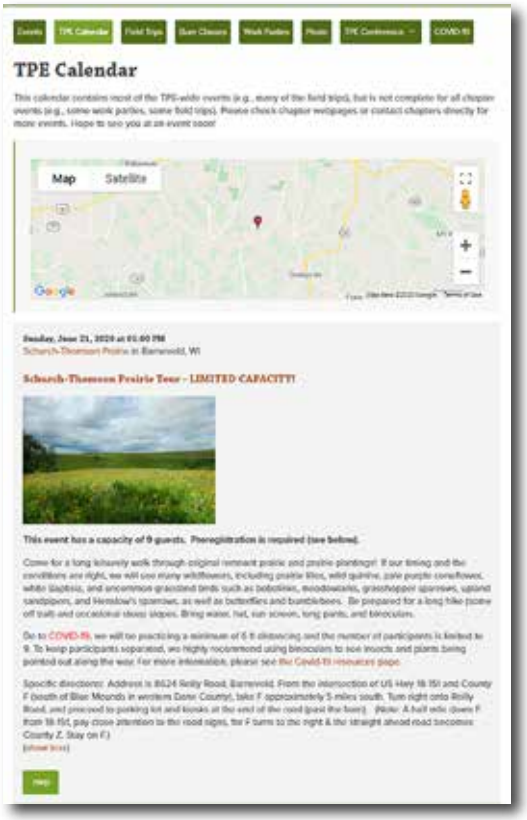
By Scott Fulton, President and Acting Executive Director

TPE is moving our guide for field trips and other events to an online format on our website. Click on the *Events/TPE Calendar* item on the menu to open the calendar page. The page has a live map of where the events are happening followed by a listing (with descriptions) of upcoming events in chronological order. You can reserve a spot at an event by clicking on the "rsvp" button. You will receive an email with information about the event, contact information for the leader, a Google Maps link for the location and a link to cancel if necessary.

Part of the reason for converting to this system from the static Field Trip Guides previously published in *the Prairie Promoter* is to enable greater flexibility for event leaders and to handle restrictions in the numbers of attendees, both necessitated by the new COVID-19 Policy & Guidelines. However, we also think this system will be very convenient and useful for our members and others who wish to attend events.

If you are planning an event and would like to have it listed on the TPE Calendar and publicized on our Facebook page, please contact Diane Hills (608-239-4699 or outreach@theprairieenthusiasts.org) for assistance. Any suggestions for improving the system are also welcome.

We hope to see you out at some of our events soon!



Communications and Outreach Committee

By Evanne Hunt

The committee has been restarted and membership is open to any member of TPE. If you are interested, please contact me (Evanne Hunt) at 715-381-1291.

The Committee includes the TPE webmaster, *The Prairie Promoter* editor and staff directly responsible for communications, outreach and/or education activities (currently the executive director, communications coordinator, and outreach and development coordinator).

We will identify and coordinate communication and outreach needs for TPE. The primary objective is to grow awareness of and enthusiasm for the work of the Chapters and the Organization through various communication channels and outreach programs. The goals of the committee are to increase membership, volunteer engagement and financial support for the mission.

Editor's Notes– A Fond Farewell

Debra Noell, Editor

I'm proud of this edition of *The Prairie Promoter*, packed with diversity, heart, research, ideas and TPE's plans for the future. It's fitting this will be my last.

It was five years ago I took over for Scott Fulton as editor of the *Promoter*. Through the years, readers have sent fan mail, nasty grams, pages of grammar edits, and an overall appreciation for learning about what other passionate prairie enthusiasts are doing, thinking and feeling.

The editor role has been a volunteer position for more than 30 years, and that probably should change. Although it's rewarding – it's a ton of work. It's been an honor and privilege to work with all the creative energy you lively group bring to the written word and the beauty of photography. So, thank you.

A transition plan is still in the works, but with the agency adding staff, restarting the Communications and Outreach Committee, and committing to more unified branding at TPE, I expect this terrific product will only get better. See you out on the prairie!

pines, was initially inaccessible to Ken in his wheelchair. But with help from his sons Matt, 32, and Kirk, 28, Ken worked from his Jeep Cherokee and an adapted "little" Kubota tractor to open up trails and create a campsite.

In doing the work, he fell in love with the land.

"When I bought the property, I knew it had potential," Ken says, "but I knew it had been neglected." To find out what he really had on the site, Ken sought help from WI-DNR, and from Brendan Woodall, Wisconsin Private Lands Biologist for U.S. Fish & Wildlife. Brendan visited the site and signed Ken up for the "Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program" to help restore habitat for the endangered Karner blue butterfly.

"Ken is very dedicated to improving his property for all wildlife species, but especially for the Karner blue butterfly," Brendan reported. "When Ken first came to me he gave me a blank canvas and asked me what can we do? Painting the canvas consisted of expanding upon the existing openings by forestry mowing, removing and treating invasive species, and planting 28 acres of diverse native prairie seed." During their time creating together, Ken found patches of remnant lupine.

When Brendan visited in 2018, he walked the land on his own, Ken recalls. When he returned, he had a "smile from ear to ear." Brendan had found Karner blue butterfies on Ken's lupine.

In addition to hiring contractors, Ken has a new Kubota tractor with hand controls and a seat lift to put him in the heart of the action. He can mow, drill, disk, and move piles of brush with his grapple rake attachment. Ken also has spent time grooming trails to be accessible in his manual wheelchair.

The first year of restoration included forestry mulching 26 acres, Ken reported. Almost all the Scots pines were mulched. Left were red and white oaks, black cherry, aspen, wild plum and hazelnuts, along with the idea of creating an oak savanna, Ken says.

During the summer and fall of 2018, spraying herbicide on invasive species began in earnest, primarily spotted knapweed, which had taken over several areas. Last June, Ken seeded a 5-acre portion of the property already established with Karner blue. Because of the existing population, they didn't use herbicides, mulching or fire in those small areas.

In late summer, they used one last herbicide treatment to kill off non-native grasses and lingering invasives. "The herbicide applications were the most painful for me to witness," Ken says, "even though I know it's a very important part in establishing native species. We worked with a great contractor, Wick Habitat, and he was very careful about keeping collateral damage to a minimum."

Last October was the final seeding. A specialty grain drill was set up for the different types and sizes of seeds to plant the diverse mix.

"Ken is very engaged in his project, from making sure he meets and communicates with all contractors, setting up a new tractor that lifts him from his wheelchair, always documenting new species and activities through his photography skills, and thinking forward about manage-

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Notice the seat lift and manual hand controls Ken uses when working on his restoration project. (Photos courtesy Ken Erickson)

ment he can do to improve his land," Brendan reported.

They haven't introduced fire to the land yet, partly because the Scots pines are a recipe for too much heat, and partly because they need to manage for and protect the Karner blues.

"I would encourage anyone to think about doing a native planting regardless of age or physical disabilities," Ken said. "It can be as small as a micro native planting in a backyard or a planting comprised of multiple acres. In my case the benefits physically and emotionally have been rewarding."

Karner blue larvae thrive on Ken's lupine.

The first year, with the help of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife, 26 acres was forestry mulched along the natural contours of the property.

Field Trips & Work Parties during COVID-19

By Scott Fulton, President and Acting Executive Director

Like all of us, we at TPE are learning how to adapt to the new reality of COVID-19. We are most impacted by field trips and work parties. These events are critical to our work of caring for the land, building our human community, and reaching out to engage others in our mission. We have given careful thought to how best to safely conduct TPE field trips, work parties and events while protecting our members and the public.

The TPE staff and board have worked together to develop and approve a new policy and guidelines for safely conducting our events while the COVID-19 pandemic continues. In doing this, we recognized the need to clearly identify who is responsible for making decisions and communicating with our leaders and members so that we can quickly modify our approach as the situation changes.

May 2020 field trip at the oak barrens near TPE's Rattlesnake Ridge Preserve. (Photo by Scott Fulton)

The initial *Current Guidelines* (May 26, 2020) allow field trips and work parties to proceed under the following conditions:

- Events must be outdoors (indoor events are still canceled or postponed).
- No more than 10 attendees total (including both event leaders and participants).
- No one should attend who has a fever or other symptoms, or an active COVID-19 infection.
- All leaders and participants (except for members of the same household) should stay at least 6 feet apart.
- Wearing a face mask to protect others is highly recommended when safe distancing is difficult.
- Everyone should cough or sneeze away from others and cover themselves appropriately.
- Avoid exchanging physical objects (e.g. pens and papers, tools, equipment, etc.). Where this is not possible, objects should be carefully sanitized before and after use.
- Avoid sharing vehicles during an event, except between members of the same households.

The core of the policy is a *Current TPE Event COVID-19 Guidelines* document, which was written by the Executive Director, approved by the Executive Committee of the Board, and will be reviewed at least monthly for changes in the situation. The Current Guidelines cover all types of TPE events (field trips, work parties, prescribed burns, workshops, lectures, courses, social events, meetings and conferences) and is based on the current orders and public health recommendations from the CDC and our three states (Wisconsin, Minnesota and Illinois). The Current Guidelines are available on the **COVID-19** page of the TPE website.

Because we will be limiting attendance at our events, we have decided to institute pre-registration. You can do this by emailing or phoning the event leader, or (better yet) by registering online at the Events page of the TPE website. We will need at least an email address or phone number for each attendee so that we can contact you if anything changes. (See Page 5 for details on the new web sign-up process)

All of this is a significant change for those of you planning to lead events. You will need to familiarize yourself with the *Current Guidelines* and will be responsible for ensuring that those who attend the event comply with the social distancing rules. We have prepared a *TPE COVID-19 Event Leader Guide* to assist you, which is also available on the COVID-19 page. Please contact Diane Hills, the new TPE Outreach and Development Coordinator (outreach@theprairieenthusiasts.org, (608) 239-4699 for more information or assistance with publicizing your event.

We ask leaders and attendees to please cooperate with the new *Current Guidelines* so that our field trips and work parties can be safe for everyone. We know that it's a pain to wear masks and hard to remember to stay sufficiently separated. Frankly, none of us enjoy these rules at all! But this is truly the only way that we can continue to do the work needed to care for the natural communities we love and to share them with others while COVID-19 is still with us. Getting back out again on the prairies and savannas with our TPE friends will make it worthwhile!

Time Does Change Things

By Scott Sauer

On April 11, in the third week of stay-at-home orders, my companion and I make the short journey from Madison to Smith-Reiner Drumlin just outside of Cambridge, Wis. It's early spring, and we're hunting pasqueflowers. We had seen a beautiful display at Hauser Road Prairie four days before. Surely there would be more.

The day moves from a sunny morning into a cloudy and, eventually, wet afternoon. We make the most of the time before the rain comes. Checking in at the registration box, we see that site steward Gary Birch had been here earlier in the day and noted he had seen one pasqueflower in bloom that morning.

We walk the full circuit of the site, south along the unburned east drumlin and back north along the burned west. My companion spots one lonely prairie violet on the east drumlin, and we see a mink (or perhaps a different weasel) sniffing around on the trail up the west drumlin. It spots us and lopes away with the bounding gait typical of minks before it disappears into the adjacent horse pasture.

Our hunt for pasqueflowers turns up naught. Gary tells me later that the pasqueflowers at Smith-Reiner come up in late April. He describes them as "late risers." It's interesting to think there is this type of relatively local variation in a plant that once covered all of the plains.

The west drumlin is a moonscape, burned down to the soil by the fire. In contrast to the blackened ground are the many rocks scattered on the surface. There are piles of field stones carted out of the tillable parts of the property by human hands.

Many glacial erratics sit above the soil surface, so large they surely lie where the glaciers left them, although none the size of the Chamberlin Rock on Observatory Hill on the Madison campus (which, by the way, was itself moved from the lakeshore to the top of the hill). And, of course, there is the "unsorted" till that comes in all shapes, colors and sizes on drumlins – bits of shiny red quartzite, black for basalt, dull red for rhyolite, gray for granite, and bone color for weathered limestone – all transported from their parent bedrock. This till sits on the surface and is exposed in the diggings of the many animal burrows evident on this day. One badger mound has bits of fist-sized till in its spoil. Evident too are the burrows of humans - pits dug into the west drumlin – for fill or building material; we don't know.

This flat, light-colored rock was an ancient stream bed or perhaps a beach, muses the writer. (Photo by Scott Sauer)

The mosaic of pebbles, themselves eroded from some parent material and tumbled round, deposited in an unsorted mix of even finer-grained sand, before being dropped here at Smith-Reiner Drumlin outside Cambridge, Wis. (Photo by Scott Sauer)

One rock catches my attention. It lies flat to the surface and is light-colored, speckled with lichen and heavy with quartz, like the coat of some unearthly cat. Unique in this rock are many pebble-sized inclusions, or clasts. This is not a volcanic rock. It has no intrusive veins of crystals. It's not layered into bands.

In the Driftless region of southwest Wisconsin, the geology is often predictable and reliable. Layers of mostly dolomite and sandstone denote the lowering and rising of ancient seas and are spread out over a large geographic area, exposed in road cuts and cliffs, and in once-prominent pillars of rock. Not so in the glaciated east of Wisconsin. Everything in the till comes from somewhere else, either a little farther north in Wisconsin to perhaps as far away as Hudson Bay. It tells a tale of ancient lands before life was even on the surface of the Earth.

It dawns on me that this flat, light-colored rock was an ancient stream bed or perhaps a beach. The inclusions are, in fact, pebbles, themselves eroded from some parent material and tumbled round, deposited in an unsorted mix of even finer-grained sand. The stream bed was buried under more rock at some time, and, under pressure and heat, the sand became quartz. Other minerals changed color and composition, while the volcanic granites, basalts and rhyolites held their colors and shapes. Buried, lost to the world, somehow the ice ages found it and took it from wherever it lay to here, mixed among so many other rocks whose stories aren't nearly as clear.

I'm always proud of and struck by the work TPE does. At Smith-Reiner, the relationships built between our members and the Smith family eventually led to these 40 acres becoming a nature reserve in the middle of an agricultural landscape. Everything around it has been converted from the prairie and marsh of just 200 years ago to serve human industry and dreams. Even the preserve, with its odd berms and borrow pits, denotes human endeavor. Is our work in the service of nature really all that different? It is, after all, another human undertaking.

Time does change things. Our lives change because of unforeseen events, either personal or social. We lose a natural landscape, ice comes and goes, rivers are buried and then borne away. An ancient mountain rises and falls. In brief moments, we see these things, are blessed to know or at least guess about our place in the world, and for some of us, that makes all the difference.

Silent Hill

By Mehmet Ekizoglu (Turkey)

Standing on a hill wooded with thin pine trees and short oaks, a Turkish Huglu (shotgun) in my hands, I was looking at small paths opened by little feet. Small, muddy paths running up and down the hills were full of tracks, but none of the tracks belonged to wildlife – just livestock. They were so numerous that the color of the natural landscape was turned pale brown. I was hoping those short, scrubby oaks would hide a hare or two. The habitat was just right, and this remote hill was far enough away from any village to be undisturbed.

But the hare wasn't there.

Apparently, herders were not shy taking their goats and sheep grazing on this steppe, an ecoregion characterized by grassland plains. Steppes can be found throughout Europe and Asia, from the highlands of China to Iran and the Ukraine.

The animals, after finishing already scarce short grass of the this steppe, were quick to turn their attention to shrubs, trees and brush in the area. Soon, every hill in Central Anatolia, near Turkey's capital Ankara, once abundant with natural flora and wildlife, became silent land of shaven, bare earth.

Not long before, the brutal power of erosion took control of these lands and made the situation worse for everyone in the region. Farming became more difficult as rich top soil was washed away by rain storms. Unfortunately, farmers and their herds had eradicated the necessary woody and grassy cover that would have prevented the soil erosion.

I shoulder my gun to an imaginary hare running in front of me. Then, half-heartedly, I continue my walk toward the other side of the hill. It was a long drive to come here in the middle of the night. As a dedicated upland hunter, I waited for the sun to come up and shine on the land. I was also hoping to find chukar partridges in the hills. Chukar, in fall and early winter, like to feed in the surrounding wheat fields trying to finds leftovers from the harvest. And they often find a good deal of it. Then, they retreat to ravines and rocky slopes of the hills of this great steppe. I wasn't very successful finding those rocketing birds this time, though.

Overgrazing had caused the destruction of wild flowers and herbs in the steppe. This was a disaster, especially for the bugs and flies that depend on this flora to feed and lay eggs. The disappearance of the insects – as well as birds that prey on them -- has caused a decline in the survival rate of upland bird chicks and most song birds.

Still, I feel that sadly some hunters are not very keen on the idea of nature conservation.

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Editor's Note: *This story reflects observations from Turkish ecologist Mehmet Ekizoglu. We share his insights via his friends, members Tom & Eva Wedel. Interesting to know we share similar experiences with such a distant land.*

Chukar partridges, fox, hare, wolves and numerous song birds and reptiles call steppes home. This photo is taken in the Cankiri region of Turkey. (Photo by Mehmet Ekizoglu)

Silent Hill ... continued from Page 10

A magpie calls from the distance with bright black and white feathers visible. Another responds to it, hidden in the branches of a tree. Alarmed by my walk, a blue jay cries and finds refuge in another tree. Blue jays, like magpies, are very smart birds. They rarely fall into shotgun range. Although the blue jay is not a game bird, sometimes they cannot escape from shots of frustrated hunters who couldn't find an opportunity to shoulder their guns at a chukar or gray partridge during the day. Similarly, magpies, crested larks, black birds, doves and sometimes even birds of prey find themselves face to face with shotgun pellets. The decline in numbers of upland birds and waterfowl is becoming a threat to all wildlife.

On the other side of the hill, there's more grassy vegetation, and I'm more hopeful. I go down a slope coming close to the green edge of a wheat field. This field surrounds the south side of the hill. A hare jumps up from the grass, but he's out of range. The hare runs toward the hill, galloping away from me.

I watch the hare climbing over the hill with my gun on my shoulder. The black fur on his back makes him seem more beautiful to me; it means he's an old boy. If I shot, I might be able to kill it if I was a little lucky. But, more likely, I would cripple the animal, producing nothing except pain for the poor creature. I lower my gun.

Farmers cut all the trees surrounding their villages first. They transform the steppe and woods into farmland. Now, with the help of the latest technology, such as big tractors, they are trying to destroy the natural habitat they were not able to reach before. The land where once chukars, hares and songbirds lived now becomes fields to grow food for city dwellers, who are not aware of what has been lost. I found no chukars or any other animal in the bushes on that slope.

As the sun starts its way to the highest point in the sky, I climb down to my car to look for another place to hunt. I feel connected to the last hare of the silent hill. It's by not thinking hard about terms like land ethics or conservation, hunters and villagers together wiped out the chukars and rabbits from these grasslands, where once they were abundant, by killing them during the off season, without limits and destroying their habitat.

This is how the wild voices disappeared from the Anatolian steppe, now left with its silent hills.

Early morning on the steppe, a grassland ecosystem in the Beypazari region of Turkey. Plants include veronica, wild thyme and sage. (Photos by Mehmet Ekizoglu)

The Moment

By Mike Mossman

Under a broad sky in a grassland that stretches a mile in all directions, I gaze out across its green expanse to where it's bounded by distant, wooded bluffs and shrub thickets.

It's early July, and the sun has just risen. Not a person, and hardly a human structure, is in sight. Close by, the grassy blanket resolves into vivid multicolored blossoms, patches of low legumes, grasses of various forms waving in the breeze, gravelly openings, scattered shrubs, tree seedlings and forbs of many shapes. My dew-drenched boots are immersed in a thick layer of blond thatch. Just a few meters away, the ground beneath the grasses and forbs is a blackened mix of bare earth, ash and broken plant stems scorched from the past spring's burn.

All around, the native prairie birds chatter, buzz, bubble and ring, each species claiming its niche among many. Hidden in the grassiest, unburned patches are grasshopper sparrows, sedge wrens and Henslow's sparrows. Dickcissels display atop tall, stiff forbs. Willow flycatchers, brown thrashers and clay-colored sparrows perch on the scattered shrubs and trees, and Bell's vireos dwell where they are thick. Eastern meadowlarks and bobolinks are nearly everywhere. The distant wail of an upland sandpiper spreads gloriously across the wide expanse. A Northern harrier bobs on the morning tide of clear and fragrant air, and drops into the sea of green.

Dozens of butterfly and moth species are about, among many other insects, all silent for now. Hidden below, I know there are voles, prairie deer mice, ground squirrels, badgers, fox snakes and more…

This place has taken me.

I'm standing in the old fields, grass hay, scattered croplands and disturbed soils of the former 7,500-acre Badger Army Ammunition Plant (BAAP), almost entirely covered in exotic and invasive species. Oh, there's a small prairie remnant and a few restored tracts, but they comprise very little of this vast open landscape. Ongoing plans for its conversion to a natural mosaic of prairie and savanna are worth celebrating, and so is the present moment, imperfect as it may seem.

Like any earthly moment, this one is the result of a peculiar history. There's the long formation and sculpting of the land, the evolution of species and their communities, and the inescapable, ongoing imprint of humanity. With the right tools and understanding, much of this narrative can be read from where I stand.

An old shade tree, a reminder of the Euro-American farm community that preceded the ammunition plant. (Photo by Mike Mossman)

Willow Flycatcher—a species of native prairie shrubland—nested in this heirloom apple tree, which outlived the ammunition plant and now grows like a savanna tree in the exotic Badger grasslands. (Photo by Andy Kraushaar)

Its layers are especially rich and legible at Badger, where a unique intersection of global forces left legacies of ancient seas, erosion and glaciation so close at hand. And so, too with the removal of the native Sauk and Ho-Chunk people, the 14,000-acre Sauk Prairie and its surrounding savanna and woodland turned to Euro-American farms. Its replacement by the ammunition plant was in reaction to world conflict in 1942. Its closure began in 1997 in response to socioeconomic changes and the evolving nature of war.

While producing propellants for three wars, BAAP released many chemicals into the soil and water, including organic solvents and dinitrotoluene (DNT). Although most of the soil contamination has been remediated, the ground water remains polluted—a legacy of ongoing concern.

The most recent chapter of the Badger story is one of creating a new future for the land. This includes acknowledging the site's history and reconciling its toll over recent centuries on the land and its inhabitants.

Since the Ho-Chunk were first removed from this site in the 1830s, most of Badger's rich native flora was replaced by a relatively few exotic species. Undoubtedly, invertebrate fauna were decimated. Although native vertebrates such as elk and long-billed curlew disappeared, the land maintained diverse grassland birds and mammals. They certainly flourished on the Sauk Prairie, but they held on through the pre-WWII farms and the extensive pastures of the plant. Recently, they endured soil disturbance, shrub encroachment, and the transfer of ownership to a partnership of Ho-Chunk, DNR and USDA landowners.

Periodic bird surveys since 1993 document a thriving native grassland, shrub and savanna bird community, and reveal how it responded to management and land cover changes. In 2012, Badger earned "Important Bird Area" status as one of the best bird conservation areas in the state - an unintended consequence of this industrial site and a

Continued on Page 13

The Moment ... continued from Page 12

testament to nature's resilience.

The most immediate threat to Badger's grassland bird community is invasive shrubs. But until they become impenetrable, the multiflora rose, honeysuckle and autumn olive benefit some declining shrub-loving grassland birds, including the state-threatened Bell's vireo. Ironically, this species was not present at Badger until shrub invasion became rampant and almost uncontrollable. How we might maintain habitat for the native prairie-shrub bird community in a restored Badger landscape is a worthy and wonderful challenge.

Another competing land use at Badger has been cultivation. Even corn and soybeans, in addition to being one phase in a practical method of reestablishing prairie, aren't complete deserts as I once assumed. They support some native wildlife, including the uncommon prairie deer mouse.

Badger is changing. Prairie restoration, initiated during the Army's tenure, is proceeding slowly.

The DNR is converting blocks of invasive shrubs to grassland and savanna with forestry mowing, chemical treatment and prescribed fire. It's a deliberate process because each cleared patch demands a commitment of years.

And seeing a grassland - this grassland - burned again by the Ho-Chunk Nation is remarkable, even when fueled by European grasses and forbs. It re-engages a culture in an age-old connection with the land, reintroduces an important driver of prairie ecology, and controls exotic shrubs.

To the uneducated eye, today's expansive Badger grasslands appear natural, whereas a conservationist may see wounds needing tending. To the birdwatcher, it may not matter, so long as the birds are here. To a Ho-Chunk elder, spiritual reconnection with the land, here named Maa Waaka\\ca\k, or Sacred Earth, may be most important. To local historians, former plant workers and the descendants of Euro-American farmers, the site can come alive with stories told by remnants of infrastructure or old lilacs and apple trees. To others, its green space is a place for reflection or a way for volunteers to connect with the land through work.

I believe we can come to embrace all these perspectives and more, and to be enlightened by them.

Badger had over 1,400 buildings and many miles of elevated steam pipe. Here is the abandoned Ball Powder production area. (Photo by Mike Mossman)

Two old cemeteries remain at Badger, carefully maintained over the decades of the plant's operation, even though burials were not allowed after 1942. (Photo by Mike Mossman)

Since the plant was decommissioned, I have studied its geological foundations, sought out remnants of its prairies, savannas and farmsteads, documented the stories of the farm families and munition workers, crisscrossed it repeatedly with animal survey transects, studied the amphibians of its kettle ponds and artificial reservoirs, and wandered about after one thing or another. I have worked with Army staff, managers, historians, ecologists, artists, and people with a history here, and studied old photos and aerial images in my attempt to understand the history of the land, of how we see it, and how the land responds to our attitudes and actions.

Together, many of us have sought its lessons about our place in the long, dramatic narrative of time, so that we can think clearly about the future and make wise decisions about how we treat the land on which we and future generations all depend - both within and beyond the Badger fence.

In the process, I have mourned the displacement of native Ho-Chunk and Sauk people, and the loss of the prairies and savannas they lived in and managed with fire. I've lamented the loss of the land's intact, living soil, the large native ungulates and carnivores, and the bird and invertebrate species that disappeared with the plowing of the prairie. I've wished we still had the sort of rural landscape that kids, greater prairie-chickens and jack-rabbits could roam together. I even miss the unique and odd functional structures that characterized the ammunition plant .

Someday, if I live long enough to see native prairie and savanna restored over large parts of Badger, I will undoubtedly revel in it. Yet, surely, I will lament something - perhaps the colorful and rich "surrogate grassland" that now dominates it, or the enervating (perhaps naïve) anticipation of changes that lay ahead.

In our efforts to make the world a better place, let's not miss the current moment. Every tract that we love and care for has its own meaningful history, its own significance and set of management issues, its own uncertain future. With all our plans and anxiety for that future, let's not forget that the prize is right here. You are standing in it. You are part of it.

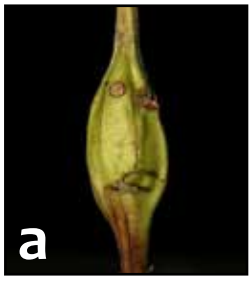
Can You Match the Goldenrod Stem Galls to the Insect?

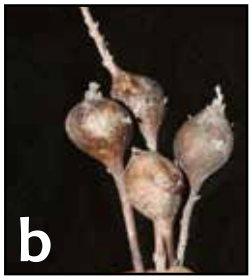
By MJ Hatfield

We often curse common goldenrods especially those that are clonal. But consider how well they've survived the onslaught of humanity - agriculture, development and herbicides. Then consider the number of insect species that utilize these forbs, some require them as host plants for larval development.

Some insect larvae feed openly on flowers and leaves, and others cryptically inside stems with no outward sign. Some larvae cause the plant for form galls, creating both food and habitat for the developing larvae. There are flower galls, leaf galls and stem galls. Give this a try, match these 4 insects with their goldenrod stem galls. (Insects and galls are not to size - see page 22 for answers)

Match these 4 insects with their goldenrod stem galls.





Welcome New Members

February 17, 2020 - June 21, 2020

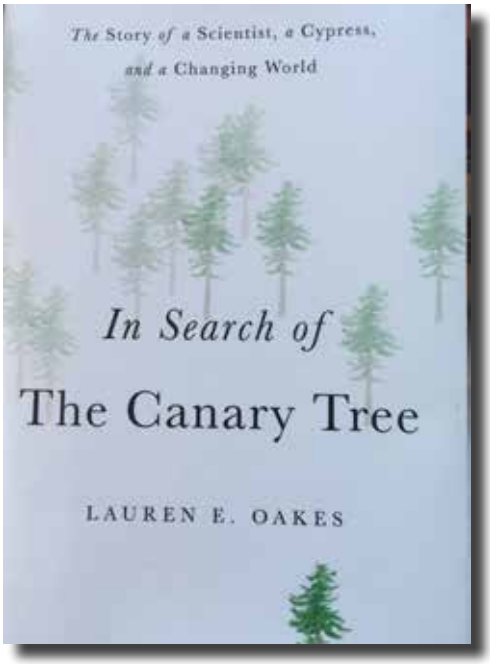
Greg Armstrong & Cheryl Bauer-Armstrong
Dan & Lorraine Beck
Cathy Bleser & Dan Krunnfusz
Charles & Sheryl Brownlow
Mary Crawford
Robert & Martha Degner
Claire Ebben
Pamela Eyden
Kishwauketoe Nature Conservancy (Harold Friestad)
Keith Gilland
Paul Hayes
Mary Hillstrom
Primates Incorporated (Amy Kerwin)
Steve Klock
Mary J. Koehl
William Lebensorger
David Lehman
John Lien
Karissa Lyman
John & Mary Kay Lyons
Mollie Mechenich
John, Austin & Susan Miller
Ann & David Moffat
Nara Nayar
Evan Nelson
Sara Nelson
Michael Nesemann
Kevin Nigon
Greg Patten & Joan Kincaid
Jennifer Peck
Jim & Marie Pecquex
Bethney Pickhardt
Catherine Procknow & Matt Cook
John & Julie Raasch
David Rice
James Riser
John Rodwell
Yoshiro Saimi
Marianne Sambar
Kathryn Schaffer & Erik Nichols
Susan Smith
Jeff Summerfield
David Swanton
Judith Thode
Kerry & Sandy Van Kleeck
Jody Vanderloo
Mary WIlliams
Peter & Annette Zimmerman

Feelings from a Changing World – Book Review

By Chuck Wemstrom

In Search of the Canary Tree: The Story of a Scientist, a Cypress and a Changing World by Lauren E. Oakes is fascinating. It's incredible how much Oakes has jammed into just 250 pages.

Oakes' story is about writing her doctoral thesis on the decline and near extinction of the yellow-cypress in Alaska. It's also a story about the indigenous people and back-to-the-earth types she met along the way who played an important part in her dissertation. The story covers the other scientists, her professors who helped her with field work and who later shared with her their personal feelings. And finally, it tells how she herself came to grips with climate change.



Cover of "In Search of The Canary Tree"

Most of us picture a graduate student jumping into her car, driving out into "the field," and spending the day taking notes and gathering specimens to put in her backpack. But Oakes jumps into a small plane, flies over islands off the Alaskan coast studying the yellow-cypress from the air, then lands and jumps into a canoe. She learned that aerial imaging and photography from a plane's tiny window, and taking core samples of dead or dying trees on the ground, are all part of a day's work.

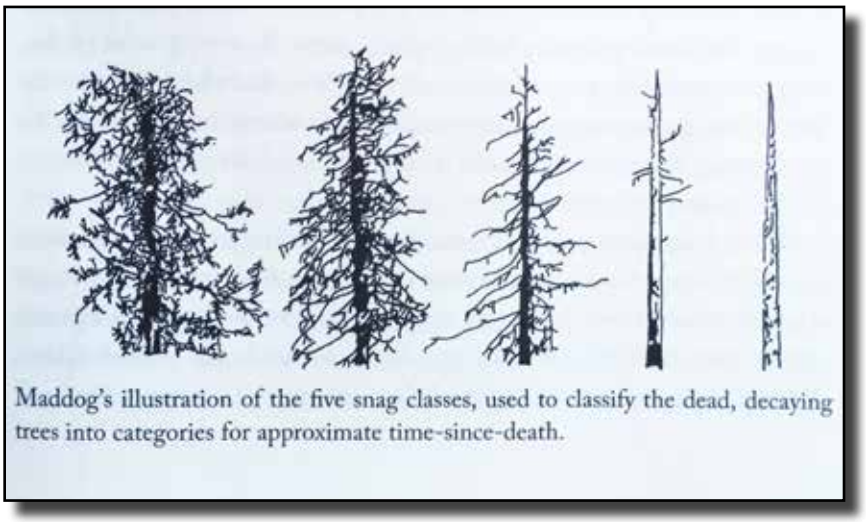
Unlike many scientists who study everything but humans, Oakes makes a major part of her book about the people who live near the trees and depend on them for their livelihood, as well as how the trees, themselves, are part of the native culture.

There are interesting insights into the life of a grad student. She met a fellow student on the first day of class, Kate Cahill or "Maddog," who would help Oakes by supplying illustrations of the yellow-cedar in stages of decline and death for Oakes' book. (Oakes uses yellow-cypress and yellow-cedar interchangeably).

Like everyone else, she had the jitters when she had to defend her dissertation. It went well. She had expected to be relieved and overjoyed. She was happy but felt a letdown when she realized that there was still a lot of work to do.

She wrote that the single overriding issue is climate change. She went back and again talked to many of the people she had interviewed about the yellow-cedar. She wanted their stories of the trees and climate change. Everyone has to deal with the coming extinction of the yellow-cedar, but she wanted more—especially from the scientists. The scientists could talk all day about the science of climate change but not their own feelings. She kept after them until they revealed their own most personal stories.

Their stories and her own journey are the most interesting and important part of the book. David Wallace-Wells' book, *The Uninhabitable Earth*, is never mentioned by name except in a footnote, but his presence is a chilling dark shadow felt throughout the book. The book is really about the battle between faith and hope, optimism and pessimism, despair and denial, and then finally a feeling at the end that there is still room for commitment and action.



Maddog's illustration of the five snag classes, used to classify the dead, decaying trees into categories for approximate time-since-death.

Author's note: Earlier, I wrote about *Wilding,* by Isabella Tree. The story is about how one couple converted its 3,500 acre English farm into a "wilding." *The New Yorker* magazine has published a piece about one of the Wildings' former employees, Jake Fiennes, who has continued their work on three or four large farms. The concept of wilding implies that it's economically possible to preserve the land and also make a living. Fiennes proves it. See *"Betting the Farm"* by Sam Knight, *The New Yorker* Feb. 17 & 24, 2020. www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/02/17/can-farming-make-space-for-nature

Rekindling Old Flames: Prescribed Fire Promotes Reproduction

By Jared Beck, Gretel Kiefer and Stuart Wagenius

After a burn, prairies may resemble a charred moonscape with little indication of life. However, this ashen landscape quickly transforms into a colorful mosaic of lush foliage and striking flowers during the summer months.

Prairies depend on fire and our native prairie plants are well-equipped to take the heat. In fact, without fire, prairies are rapidly invaded by woody vegetation, and plant species disappear at an alarming rate. Studies from remnants in Wisconsin spanning decades estimate that unburned prairies lose, on average, more than one plant species per year.

Why do plant populations go extinct in the absence of fire? The most common explanation for fire's beneficial effects on plant diversity is that fire promotes survival by reducing competition for light and other resources. Periodic burns set back woody vegetation while herbaceous prairie plants readily re-sprout from buds hidden safely below ground. Thatch is burned away, which increases the light available to seedlings and short plants.

Meanwhile, direct sunlight warms the soil, and nutrients returned to the soil in the form of ash stimulate plant growth. All these factors promote plant survival.

In research out of Chicago Botanic Garden published in January, we offer a different explanation for fire's positive influence on plant diversity: *fire synchronizes flowering and promotes successful reproduction.*

For populations to persist and grow, plants must survive and reproduce. Yet, the prospects of finding a suitable mate are slim for many prairie plants. In many species, whether the wind or insect pollinators play matchmaker, pollen must be transferred from one flowering plant to another for plants to successfully reproduce. As a result, plants are unlikely to be pollinated or produce seed if potential mates (other flowering plants) are too far away or flowering at different times. This is especially problematic in small, isolated prairie remnants where mating opportunities are severely limited. There's no guarantee of successful reproduction. If plants fail to reproduce year after year, populations will dwindle and eventually disappear.

Prescribed fires re-kindle plant romance in the prairie. After a burn, flowering purple coneflower plants are closer together, and the timing of reproduction is synchronized, which makes bees more likely to move pollen from one coneflower plant to another. (Photo by Gretel Kiefer)

We wanted to find out how much fire could improve pollination and seed production. Many prairie plants flower vigorously after a burn. This will come as no surprise to those who have taken a stroll through a prairie the growing season after a burn and admired the incredible display of flowers. But do plants actually produce more seeds?

This purple coneflower head (Echinacea angustifolia) has over 150 flowers on the disk. Most flowers are not visible because they haven't opened (top). About 15 flowers are visible in male phase, showing black anthers with yellow pollen (middle). About 30 flowers are in female phase, showing branched styles, which have surfaces receptive to pollen (bottom). Each disk flower can produce one seed, but only if pollen from another coneflower plant lands on the style. About 10 ray flowers are visible; they are sterile and produce large, purple rays. (Photo by Gretel Kiefer)

To determine how much increased flowering after fire improved pollination and seed production, we studied the narrow-leaved purple coneflower *(Echinacea angustifolia.)* This species is common and widespread across the prairies of western Minnesota. However, previous research has shown that this purple coneflower fails to produce seed in small populations, especially when individual plants are far away from prospective mates or flowering at different times.

We tracked the survival and reproduction of 778 individual plants over 21 years (1996-2016) at Staffanson Prairie, a 94-acre prairie preserve managed by The Nature Conservancy. We mapped the location of every individual plant, monitored the first and last day of flowering, and collected seed heads to quantify seed production.

Our 21-year study of the purple coneflower revealed that fire stimulates flowering and synchronizes reproduction. After a burn, flowering purple coneflower plants are closer together, and their flowering times overlap. Being in closer proximity to other flowering plants and flowering with greater synchrony makes it more likely for pollinators, common generalist bees, to transfer pollen from one plant to another. In fact, we found the number of seeds produced per coneflower plant nearly doubles after fire due to improved pollination!

Our research adds another good reason to conduct more prescribed prairie burns. In addition to setting back woody vegetation and promoting survival of native prairie species, fire helps maintain prairie plant diversity by promoting successful pollination and improving seed production.

The next time you walk through a recently burned prairie, consider how the striking floral display sparked by prescribed fire sets the stage for plant romance, reproduction, and persistence. For more information about this research, please visit: http://echinaceaproject.org/fire/

TPE Begins New Services for Private Landowners

By Diane Hills, Outreach and Development Coordinator

Are you, or do you know someone who is interested in restoring or managing native prairie and savanna communities on private land? Would you like to hear the bumblebees busily spreading pollen from flower to flower and see more butterflies dancing among the grasses?

As most of us are well aware, the biggest threat to the prairie plants, pollinators and other animals is a loss or degradation of their habitat. With more than 96% of Illinois, 82% of Wisconsin, and 77% of Minnesota's landscape under private ownership, landowners play a key role in helping conserve the diversity and beauty of natural prairie and savanna communities.

Coulee Region Chapter members John and Rita Hoffmann at their property in Viola, Wis. with Dan Carter in May. (Photo by Scott Fulton)

Although some of our our volunteer chapters focus primarily or in part on supporting private landowners with restoration, management, and education efforts, much of TPE's work over the years has been focused on preserves we own or public lands that we support. Several years ago, we identified a major need to provide better services to private landowners, who are frequently so busy on their own properties that they are not able to do much volunteer work with the chapters. In 2018 we surveyed our landowner members to better understand their needs and began to look for ways we could better serve them.

Good news! This year TPE received a 3-year grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to provide educational outreach and direct technical assistance for private landowners who want to restore and manage habitat for pollinators (with a special focus on monarch and Karner blue butterflies and the rusty patched bumblebee). The goal is to work with landowners throughout TPE's service area to increase the overall acreage and quality of native prairie and oak savanna pollinator habitat. The grant dollars are to be used specifically to fund two new TPE staff positions to work in collaboration with TPE's local chapters as well as several other conservation organizations, including the Valley Stewardship Network and the Southwest Wisconsin Grassland Network. NFWF is particularly interested in supporting working landowners, so much of our efforts will be focused on reaching out to farmers and ranchers in our region, a new audience for TPE.

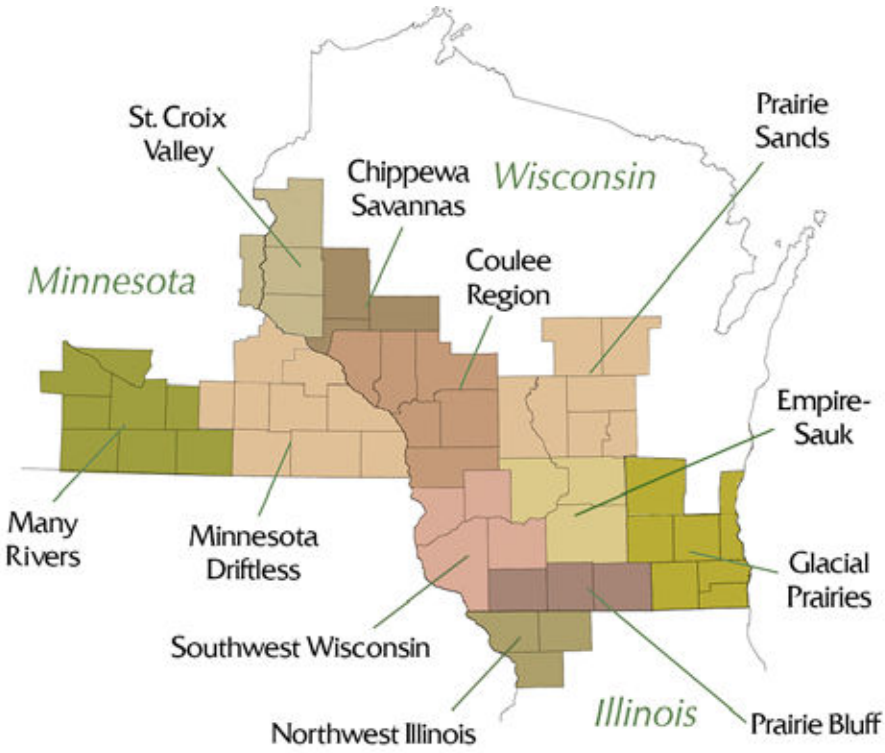
Diane Hills and Dan Carter have recently joined TPE's staff to implement the NFWF grant (for more about them, see the staff introduction article in this issue). Half of Diane's role as Outreach and Development Coordinator will be to work on engaging and educating landowners about the ecology and natural history of prairies and savannas along with best practices for restoration and management. TPE's chapters already provide an excellent local, peer-based foundation for these activities, and Diane will be actively building upon and supporting their efforts. Stay tuned for future program developments!

Dan Carter is the new Landowner Services Coordinator funded full time by the grant. He is now available to schedule site visits to assess and discuss the potential for prairie/savanna restoration and reconstruction projects on private property. Depending on the project's potential within the scope of the grant and the landowner's interests, Dan can help landowners develop a management plan and connect them with possible funding sources and quality resources (such as management contractors and quality seed suppliers), as well as provide information about potential land protection options. Dan will be working in close contact with the local chapters to connect landowners new to TPE with our existing community, and to provide the best locally based advice.

Now that the field season is in full swing, Dan already has a full dance card of landowner visits under way. If you (or someone you know) own private land, you can reach Dan at landowners@theprairieenthusiasts.org or 319-321-6513 to ask questions, discuss your property's potential and/ or set up a site visit. As a landowner, you can make a difference!

Key pollinators for TPE NFWF grant – monarch and Karner blue butterflies and rusty patched bumblebee. (Photos by Gary Shackelford, Shelley Hamel and Jeb Barzen)

Chapter Updates



Empire-Sauk

Willis Brown

Congrats and Thank You, Ron Endres!

Ron Endres was chosen as this year's Empire-Sauk Chapter Volunteer of the Year. Ron is the epitome of a Prairie Promoter. He has spent more than 25 years restoring his own 21-acre prairie and has been an active member of TPE for many years. During that time, Ron has worked on prescribed burns, invasive species removal, and more.

Ron has also proven himself to be a fanatical seed collector; I have personally found Ron drenched with sweat from seed collecting. Ron sorts, cleans and weighs the seed he has collected and then donates the seed to various groups around Wisconsin and neighboring states for prairie restoration projects. Seed purchasing can be a major cost in restoration and, Ron estimates he has donated hundreds of thousands of dollars in seeds over the years based on their price in commercial seed catalogs. In 2016, Gathering Waters named Ron Environmentalist of the Year for his efforts to supply seed to non-profit organizations.

This past year alone, Ron has contributed seed to 31 different projects scattered over seven Wisconsin counties, along with others in Iowa and northern Illinois. Some of the recipients include many land trusts such as Groundswell Conservancy, special land restorations at places like Taliesin and American Players Theater in Spring Green, and schools and kids' programs.

In addition to TPE, Ron is also very active with the Ice Age Trail Alliance (which passes through/near his property in

Ron collecting seed

Middleton); Dane County Parks, which he partners with to collect and process seed, and Holy Wisdom Monastery. Ron donated seed to plant more than 50 acres at Holy Wisdom. He served on their prairie council for five years and helped them with prescribed burns and prairie restoration. Holy Wisdom Monastery has an art gallery, and Ron donated a collection of 23 marvelous drawings by former President and charter TPE member, Gary Eldred. Ron sponsored an exhibit that included an opening night to pay tribute to Gary.

In addition to donating the seeds to groups, Ron has traveled to numerous events throughout Wisconsin and neighboring states to raise money for TPE. Over the past three years, he has made necklaces that contain a pollinator charm along with an ampule of prairie seed. The buyer selects the shape of the glass vial, the charm and the seed type, and Ron assembles the necklaces on the spot. He includes a write-up explaining prairie and savanna ecosystems and the work that TPE does. For several big multi-day events, Ron enlists a team of his friends to assist him at the booths while he assembles the necklaces.

Ron also produces and sells notecards of his nature photos to raise money for TPE. Despite the cost of materials, entrance fees for a booth and travel, Ron donates the entire proceeds of the sale of necklaces to TPE's education and outreach programs. Through his efforts and generosity, Ron has donated well over $35,000 to TPE. At $10 each, that is a lot of necklaces.

Ron enjoys spreading the word about the folks he has helped and who have helped him. He's written profiles on Facebook of all the groups and projects that he has donated seeds to. This helped these groups get the word out about the good things they were doing. At the end of the day, Ron enjoys a libation and grilling, which he richly deserves. The Empire-Sauk Chapter is proud to have members like Ron Endres.

Ron rests among the lupine.

Ron stands with TPE volunteers at a booth selling seed necklaces he makes. He donates all the profits to TPE, resulting in donations so far topping $35,000. (Photos courtesy Willis Brown)

Northwest Illinois

Pam Richards

Northwest Illinois Prairie Enthusiasts (NIPE) NINJAS have been returning to work and following COVID-19 Workplace Health and Safety Guidance for Employees and Staff of Businesses procedures. Our East and West teams work apart in family units but remain masked and six feet away when in close proximity to one another.

NIPE teams have been eradicating invasives, then sweeping and weeding prairies and savannas throughout the area. Hanley, Oneota, Wapello, Warbler World, Horseshoe Mound, Gramercy Park, Plum River Farm, Blue Bird, Knapp Road, Elmoville, Twin Ponds, Rettig Prairie, Pirate Prairie, Meeker Savanna and Lonetree have kept us busy. Our focus remains on the safety of the crew.

Ed Strenski, our land manager, installed several interpretive signs at the Hanley savanna shelter while the crew assembled and added three benches constructed from recycled materials there.

NIPE Ninjas preparing to predator parsnip at the Wapello Land and Water Preserve managed by NIPE in Hanover, Ill. After meeting with masks for directives from Land Manager Ed Strenski, we split into separate work areas. (Photo by Karen Strenski)

Prairie Bluff

Chris Roberts

We were able to burn four units this spring before weather and Covid-19 stopped us in our tracks. We've had no official work days, but Tom Mitchell and I are having unofficial work days together.

We go to a site in separate vehicles, go about our tasks for the appointed time and leave separately; the plan works well. We have had added help at Skinner Prairie working on the valley between the larger eastern portion and the much smaller western part.

Discovering shady species that we didn't realize were there such as showy orchid among others.

We have freed the old dugout from trees and brush, and it's an impressive sight.

Thinking that Skinner, previous owner, lived in it four seasons during the time he was mining lead just shows you how tough they were back then.

Hauling old fencing and posts to the metal recycling business in Monroe showered us with another $3.60; our good fortune just keeps flowing over us.

Prairie Sands

John Shillinglaw

Karner blue butterflies are a species designated as federally endangered in 1992. With loss of habitat and climate change, populations have diminished or even been extirpated from certain states. For example, there are no longer wild Karner blue butterfly populations in Minnesota, Indiana, New Hampshire or Ohio. The WI-DNR, in cooperation with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has instituted a recovery plan in our state that is leading to increased populations, particularly in a recovery unit called the Morainal Sands RU, centered in Waushara, Waupaca and Marquette counties.

These three counties are the home of the majority of our members and also home to one of the largest populations of Karners in the nation. Karner blue's welfare has been one, but by no means the only, focus of our chapter of TPE.

Our history is relatively short, but we have accomplished a great deal. Eleven individuals interested in prairie restoration in general and in some cases specifically to enhance habitat for Karner blue butterflies formed a TPE chapter called Prairie Sands in 2008. From this beginning, we have burgeoned to 74 members in seven central Wisconsin counties.

We have leadership on the TPE board and an outstanding communication network. In our second year, we hosted the state summer TPE picnic, and in 2013 organized a highly successful prairie information event called Prairie Days in Waushara County, with tours, information booths and music.

In 2014, we hosted the annual state meeting at UW-Stevens Point and had numerous prairie tours of our lands, along with land owned by the state and the Ice Age Trail.

We've worked on the Ice Age Trail as well as state properties, planting seeds and removing invasive species. We have established a Facebook page: *The Prairie Enthusiasts – Prairie Sands Chapter,* have annual holiday parties with seed exchanges, host work parties on our prairies and on public lands, manage a city prairie garden in Wautoma, take courses in fire management and conduct burns.

We collaborated with the DNR to develop and maintain a large savanna at Observatory Hill, a 208-acre state natural area (SNA) and the highest point in Marquette County. We have worked as stewards of a 643-acre SNA prairie preserve with the Wisconsin Nature Conservancy called Page Creek Marsh and have spent many productive hours removing invasive species and conducting burns.

All told, we have been involved in management of about 2,000 acres of prairie

Some of our members have participated in two North American Prairie Conferences focusing on our Karner blue biology knowledge and our recovery efforts. We are proud of the recognition we have received from other conservation groups, especially Friends of John Muir, Monarch Joint Venture, North Central Conservancy Trust, The Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin, The Sand County Foundation, Wild Ones, Central Wisconsin Invasives Partnership, The US Fish and Wildlife Service, The WI-DNR, The Southern WI Butterfly Association and Pheasants Forever.

Growing our membership and sharing our knowledge will result in more resilient and diverse prairie habitat in the sand counties as we move forward.

Dr. John Shillinglaw is the owner of Mecan Prairie and Savanna in Waushara County – a 230-acre restored prairie and savanna important for its growing population of Karner blue butterflies and endangered upland bird species. John has been an active member of the Prairie Sands Chapter since its inception.

Southwest

Jack Kussmaul

There isn't much to report from Southwest Chapter, and I'm sure you know why. We had to cancel scheduled work parties in March and April to concentrate on burns, and then came Covid-19, the burn ban and safer-at-home orders. Everything stalled out.

Just before the shutdown, we hosted TPE's annual Prairie Conference Feb. 29 at UW-Platteville. With about 250 people in attendance, it was a real success. We thank everyone involved for their time and effort.

Bob Costanza and Mike Nee pause for a break from spraying crown vetch at Eldred Prairie May 22. (Photo by Jack Kussmaul)

"Safer at Home" gave many landowners time to work on their projects at home. In the distance, Steve Querin-Schultz works on restoring his oak savanna. (Photo by Martha Querin-Schultz)

Following the high of the conference, we planned an active year – we had scheduled a reception for wildlife artist Mike Riddet at Timber Lane Coffee House in Boscobel. We also planned to show *"Decoding the Driftless"* for a youth group at the Boscobel Library. Neither could take place, but we still plan to reschedule when it's safe to do so.

A turtle workshop on the Wisconsin River for June 27 had to be delayed until next year.

We continue with limited work parties, including the annual crown vetch spray on May 22 at Eldred Prairie. We also worked May 30 and June 6, and will continue to schedule work parties throughout the summer and fall for anyone comfortable attending.

St. Croix Valley

Evanne Hunt

TPE Helps with UW-River Falls Prairie Restoration Project

Last October, Mike Miller and Evanne Hunt visited the UW-River Falls campus to consult with Dr. Eric Sanden's class, *Prairie Restoration and Fire Ecology* on a proposed course project. Dr. Sanden and his class have identified a 2.44-acre parcel on campus that has potential as a restoration site using native prairie and sedge meadow species.

Dr. Sanden divided the class into five groups, each responsible for a different aspect of the restoration project (assessment, timing, prep, seed mix, maintenance). The students will begin the multi-year implementation phase of the plan this fall.

The class identified three units (sedge meadow, upland prairie, and entryway garden) on the site, just southwest of the Agricultural Science building. Though the students were first focused primarily on the prairie restoration potential of the site, Mike and I emphasized the value and diversity of the existing sedge meadow and recommended that it be retained as a part of the project.

The chapter looks forward to working with the students from UW-River Falls on this project. (Photo by Evanne Hunt)

The students also interviewed some prairie restoration consulting firms. Their recommendations focused on a more aggressive, quicker-results approach utilizing more substantial use of herbicides in the site preparation. As these firms are profit-based and accustomed to serving clients who expect relatively rapid results, their recommendations were not unexpected. The students opted to utilize some of the recommendations of all those who consulted on the project but primarily opted for a lower impact and slower approach to achieve their desired results. Their efforts will involve conducting prescribed burns and targeted use of herbicide together with introducing appropriate native species, both as seed and plant plugs.

Chapter "Loans" Alexander Oak Savanna

Dr. Kevyn Juneau, Assistant Professor of Conservation and Environmental Science, UW-River Falls, asked to use Alexander Savanna to develop a management plan for his Forest Restoration and Management class. Dr. Juneau said, "My hope is to make this project a high stakes, "real world" activity for the students."

While we have a management plan, this seemed like an excellent opportunity to have it updated, looked at with fresh eyes, and help the class.

The first step was to visit the class and discuss our management goals. The second step was to visit the savanna. Alex Bouthilet guided the class around the site, pointed out the areas we have burned and otherwise managed.

Before all classes were cancelled and the "safe-at-home" order was implemented, the class was to give presentations to the stakeholders (TPE chapter and the community) at the end of the semester. Dr. Juneau: "Again this presentation is high stakes, as I want it to basically be a public defense of their proposal as if they were competitively bidding for the project." Perhaps next year.

Dam Removal

The City of River Falls plans to remove two dams in the Kinnickinnic River. The Powell dam is directly across from Foster Cemetery.

On Feb. 13, Wayne Huhnke and Evanne attended a presentation by Ayes, the contractor hired to prepare a draft plan. The topic in which we were interested was where is the best location to place the access road for the Powell Falls dam demolition. The plan contained two options: build a causeway/access road from the north coming in around the sewer plant property or come down the access on the east side of the Kinni, just south of the dam.

We had the opportunity to talk about the impact the temporary access could have on the rare and endangered plants and how to minimize or avoid disturbance at the conservation area. A follow-up meeting was scheduled, but cancelled due to COVID19. We will continue to follow discussions.

St. Croix: New table cover for outreach. (Photo by Greg Korman)

New Outreach Material

The chapter purchased a stretchable table cover for all those events we used to attend.

The cover is eye-catching and will draw attendees to our table. The tight-fitting profile also solves the problem with wind since most of our events are outside.

Galls to Goldenrods Answers

1-Goldenrod gall moth. . . . . .d-Gall of gall moth(adults emerge in May)
2-Goldenrod elliptical-gall moth . . . . . a-Gall of elliptical-gall moth (adults emerge in Sept.)
3-Gall midge, no common name . . . . . .c-Gall of the gall midges (emerge in May)
4-Goldenrod gall fly . . . . . b-Gall of Goldenro gall fly (adults emerge in May)

The Prairie Enthusiasts

2019 Annual Report

2020 TPE Photo Contest Winner - "The Beauty of the Burn" (Photo by Sue Steinmann)

Executive Director's Message

The year 2019 was a good one for TPE. We continued our land protection work as an accredited land trust with the addition of a major donated easement as well as four smaller but important additions to existing preserves. Our land management activities continued in full swing, carried out in all eleven of our local chapters by both volunteers and contractors on TPE preserves, easements, public conservation lands, and private lands. We also continued our growth in educational outreach programs, with chapters conducting innovative field trips, courses, workshops, and other events and activities.

The finances of the organization continue to be strong. One major achievement for the year was the adoption of a new income allocation policy which fully funds our central Chapter Support organization while putting the maximum amount of revenues to work carrying out our mission at the chapter level, distributing the centralized costs equitably between chapters with widely differing budgets.

The year ended with news that we had received a major 3-year grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation to fund new staff providing educational outreach and support services for private landowners. With all these many achievements, we are looking forward to a great 2020.

I very much wish to express my personal thanks to all of the members of the greater TPE community - the board and chapter leadership, staff, committee members, site stewards, and, most especially, all of the many members and other volunteers who provide the countless hours and financial support that make our work possible. We are all truly Grassroots Conservation in Action!

Scott Fulton
President & Acting Executive Director

Land Protection

TPE's largest land protection project in 2019 was a donated conservation easement on the Horseshoe Mound Preserve in East Galena, Ill. The preserve is owned by the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation (JDCF) and is located on a high bluff with dramatic scenic views of the city of Galena and the Mississippi River. The property contains prairie, oak savanna and dry-mesic upland forest and an extensive trail system. The ability of TPE to take ownership of the conservation easement enabled JDCF to expand this important preserve from 28 to 150 acres in total size.

Dedication of the Foslin Addition to the Avon Ridge Preserve in Rock County, Wis. (Photo by Jerry Newman)

In addition to Horseshoe Mound, TPE made several additions to its existing preserves. These additions provided additional habitat, as well as critical access for parking and management, and buffering from adjacent properties.

- **Cultrano Addition to Muralt Bluff / Iltis Savanna**
  1.2 acres (Green County, Wis.)
- **Foslin Addition to Avon Ridge Preserve**
  6 acres (Rock County, Wis.)
- **Wilken Addition to Parrish Oak Savanna**
  4.3 acres (Dane County, Wis.)
- **Addition to Rattlesnake Ridge Preserve**
  16.1 acres (Iowa County, Wis.)

In total TPE has permanently protected:

36 owned preserves (2,651 acres)
14 conservation easements (889 acres)
3,540 acres total conservation land

Restoration & Land Management

All of TPE's eleven chapters are highly active in land restoration and management, engaging in a year-round cycle of tree and brush control, prescribed burns, invasive plant removal, and seed collection, processing and spreading. Increasingly, chapters are working collaboratively with other organizations and local landowners to develop projects at a larger landscape scale.

Spring 2019 burn on Pleasant Valley Bluff, Winona, Minn. (Photo by Gabe Ericksen)

One of the more exciting projects is the Pleasant Valley Corridor led by Roberta Bumann and Gabe Ericksen of the Minnesota Driftless Chapter. For several years, the chapter has done major management work on Pleasant Valley Bluff, a privately owned hill prairie on an enormous bluff with spectacular views of downtown Winona, Minn. and the Mississippi River. In 2019, the group initiated a new project to work with landowners in planting pollinator habitat along roadsides, in meadows, and in pocket gardens in their yards with the intent to create a corridor of the various landscapes complimentary to the prairie bluffs in this Driftless Area valley. In January 2020, the group received a grant from the Minnesota Board of Water & Soil Resources in the Lawns to Legumes Demonstration Neighborhood program.

TPE devoted 52% of its 2019 expenses to restoration & land management

Education & Outreach

This year saw continuing major growth in the education and outreach activities of TPE's chapters. Many provided training opportunities for burn crew members in order to expand our capacity to get fire on the ground. The field trip program continued strong, and the chapters hosted or participated in an extraordinary number of other educational and outreach activities, including public events, workshops, internships and other programs for students.

The 2019 Wisconsin Master Naturalist class learns about soils from instructor and organizer Pat Trochlell at TPE's Mounds View Grassland Preserve barn. (Photo by Rob Baller.)

A great example is the Wisconsin Master Naturalist Program, conducted for the fourth time by the Empire-Sauk Chapter. Participant Roger Reynolds said:

"The course brought together an incredible mix of passionate, knowledgeable, creative, curious and fun people, both the educators and students. I so enjoyed learning more about nature, with an emphasis on the fire dependent ecosystems, while also looking at so many facets of the natural world of Wisconsin. It's amazing to see how geology, the water cycle, millions of years, and ice ages all influenced where badgers live, how fire spreads, how parasitic Wood Betony helps kill cool season grasses, restoring prairie for so many plants, insects, birds and mammals."

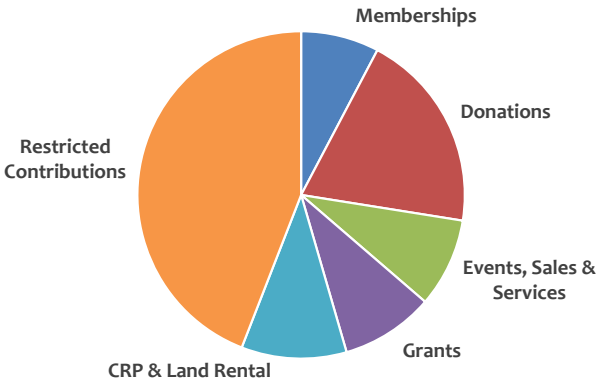
In 2019 TPE hosted or participated in:

40 field trips
126 other events & activities

Statement of Activities

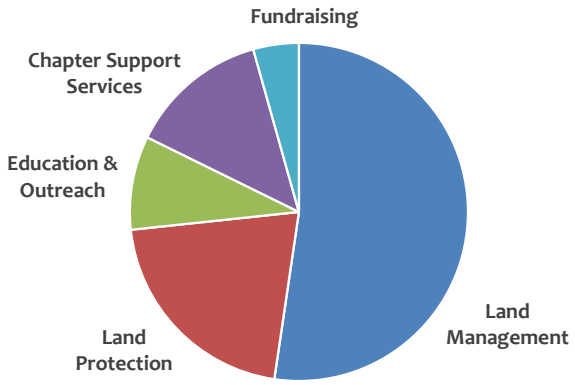
Revenues, Gains & Other Support

Memberships	$	71,648	8%
Donations	$	183,791	20%
Events, Sales & Services	$	81,757	9%
Grants	$	85,396	9%
CRP & Land Rental	$	96,501	10%
Restricted Contributions	$	409,315	44%
	$	928,409	100%



Expenses

Land Management	$	358,310	52%
Land Protection	$	143,704	21%
Education & Outreach	$	61,338	9%
Chapter Support Services	$	91,525	13%
Fundraising	$	29,839	4%
	$	684,717	100%



Statement of Position

Assets

Current Assets		
Cash & equivalents	$	462,469
Receivables	$	46,364
Other	$	34,253
	$	543,086
Property & Equipment (net of depreciation)		
Land & improvements	$	9,395,134
Equipment	$	22,113
	$	9,417,247
Investments & Restricted Cash	$	2,175,366
TOTAL ASSETS	$	12,135,699

Liabilities & Net Assets

Liabilities		
Accounts payable	$	5,058
Deferred revenue	$	3,850
Accrued salaries & expenses	$	22,558
	$	31,466
Net Assets		
Unrestricted	$	576,382
With donor restrictions	$	11,527,851
	$	12,104,233
TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS	$	12,135,699

Notes

1. Financial statement as of Dec. 31, 2019, audited by Johnson Block & Company.
2. Includes both The Prairie Enthusiasts, Inc. and The Prairie Enthusiasts Trust.
3. Donated land and easements totalling $737,400 not included in Restricted Contributions.

Thank You Donors

We thank the following who donated to TPE between February 17, 2020 - June 21, 2020. These gifts include those from our annual appeal, are beyond membership dues and are truly generous and appreciated.

$1000 or more

Ron Endres
To the Praire Education Fund
Izzak Walton League #79
For the New Ulm High School Prairie
Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin
For land management at West Dane Conservancy
Shirley Northern
For land management, in memory of Alan Slavick
Kurt & Susan Sroka
Gail Van Haren
To the Land Management Endowment

$500 - $999

Anonymous
For a refrigerator at Schurch-Thomson barn
Network for Good
Facebook fundraiser for educational events at Moely Prairie
David Wilken
For Land Management at Parrish Oak Savanna

$100 - $499

George Barry
Sarah Morris
In Memory of Coco Morris
Candace Diaz
M Bruce Edmonson
Kay Gabriel
Nancy Gloe
Randolph Hoffman
For land management at Hauser Road Prairie
Susan Lehnhardt
Erica Nelson
Mothers' Day gift for Virginia Nelson
Denise Thornton

Under $100

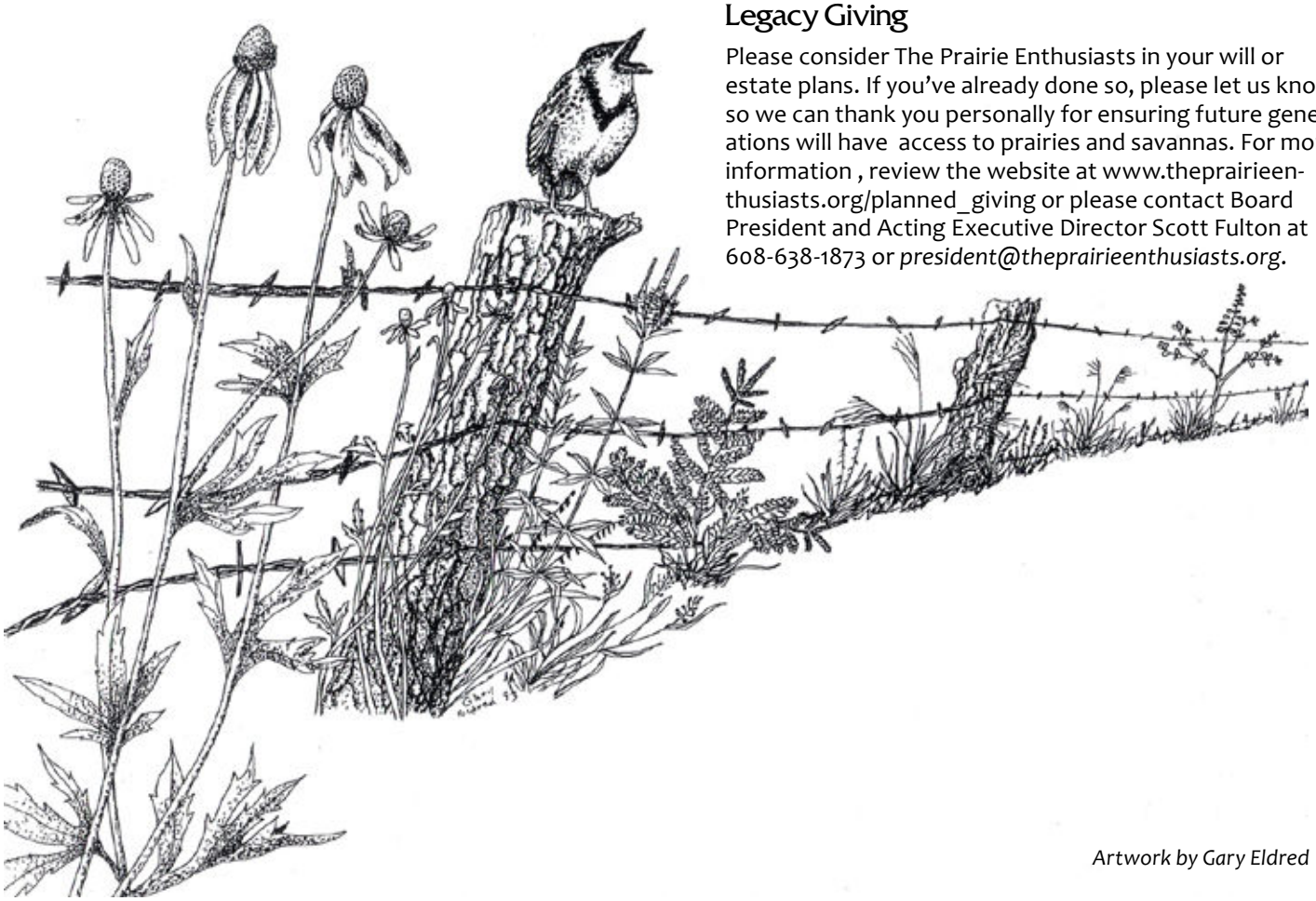
Joshua Boyer
In Recognition Of Roberta Bumann
Mary Jo Clark
Mary Crawford
Karin Exo
Rita Hoffmann
In memory of Edwin B. Christie
Evanne Hunt
Thomas Hunt
Valerie Kubal
Tom Lobacz
Andy Nelson
Jennifer Peck
Tom & Yolanda Lobacz

In-Kind Conference Donation

Adaptive Restorations, LLC
Marilyn Anderson
John Arndt
Susan Chambers
Kay Day
Judy Decker
Sylvia Downing
Chris Hughes
Jim Kojis
Henry Panowitsch
Deanna Pomije
Rickie Rachuy
Pamela Richards

Legacy Giving

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 , review the website at www.theprairieenthusiasts.org/planned_giving or please contact Board President and Acting Executive Director Scott Fulton at 608-638-1873 or *president@theprairieenthusiasts.org*.



Artwork by Gary Eldred

The Prairie Enthusiasts

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www.ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org

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Your annual membership dues with The Prairie Enthusiasts help us carry on our mission of educating about, protecting and restoring prairies, oak savannas, and related natural communities of the upper Midwest. Ensure that your membership is current to continue receiving future issues of *The Prairie Promoter*.

Renew online by visiting www.ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org or mail a check and the form below to:

The Prairie Enthusiasts, P.O. Box 824, Viroqua, WI 54665

Questions?

E-mail Jerry Pedretti at *bookkeeper@ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org* or call us at 608-638-1873.

Thank you!

Name:_____

Address:_____

City:_____ State:____ Zip:_____

E-mail:_____

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- ❑ $35 Little Bluestem
- ❑ $50 Big Bluestem
- ❑ $100 Shooting Star
- ❑ $250 Blazing Star
- ❑ $500 Monarch
- ❑ $1,000 Compass Plant
- ❑ $5,000 Bur Oak

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YOUR TPE MEMBERSHIP HAS EXPIRED!

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