

The PRAIRIE PROMOTER

Grassroots Conservation in Action

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The
Prairie
Enthusiasts



Can't Get Sylvan Road Out of My Mind

© Tom Hunt

"Can't get Sylvan Road TPE out of my mind" was the subject line of the email. Sylvan has that effect on people. What is it about this place that draws a person in, grips them? The scenic beauty, trout streams, palisades, birding, sprawling sedge meadows, a palpable sense of untamed wildness; maybe it's a nod to the past evidenced by fading remnants of a long-forgotten railroad. Yes, yes all that but there's something more, something deeper.

There are places chock full of alluring mysteries. Sylvan is such a

place and occasionally there'll be a clue, especially if you happen to be in the right place at the right time with the right light. Each piece of the puzzle solved reveals the place, deepens the connection, and heightens the intrigue.

Though now a venerable jewel among The Prairie Enthusiasts' protected lands Sylvan didn't start that way. There was opposition to purchasing an isolated conglomerate of parcels along the Dodge Branch deep in the hills of southern Iowa County. Ninety-nine acres of a hard-ridden amalgam of wetlands, uplands, streams, and valleys were eventually purchased by The Prairie Enthusiasts from Iowa County in 2014 and came to be known as the Sylvan Road Conservation Area (aka Sylvan Road), or just Sylvan.

There are places chock full of alluring mysteries. Sylvan is such a place...

In your mind's eye imagine a circle. Looking south, a narrowing pastoral valley, on the right-side soft sandstone gently gives way to a seepage wetland. A gin-clear feeder stream which carved the little valley gurgles inexorably toward its confluence just north a quarter mile. On the left side above the little stream a fractured and tilted palisade rises some 70 feet. It is draped in southern mesic forest and supports a few relic paper birches that tell a story about what once may have been.



Tom Hunt, pictured here with his cattle just a few miles north of the Sylvan Road property where he serves as the site steward.

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Our Mission

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

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President's Message – Endings and Beginnings

Scott Fulton, Immediate Past President

By the time you read this, I will have handed off the role of Board President of The Prairie Enthusiasts to Jim Rogala. My service in this position for the past six years has been one of my most challenging undertakings, as well as one of the most rewarding. It has been a time of great growth and change for TPE, and it has been one of the greatest honors of my life to serve as a leader of the organization during this period.

Jim has served on the Board's Executive Committee during my entire term. He brings a steady hand, and a clear and practical way of communicating and dealing with issues that will serve TPE very well for the next phase of our growth and development.

Shortly after starting as president, I began the practice of making an annual visit to meet with each of our 11 chapters, which we were able to do three times before COVID intervened. This took quite a bit of time and effort, but through this process we gained a deep collective understanding of who our members and chapters are, how they do their important conservation work, what they care about most, and what they hope for the future of the organization. I left every visit with a huge number of ideas, many new things to consider, and a renewed sense of excitement about what TPE does and its potential for the future.

The most important idea that emerged from this for me is that our conservation mission is fundamentally the responsibility and work of our individual members and other people we touch. We have built an organizational infrastructure consisting of our chapters, Board, staff, financial system, land protection processes, outreach, fundraising, etc., but this infrastructure only exists to serve and support our individual members – whether volunteers or professionals – in doing their vital work. This is what it means to be about “Grassroots conservation in action”. This is truly the heart of what TPE does in the world.

Even though our focus is on individual conservation work, our collective organizational infrastructure is not unimportant – far from it! Much of what our individual members want to accomplish can be much better done – or in some cases only done sustainably – through group action and with resources that only a significant organization can support. Building and overseeing “Chapter Support”, especially our paid TPE staff and financial resources, is the primary responsibility of the TPE Board and has been where I have spent most of my efforts as president.

We have become an accredited land trust and put in place the policies and processes required for the complex land protection part of our mission. We have tried to grow our support capabilities to meet the clear and expressed needs of our membership – such as with the introduction of landowner services over the past couple of years. To accomplish all this sustainably, we have also had to find a fair and transparent way to grow and fund the professional staff we need, while still providing our chapters with the maximum possible financial resources needed to carry out their local work.

None of this has been easy, but I leave my post with a deep sense of accomplishment. My sincerest thanks to all of you, who have inspired, challenged, educated, and supported me through this process. As we all know, the “prairie bug” is a lifelong, chronic condition, and I look forward to working together with you into the future! ■

On the Cover: Amy Chamberlin, winner of the 2022 photo contest, took this already stunning photo of prairie smoke at Moely Prairie and edited it to mesmerizing effect.



President's Message – As new president, what is my role?

Jim Rogala, President

I'd be remiss if my first message as President didn't acknowledge the progress The Prairie Enthusiasts has made under the leadership of Scott Fulton over the last 6 years. If you are a

member of this organization, I don't need to tell you about Scott's dedication to The Prairie Enthusiasts. He brought his skills as an entrepreneur to The Prairie Enthusiasts, particularly regarding pursuing organizational growth. Part of that growth was building our Chapter Support staff, with Scott serving as interim Executive Director during our transition. He also spent countless hours working with chapter leadership and started his whirlwind tours to visit all chapters at least annually (pre-COVID, anyway). In addition to all his leadership roles, he also used his technical skills in various projects such as databases and website development. Fortunately for us, Scott will remain on the Board as Past-President and has already committed to working on future projects while serving on committees. A similar story can be told for all past Board Presidents who served well and continue to serve on the Board, committees, and as leaders in their respective chapters. I look forward to being mentored by all our strong leaders of the past.

Scott's President's Message in the last Promoter asked the question: *What guides you on your journey?* There is an obvious question that precedes that one: How did you get started on your journey? As an introduction of myself to those that don't know me, here's my "prairie story." I grew up along the shores of Lake Michigan enjoying the outdoors, mainly fishing. I decided to go to college at UW-La Crosse to pursue a career as a fishery biologist. After working some temporary jobs, I was fortunate enough to get hired by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to work on a Mississippi River monitoring program in 1988. I recently retired after 32 years in the same program (although I was a USGS employee for most of it). So how does an aquatic ecologist end up with a passion for prairies? I purchased 60 acres of recreation land in 1990 and discovered an opening with many flowering species. A hill prairie! In 2002, my wife and I purchased an additional 68 acres that had 2 more small hill prairies on the land. I began striving to learn more about these prairies. At about the same time, my forester included prairie management in my forestry plan. Foolishly, I thought that managing them would be easy! I began to realize I needed some advice on what to do, and in 2002, I came across an organization that is solely dedicated to preserving prairie remnants in the upper Midwest. I became a member of The Prairie Enthusiasts and had other members join me to conduct burns on my property. I've become involved in the leadership of The Prairie Enthusiasts by being a Board member, serving on several committees, and serving within the leadership of the Coulee Region Chapter. I recently had an easement with The Prairie Enthusiasts put on my property to ensure perpetual protection of the hill prairies.

Now for a quick answer to the question I posed in the title of this message. As The Prairie Enthusiasts' new President of the Board, what is my role? The obvious answer is to help guide our leadership, the Board of Directors in particular, towards succeeding in our mission. However, a closer examination of the previous statement reveals that the President really serves our mission, and our mission is simply to be effective in "perpetuation and recovery" of the land we work on. I intend to serve this mission, and hope all of you join me in this service as best you can. ■

We've received some "Ask Me Anything" questions for me to answer. I'll answer just a couple here. Keep the questions coming!

Q: Is Jim going to do listening visits like Scott did?

A: I think Scott's visits were very successful and I plan to do something similar. It seems appropriate that I would visit during the strategic planning process, so that will come soon. I'm also continuing my quest to visit as many The Prairie Enthusiasts sites as possible, so that will be another opportunity to listen to chapter members.

Q: The natural history of the fire-dependent ecosystems in our region is linked to thousands of years of Indigenous land management. The Prairie Enthusiasts and its members actively work to restore lost biodiversity, but what about the lost cultural history that is intertwined with it? Are there ways The Prairie Enthusiasts can better incorporate, advocate for, and support Indigenous voices and cultural practices through its land-management and educational work?

A: I think it is a natural extension of our land management to think about how Indigenous peoples interacted with the land. It is central to our core value of Reverence for the Land, where we state our love and respect for the land. For me, that is the part of the Indigenous culture that resonates best and thinking about the overall cultural history follows. There certainly will be opportunities for The Prairie Enthusiasts to highlight this. I welcome any ideas from our members on how we might do it.



Executive Director's Message – Celebrating Progress

Debra Behrens, Executive Director

Midsummer is where our past and future collide. It is hot out there. I find myself forgetting how I longed for this in the dead of winter, reminding myself that sweater weather is just around the corner. This is when I reap the rewards and shortcomings of my spring optimism. It feels good to have cleared so much garlic mustard this year. Yet the towering wild parsnip jeers at me, reminding me that next year will be worse if we don't get after it.

And so, on a recent sweltering day, we try to get a jump on the heat and spend our morning toiling in the shade, slicing wild parsnip roots and pulling, pulling, pulling. By 11:30 the sun is overhead, the sunscreen is melting off my face and running into my eyes, our progress is slow, and we are questioning our sanity. But we keep going.

Why do we do this? What started as love and respect for the land has become reverence. We now view it as a privilege to be its devoted stewards. We work side by side and when one of us flags, the other offers encouragement. We have learned that invasive species are a symptom of people neglecting to give the land what it needs – diversity, fire, protection. We see ourselves as part of the ecosystem now and rejoice as native plants, butterflies and an abundance of insects respond to the care we provide. We delight in recognizing and calling them by name when we can, seeking

help to unravel the mystery when we can't. We now have a vision for what will be possible for this place through our restoration efforts. Giving up is no longer an option.

The past and future for The Prairie Enthusiasts come together in many ways in this midsummer issue. I acknowledge with gratitude the leadership and support of my first Board President, mentor, and friend Scott Fulton. He has given more to this organization than many, perhaps any, of us can fully appreciate. His commitment and deep love for our community are an inextricable part of who we are now. It will be a privilege to work with our new Board President Jim Rogala to build on his legacy. Taking on this leadership role requires significant investments of time and effort and I'm grateful for Jim's willingness to serve.

At this mid-point of the year, we also provide a look back at what we achieved together last year. The annual report to our community on last year's mission impact and financial results reminds us to celebrate our progress, just when the reality of all we have yet to do this year is setting in. But I am not giving up, and I know the same is true for you.

Early in my work with The Prairie Enthusiasts Scott gave me wise advice: "Get outside. Take a walk. Connect with the places that will inspire you to keep going." A good reminder for all of us at midsummer. Just don't forget to bring your Parsnip Predator. ■

Jim Rachuy Recognized as 2022 Prairie Enthusiast of the Year

The Prairie Enthusiasts is very pleased to announce that The Prairie Enthusiasts Board of Directors has selected Jim Rachuy as the recipient of the 2022 Prairie Enthusiast of the Year award. This is a very long overdue honor, given Jim's involvement with The Prairie Enthusiasts from its very beginnings and his incredible and highly innovative work over many years on conservation. Join us in extending our sincerest congratulations to Jim! ■



Jim Rachuy, member of The Prairie Enthusiasts for over 40 years, is honored with the 2022 Prairie Enthusiast of the Year award. (photo courtesy of Rickie Rachuy)



*Prescribed fire has helped restore balance at the Sylvan Road Conservation Area.
(photos by Tom Hunt)*

From its fern covered base one can follow Sylvan Road, a broken and narrow ribbon of bitumen, westward across the sedge meadow to an abruptly steep, dissected, oak-covered hill adorned by a series of promontories jutting along its shoulder. Each promontory overlooks expansive sedge meadows and provides a vantage point from which to cast a gaze upon the blocky palisades. Turning your view to the north is a mighty sandstone palisade, at its brow large white pines, at its toes tumbled boulders dip into a once cold limp trout stream now struggling to hang on to that designation.

To the east following the Dodge Branch on its run to the Pecatonica you'll see beyond our circle as the valley opens to a more distant sandstone monadnock capped in white pine. While yellow-rumped warblers flit about in the oak branches you're likely to see an eagle; certainly, there'll be vultures, cranes, ducks, and geese in season. Then, imagine the circle from above. A line gently arcing east to west across its center is the remnant of the railroad. The puffing engine with its steam whistle long ago ceased to pierce the quietude of the valley. The once rhythmically clacking steel rails were sent off to the war effort. Now the remnant grade is a pleasant walking trail, a kind of portal into Sylvan.

Sylvan is surrounded by family farms that have celebrated their sesquicentennial anniversary and are bearing down on the bicentennial. Amazingly the Sylvan landscape has remained a mostly intact refugia despite the conquering dreams and means encouraged by the doctrine of Manifest Destiny. This refugia, because of exceptionally trying limitations and hazards for most development, has resisted efforts to subdue its wildness from settlement onward. That said, the site did give way to early wagon trails, a modern paved road, a few early buildings, and the railroad.

Failed attempts to drain the wetlands and persistent overgrazing have left their mark. Those few corners considered unfit succumbed to trash, literally. To be sure, those parts of the site that have suffered will respond well to restorative attention.

Linda Lynch recognized the site as a diamond in the rough and set about championing its protection and improvement. Fortunately, she had help, the Southwest Wisconsin chapter, the stewardship fund, and a variety of contributors together pulled off the purchase that in effect saved Sylvan. No, it's not the Miracle on Ice, but everyone loves an underdog story. For this refugia to persist relatively intact against long odds is a testament to the site's resilience and the dogged persistence of grassroots conservationists to protect it.

Like many things protection can be complicated; it can mean different things to different groups. Initially protection meant defining boundaries, in more ways than one, and weaning various groups and individuals of their sense of entitlement for use without restriction or constraint. The Prairie Enthusiasts' Land Protection Committee took steps necessary to assert control of ownership while still permitting public access, even encouraging responsible use.

There's an adage among project managers, "measure to manage." The Prairie Enthusiasts' Land Management Committee assembled topflight scientists and practitioners to embark on measuring the site. Major natural communities identified include the southern sedge meadow, wet mesic prairie, remnant oak savanna, and southern oak forest. There are inclusions of lesser or micro communities such as the ephemeral wetland, pine knob, cliff, and riparian shrub/scrub land.

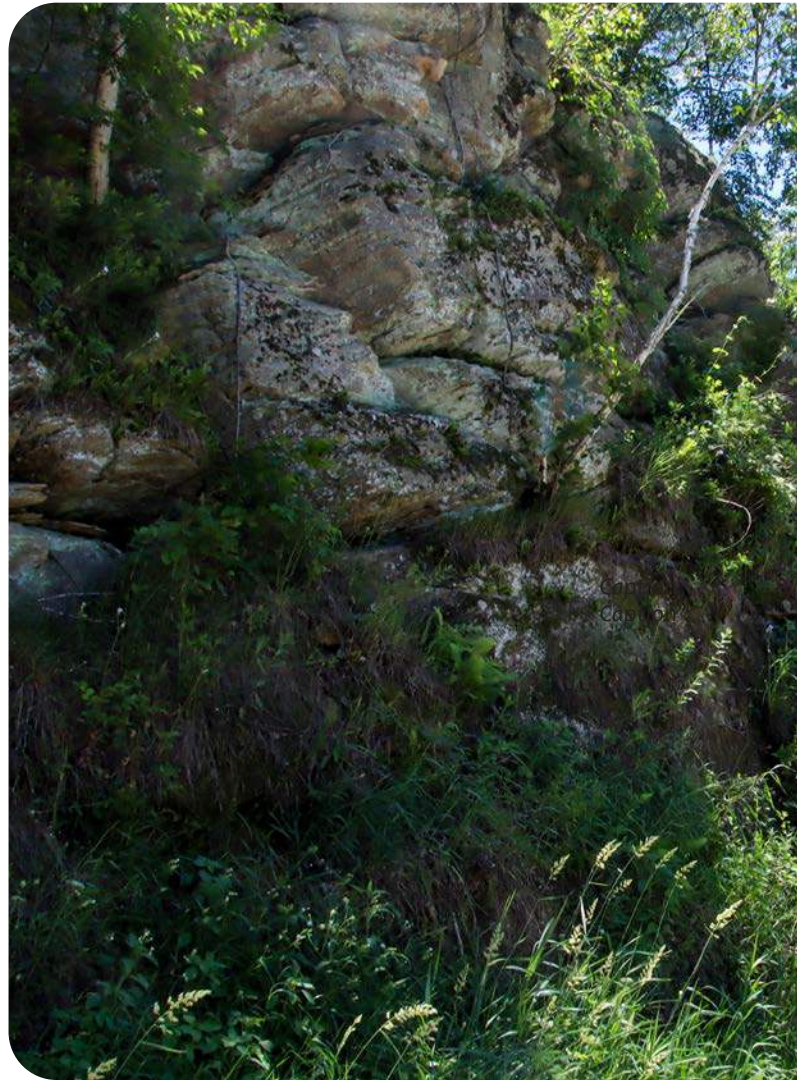
Botanists have surveyed the site periodically through the years resulting in an ongoing inventory of 375 plant species, 345 of which are native. Thirty-four species of *Carex*, at least a dozen ferns, several orchids, carpets of spring ephemerals, showy forbs, and additional species continue to show up with nearly every new survey. Just recently our inventory of the genus *Salix* increased by 6 species. We have a management goal of clearing brush from the sedge meadows and wanted to ensure no harm, especially to important willow species should they be present.

Bird surveys indicate at least 78 species to date including breeding pairs, passerines, and residents. Frog surveys include the usual local residents, and in our management activities we are mindful of the Northern Cricket frog. Fish surveys indicate that our little feeder stream is high quality while the Dodge Branch could use our help regaining its health. Of course, we've observed large mammals typical of the area ranging from white tailed deer to otters and coyotes. A goal is to survey more comprehensively the trophic structure (micro to macro), so we better understand our catalogue of community members, where onsite they prefer to reside, and how to optimize management.

Sylvan has demonstrated resilience. The site possesses variability in surface water and groundwater hydrology. There are stream systems, multiple seepages, ponds, meander channels, and wetlands. Its topography includes level alluvial valley bottoms, cliff faces, hilltops, outcrops, steeply dissected slopes, a density of drainage channels, and variable aspects. Though smallish, it embodies habitat heterogeneity of sufficient scale to sustain a diversity of species, especially since surrounding lands help connect habitat and buffer the site. In short, Sylvan checks all the boxes for a high-quality natural area.

Exogenous forces have shifted conservation thinking globally and locally. Natural communities and individual species remain an essential focus, but it is the adaptive capability or resilience of a landscape that will likely determine its long-term endurance. Landscapes with ecological intactness and connectivity, along with heterogeneity (habitat variability) are the places most likely to harbor our natural heritage in the face of perhaps rapid, certainly inexorable change.

It is hubris to think we humans control evolutionary destiny when deep history reveals a track record of mass



extinctions and multiple reboots of life on earth. We're inculcated into believing we alone are the stewards of Earth but there is no guarantee our mortal efforts will sway the long-term outcome. Deep time is beyond my ken so, like you, we'll busy ourselves, in the face of this paradox, doing in good faith what we can in the here and now. The Prairie Enthusiasts' conscientious membership is fully engaged in practical, cost effective, science-based land protection and improvement to help resilient natural communities persist as places where future generations can ponder the mysteries of life on earth.

A Sylvan neighbor whose family has occupied the site since settlement referred to this place as his temple, a place where he repairs for contemplation, a place where he soaks in the magnificence of the planet, his place of reverence. It brings him happiness to know The Prairie Enthusiasts has enduring commitment to protect this place.

Whether adding to your life list of birds, cutting brush, working the fire line, battling garlic mustard, gazing across a sedge meadow, strolling the portal trail, or restoring a stream, maybe Sylvan has an allure for you. Sylvan is dreamtime. Most anyone who visits Sylvan is subject to reverie and some will tap a deep reverence for the place.

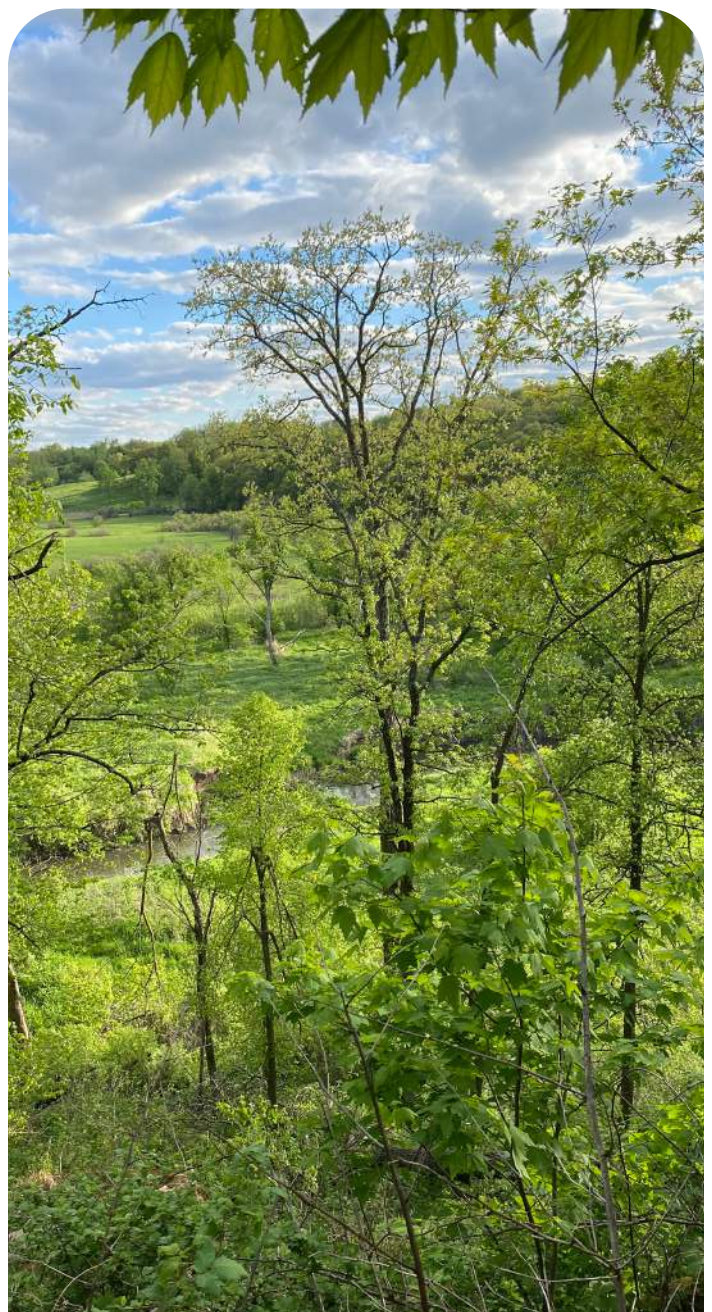
Why would you want to get Sylvan out of your mind? ■



Tom Hunt, site steward of the Sylvan Road Conservation Area, shows off the immense diversity hosted at the site.



Visitors to the Sylvan Road Conservation Area are astounded by the extreme diversity – from floristically rich wetlands and stream to soaring palisades reaching up to 100 feet high. With such diverse geography comes diverse ecosystems, flora and fauna.



Great News - More Prairie Protected at Erbe Grassland!

Rich Henderson

On March 15th, 40 acres, which include original remnant prairie and restorations, were added to The Prairie Enthusiasts' Erbe Grassland (Dane Co, WI), increasing the preserve to 140 acres. The acquired parcel is a critically important addition, greatly enhancing the conservation significance and viability of the preserve. The addition supports 90 prairie plant species and is home to the State Threatened (ST) woolly milkweed (*Asclepias lanuginosa*), Special Concern prairie turnip (*Pedimelum esculentum*), and State Endangered regal fritillary butterfly. It also has critical nesting and foraging habitat for eight grassland bird Species of Greatest Conservation Need, which regularly use the parcel: Bell's vireo (ST), upland sandpiper (ST), Henslow's sparrow (ST), bobolink, grasshopper sparrow, short-eared owl, dickcissel, and eastern meadowlark.

We have been most fortunate that Ed and Cheryle Goplin appreciated the significance of their land and have been cooperating with The Prairie Enthusiasts in its management and restoration since 2000. To our delight, they recently decided it was time to permanently protect it for future generations to experience and enjoy.

The acquisition was made possible by grants from Wisconsin's Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, the Dane County Conservation Fund, and, of course, Ed and Cheryle's long-time commitment to conservation. Their son, Erik Goplin, with his long-time curiosity about nature and love for it, also played a major role in its care and protection. He has done much of the management and restoration work and has been the volunteer site steward of our Erbe Grassland preserve for 15 years. ■



New Opportunity to Double Impact of Internship Endowment

Education is core to the mission of The Prairie Enthusiasts. One way we educate the next generation of Prairie Enthusiasts is through internships. Dennis Thomson, son of the late conservationists Olive and John Thomson, has offered a generous match of up to \$25,000 to the Olive and John Thomson Internship Endowment, in honor of his late wife, Joan Thomson, who was passionate about education in her life and, now, in her legacy. You can double your impact in supporting internship experiences for the next generation of Prairie Enthusiasts with a gift to the Olive and John Thomson Internship Endowment today.

To make your gift to support internship experiences, use the envelope included in this newsletter or give securely online at ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org – please include a note that your gift is for the Olive and John Thomson Internship Endowment. ■



The 2022 cohort of interns put the "enthusiast" in The Prairie Enthusiasts. Generous support for the internship program comes from the Olive and John Thomson Internship Endowment. Starting now, up to \$25,000 in gifts will be matched by Dennis Thomson.

"Being an intern is hard work! It involves a lot of outdoor physical labor in hot, humid weather during the warmest months of the year. But it's all worth it. Interns go on to complete advanced degrees, work for federal agencies, private ecological restoration firms, logging companies, engineering companies, or other land trusts. It is truly heartwarming to see the work-ethic, interest, knowledge, and engagement of each intern crew over the years."

– Andy Sleger, Natural Areas Manager for the Empire-Sauk Chapter

Beauty in the Eye of the Restorer

Hugh Gabriel

Sometimes I find myself wondering if the hours in the hot sun, the bramble-scratched limbs, and the burr-infested shirts are worth it. Many of my go-to reasons for prairie restoration: protecting biodiversity, healing the soil, righting the ecological wrongs of so many years of colonization, fall apart when I look at the prairie through the lens of biological time. In many millions of years, biodiversity and soil will likely heal on their own with or without human intervention. Ecosystems inevitably transition over time, and, before the hilltops can blink, people too will vanish from the landscape.

It's at this point of thinking that I start to get defensive.

"You're helping endangered species," I tell myself, smashing a shovel into the ground to sever a parsnip root with a crunch.

Then a fresh breeze will hit me, and I'll look up and stare at the landscape, entranced by beauty. The square stems of wild bergamot bruising under the weight of a purple crown. Purple streaks under the leaves of big bluestem. A fritillary dancing above a hidden wood lily. The buzz of bumblebees—in my ear, then in the distance—but never gone.

We talk about species diversity, about acres seeded, prescribed burn schedules. But at the root of it all, I often need a reminder that the force that drives me (and I suspect, many others) forward in restoration work is beauty. In our world beauty rarely earns grants, stops development, or wins elections. Since the drowning of Hetch-Hetchy valley in 1923, conservation work has been burdened with the task of quantifying nature. Ecosystems are slapped with price tags for their benefits to humanity and are traded like commodities to make way for development.

I sometimes fall victim to this mindset. Thinking of the prairie in numerical terms instead of taking a deep breath of drop-seed scented air and appreciating the aesthetic value of the ecosystem. I catch myself viewing beauty as a nice side effect to work that carries a heavy burden of historical and scientific responsibility. And as a Prairie Enthusiast, I'm proud to be a part of an organization that takes those scientific and historical contexts seriously.

So, I'm not suggesting a change in management style. There's no need to cover the hillsides in the showiest asters, or stock the streams with shimmering rainbow trout. Instead, I'm going to try to think of the prairie as a beautiful painting. I find that the most wonderful museum visits come after taking an art class. Knowing the technique of the artist, the medium used, and the skill required to smear a glob of red paint so that it becomes a boat after a few steps back. A prairie can be appreciated the same way, as an everchanging masterpiece composed between humans and nature.

And we, The Prairie Enthusiasts, are already art connoisseurs. I hear fellow prairie lovers talk like art critics all the time. Lambasting woeful seed mixes like they're low-quality paint. Abruptly striding off the path to pluck out a



Hugh Gabriel, former intern at Mounds View Grassland, finds beauty in restoring our native ecosystems. Also pictured - blue racer snake that Hugh caught on a rainy morning at West Dane Conservancy. (photo by Pat Trochell)

single sweet clover as if it's a smudge on the glass of a frame. Eyes lighting up when talking about the masterpieces and a shake of the head in reference to all the works lost.

Knowing that the prairie is home to rare bush-clovers and sparrows adds to its beauty. The sweat, parsnip burns, and tears that go into maintaining the prairie add to the beauty also. That human effort, which we often go to lengths to make invisible, makes prairies one of the most beautiful ecosystems in the world, flowers and bees aside. Each time I stand on a hill and take in a prairie vista, I'm looking at a labor of love.

But for a love of what? Why toil away on a landscape that will change anyways in 50, 100, or 5,000 years?

Because of the nest of baby orioles in the brush by the path. Because of the coyote waiting by the front door of his friend the badger. Because of the way the dew beads on the petals of spiderwort, and the brilliant green of new bluestem shoots after a burn.

Taking the long view is hard because it confronts us with our own mortality. We will be gone soon enough, and then things will go on changing without us. It helps then, to recognize the beauty that makes us love and care for a prairie. Beauty is ephemeral and intangible, and it gives us joy. The work we do may disappear eventually. Or, it may be the first flap of the fritillaries wings towards a more beautiful world. And there is nothing more wonderful we can do as humans—for ourselves, our neighbors, and children—than to create something beautiful. ■

MacDonald York Prairie Refuge Protected by TPE Easement

By Scott Fulton

The 125-acre MacDonald York Prairie Refuge in Blachardville, Wis. has been permanently protected by a conservation easement with The Prairie Enthusiasts, under the sponsorship of the Prairie Bluff Chapter. The MacDonald Refuge is located within the historic York Prairie, one of the largest pre-settlement prairies in Wisconsin. The property is less than a mile from the WDNR York Prairie State Natural Area and is close to the Perry-Primrose Bird Conservation Area and the Green's Prairie Cemetery (which is managed in part by the Prairie Bluff Chapter).

The MacDonald Refuge includes a variety of topography and natural communities, including open prairies, riparian and wetland areas, oak savanna, and oak woodlands. A total of 226 local native plant species are currently known to be present on the site, of which about 170 were remnant species. In addition, the site hosts 12 species that are endangered, of greatest conservation need or of special concern, including prairie bushclover, pale purple coneflower, twinleaf, prairie ragwort, October's lady's tresses, and rusty-patched bumble bee.

The site was homesteaded in 1853 by Ole and Kari Haugen from Norway and used by their family for three generations as a dairy farm. From the 1930s onward the property was used only for hay and light pasturing, and it was never subjected to any kind of chemical agriculture.

In 1990 the farm was purchased by James and Betty MacDonald as a long-term rewilding project. The MacDonalds were from Madison, Wis., and both were involved in environmental and political activism for much of their lives. James was a professor at UW-Madison Law School, served for a time on the Madison School Board, and was a pioneer in the field of environmental law, including being a part of the original DDT hearings in the 1960s. Betty was the national financial chair for the League of Women Voters, and served on both League and United Nations international environmental committees. James and Betty passed their conservation passions on to their children, including starting a native plant garden in their Madison yard in the 1950s. Son James, who is now the primary site steward of the MacDonald Refuge, remembers working in the garden with his dad when he was only five years old.

The management of the Refuge has been guided by the principle of rewilding rather than restoration – letting Nature direct the process as much as possible. The MacDonalds have had a clear vision of the site as a gift for future generations rather than as a place for recreation. The family started in 1993 with a 15-acre prairie planting to expand a remnant near the old barn they use as a part-time residence. Based on original prairie sod and with the MacDonalds' extensive experience in native gardening, this remnant expansion did extremely well. It has been gradually but continually expanded in the decades since to become a major high-quality example of the rare dry mesic/mesic prairie.

Many pockets of native plants have been found on the site and spread through seed collection, augmented by seed from other local York Prairie remnants over the years. The family is very serious about maintaining local genotypes,

always having greater success with seeds from neighboring sites, and never bringing in seeds from more than 15 miles away. This practice has made the site a genetic repository of significance for other restoration projects in the area, and the family has seen the property as a potential nucleus for future rebuilding of the original York Prairie. Other than distinguishing between very wet and very dry habitat plants, seeds are generally scattered around the site as much as possible to let the plants themselves create their own distribution mosaic. Current work is focused on restoring an open oak woodland adjacent to the prairie.

Betty MacDonald has now reached the age of 101, and both she and the rest of the family were determined to ensure that the MacDonald York Prairie Refuge would be protected in perpetuity. We are very pleased that they have entrusted and partnered with The Prairie Enthusiasts to help carry this important family legacy forward into the future. ■



View of restored prairie from wetland area. (Photo by Scott Fulton)



Family site steward Jim MacDonald (son of James and Betty) showing restoration work on the northern boundary of the property. (Photo by Scott Fulton)

Management Plans: Our Treasure Map to Conservation Results

Randy Hoffman, Volunteer Steward at Hauser Road Prairie

When we follow site management plans we almost always see the desired improved outcomes and, sometimes rewards we never imagined.

In making, updating, and following management plans we embody our core values. Driven by our reverence for the land, we work together to develop management plans – by sharing knowledge – that, not immediately but – in the long view – yields results.

I can recall a narrow winding dry prairie in southern Wisconsin that had a large (60 acre) cool season grassland adjacent to it. Between the prairie preserve and the grassland was a tall fencerow dominated by 60-foot-high black cherries. In developing the management plan, an ornithologist noted that Bobolinks were utilizing the adjacent land. The planning team had a prairie plant specialist, wildlife manager, fire specialist, and a real estate person comprising the team. The plan did not address the fencerow and had a firebreak established adjacent to it. When the plan was out for review by a wider audience, the ornithologist was adamant that the fencerow be addressed in the plan. The plan changed and called for removal of the fencerow, complete with the blessing of the neighbor. After the fencerow was removed almost instantly the Bobolinks occupied the previously unoccupied dry prairie.

But a management plan will only work when we work together. While working under a 48-inch diameter bur oak, I noticed four of the replacement oaks looked different. The approved management plan states a need for a few small bur oaks near the large oak to be eventual replacements for the majestic open-grown oak, while the goal for the rest of Hauser Road Prairie is open prairie.

I examined the young bur oaks and discovered someone had pruned them. Four 8- to 10-foot-tall bur oaks had their lower branches neatly pruned. Someone cut limbs close to the trunk, and either smoothed with a knife or sanded the cuts. Persons do such pruning to promote straight solid trunks.

This practice is an antithetical concept for a savanna tree and especially to ecological processes. Granted, fires may prune some lower branches, but the giant growing next to the pruned trees still has branches descending within 2-feet of the ground that are still growing after many prescribed burns.

Restorationists can argue about the effects of pruning on savanna trees, but the implications are much broader.

Can anyone walk onto a preserve of The Prairie Enthusiast and do whatever they feel like doing? As you may surmise, of course not. These are, after all, nature preserves with specific protection and management conservation objectives.

Effective management requires appropriate work that we coordinate and document in order to meet the property's goals. We do not know everything about prairie

restoration, but we have a process to use proven techniques, promote research, and learn as we go. We welcome help in the management or biological monitoring of The Prairie Enthusiasts preserves. If anyone has an interest, please contact the site steward or the local chapter's land management committee.

To help us meet our conservation goals and objectives for our preserves, The Prairie Enthusiasts have a detailed process in place to provide management direction. I, for example, as the volunteer steward, cannot do whatever I want.

Sideboards are in place to narrow and focus decisions.

The local committee, using extensive data sources, drafts a management plan. Sometimes the local committee does not have the expertise in certain practices or ecological processes. In such cases, the organization has experts both within and outside to help.

Once the local committee drafts a plan, they send it to the organization-wide Land Management Committee. This committee either approves the plan or sends it back for changes. Once approved, the management plan is the cornerstone for making management decisions.

Persons outside the local committee and the volunteer steward conduct annual site evaluations. This process assures the management plan is being followed. The inspector looks for issues not addressed in the plan that need correction.

If anyone is aware of, or feels, there is a better, more effective method for achieving a property's goals, they shouldn't act on their own. They should contact the local steward or land management committee. Their passion is native ecosystem conservation prairie restoration. They are open to new ideas. The last thing a steward wants to see is some action that falls outside the direction given in the approved management plan. ■



Management plans help us work together to reach our restoration goals. Check the plan before pruning young oaks like these!

The author thanks Mark Martin and Rich Henderson for constructive comments on the draft article.

Prairies and Bluebirds: If You Build it, Will They Come?

David Lucey

One of America's favorite birds is the Eastern Bluebird. Whether it is the lilting song heard as males announce themselves to the females in the spring of the year, or the flash of blue from the bird that "carries the sky on its back", seeing a bluebird gives everyone's day a lift. However, sighting a bluebird wasn't always that easy, as their numbers declined to an estimated 600 pair in Wisconsin in the early 60's. This was due to loss of habitat and competition for nesting cavities from more aggressive non-native birds, such as the house sparrow and the starling. Prairies would seem to be a solution to the loss of habitat issue, but are they? If you build it, will they come?

It depends. The preferences and needs of bluebirds for a place to live and thrive are relatively known and fixed components. Bluebirds are primarily a species of savanna or open woods, as they are cavity nesters, and find those naturally occurring cavities in trees, or those excavated by woodpeckers. Prairies, on the other hand, can present a wide variety of environments, some of which bluebirds will find inviting and suitable to raise a brood or two during the summer months. Bluebirds are primarily insect eaters and feed large numbers of them to their 4 or 5 young in the nest box. This requires an area of short grass or vegetation that allows them to access this food source and can be achieved by having mowed paths or fire breaks nearby. Without this shorter vegetation, tall grass prairies would not be inviting to bluebirds. Areas of prairie with low vegetation and little bluestem grass might attract bluebirds without the mowed areas. Bluebirds need a perch near their nest box as they are reluctant to approach it with food for their young without first scouting for predators. A tree or utility line would serve this purpose. These perches also allow the bluebird to scan the ground for insects. Without these perches, the bluebird is unlikely to locate in a prairie. These perches, ideally located within 30 feet of the box entrance, give the fledglings a target when they leave the nest.

However, if there are many trees or shrubs nearby, they will likely attract wrens, a protected species that will often overtake a bluebird box.

As important as location is, no attempts to attract bluebirds should be undertaken without providing a box of suitable dimensions and using a proper mounting method. This makes it difficult, but not impossible, for feral cats and raccoons to climb it and take the baby bluebirds. Of equal importance is a predator guard which is attached to the entrance hole to make it more difficult for these animals to reach into the box. All boxes should be monitored weekly during the nesting season to determine if it is being used and to monitor the young. Black flies and ants can cause mortality of the young if not dealt with. Boxes need to be cleaned out after the first brood departs. More information on helping to ensure that we enjoy these birds in the future can be obtained at the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin website www.BRAW.org. ■



Numbers of bluebirds in Wisconsin declined to an estimated 600 pair in the early 60s – that's changing as we create the right conditions for bluebirds to thrive here once again.



Accommodations for bluebirds should include properly-mounted nesting boxes with predator guards. (photo by David Lucey)



RINGS OF FIRE

Jazmine Bevers

For many the ring of a bell can have many meanings. It can denote warm dinner on the table or a cow at pasture.

It can be the song of church bells or the ring on a bicycle. A ring itself has its own meanings altogether. A ring on the correct finger indicating a lifelong commitment or the cycle of beginnings and endings.

Although Cow bells are amongst things not requested for prairie restoration, rings and the sound of bells most certainly were, this 2022 in Pleasure Valley with The Prairie Enthusiasts.

When two people “ring” a unit, they finish it by ceremoniously clanking the tips of their drip torches. The bells that I’ll remember forever were those of Lydia’s and my drip torches clanging in camaraderie upon “ringing” a burn unit in finality. It symbolized our triumph over invasive species, friendship, and cyclic renewal that fire creates in its wake.

Under the direction of Andy Sleger, Pat Trochlell and Ken Wade; Lydia Martin and Jazmine Bevers and volunteers successfully completed a record-setting year for burned acreage in Pleasure Valley. They burned 153 acres without incident and look forward to the prairies that restoration work creates in the future for Pleasure Valley.

For me, the burn season has meant a renewal of the soul. A renewal of kinship with my fellow humans in our struggle to heal the land. And finally, it has meant a reinvigoration for my life’s work and bells ringing in a whole new way from here on out. Here is a cheer to many more bells and rings to come!

(photos by Ken Wade)

Putting the “Oak” Back in Oakwood Community Park

Margaret Sprague

The City of Fennimore is a small rural community of 2,400 residents in the southwest corner of Wisconsin. Following a February 2018 goal-setting community meeting, a group of individuals discovered a common interest in improving the urban forest in the city. They began meeting in April to discuss how to educate residents and business owners in an effort to develop support for enhancing Fennimore’s urban forest. Efforts have focused on sharing information on planting and pruning practices and the importance of trees in our community.

History of the land

The City of Fennimore purchased the property now being used as Oakwood Community Park in 1968 from a local farm family owned by community members Larry and Carol Jeidy. The city was looking for land for a major manufacturing plant, Rayovac, and Southwest Wisconsin Technical College. The Jeidy’s decided that sale of the land would be a great benefit to their community and felt it was the right thing to do. The Jeidy farm was developed into an industrial park that now includes a manufacturing plant, a technical college, professional offices, and agricultural and retail businesses. However, a 45-acre area of the farm that was not suitable for development was designated for recreational purposes and has become Oakwood Community Park.

While it was in October 1970 that the Council agreed to set aside an area in the north part of the City Farm for recreational purposes per request of the local Kiwanis Club, it wasn’t until 1992 that development of recreation facilities began in the 45-acre park with installation of walking trails, a parking lot and RV hookups. This was done with the help of a Wisconsin Conservation Corps (WCC) grant. The largest ravine in the area was used for rubble fill by the city beginning in the 1980s. In the mid-1990s, the purpose of the area expanded to house a sports facility complex that now consists of two softball/baseball fields, concession stands, soccer fields, a football field, a disc golf course and most recently a dog park.

How the oak savanna restoration project began

In late 2019, a management plan for some of the neglected areas in Oakwood Community Park was completed by Bluestem Forestry, which helped the Tree Board members begin working on ideas to preserve and enhance several areas in the park as natural areas. With the

pandemic in full swing in 2020, not much activity occurred. However, in 2021, Tree Board members worked hard to educate themselves on the issues they would be facing with development in the park. Members met with several experts on topics including invasive species management, prairie restoration and forest management. It was during a meeting in March 2021 with Gary Eldred of Southwest Prairie Enthusiasts that the “seed” for an oak savanna restoration project in a 5-acre area of the park was planted. Gary knew immediately that the majestic oaks in this portion of the park was the perfect location for a restoration project.

A work event was scheduled to train board members and volunteers about controlling invasive species at Oakwood Park, led by Matthew Wallrath of Upper Sugar River Watershed Association. Multiflora rose, buckthorn bushes, garlic mustard and wild parsnip were the top

priorities identified. A group of local Girl Scouts and their family members helped reduce some of the invasive species in a small area of the park. We now have a better understanding of this work and are continuing our efforts in 2022. Our local Fire Department performed a controlled burn in the area this spring and we have explored the use of goats for invasive species management as a method in the near future.

Input from disc golf course representatives was also gathered to help enhance that area of Oakwood Community Park. We learned that the invasive species in the savanna area and the wildflower areas of the park were also impacting users of the disc golf course, particularly wild parsnip and thorny bushes.

According to the Savanna Oak Foundation, Inc., “the oak savanna was once one of the most common vegetation types in the Midwest but is today highly endangered. Intact

oak savannas are now one of the rarest plant communities on earth. However, many degraded oak savannas still remain and can be restored.” Fennimore is fortunate enough to have an area of oak savanna that can be restored.

Challenges and obstacles we are facing

The restoration project is not without challenges. Since the former pasture land has not been grazed by cattle for many years, multiple species of trees have grown up in the area we want to restore to oak savanna along with invasive plant species. Removal of existing trees, some of which are dead but many are healthy, may need to be done by city staff to reduce city’s liability. We will be looking at how to



The majestic oaks of Oakwood Park cohabitate with grasses and wild parsnip that will be removed to allow for native plants to thrive. (photo by Margaret Sprague)

remove a number of tree species from the area so that the oak trees can be featured. There are several brush piles in the area along with shrubs that need to be removed. We also will have to look at removing dead branches in the oak trees when it is a safety hazard because the branches are over a walking path or a gathering area for park users. Finally, we have lost a lot of milkweed plants to invasive species in the park. This is needed for the butterflies we want to attract to the area.

We have the opportunity to educate ourselves as well as residents and local leaders about the importance of the area and the value it brings to residents, students, and visitors. We want to impress upon others that we need to be good stewards of the land. Communicating our vision for the savanna to the community and what we need to reach our goal. We have established a Facebook page to help share our vision and communicate our need for volunteers. Our local newspaper is also willing to share our story. Monthly reports at the city council meeting keeps them informed of what is happening in the park. They have been very supportive of the project. We need to learn what grass and flowers are native to an oak savanna so we can obtain funding to replant as needed. Finally, we are aware that continuing to identify issues we need to learn about and educating ourselves about them, including reaching out to experts, will be an on-going effort. We have learned that they are very willing to share their expertise.

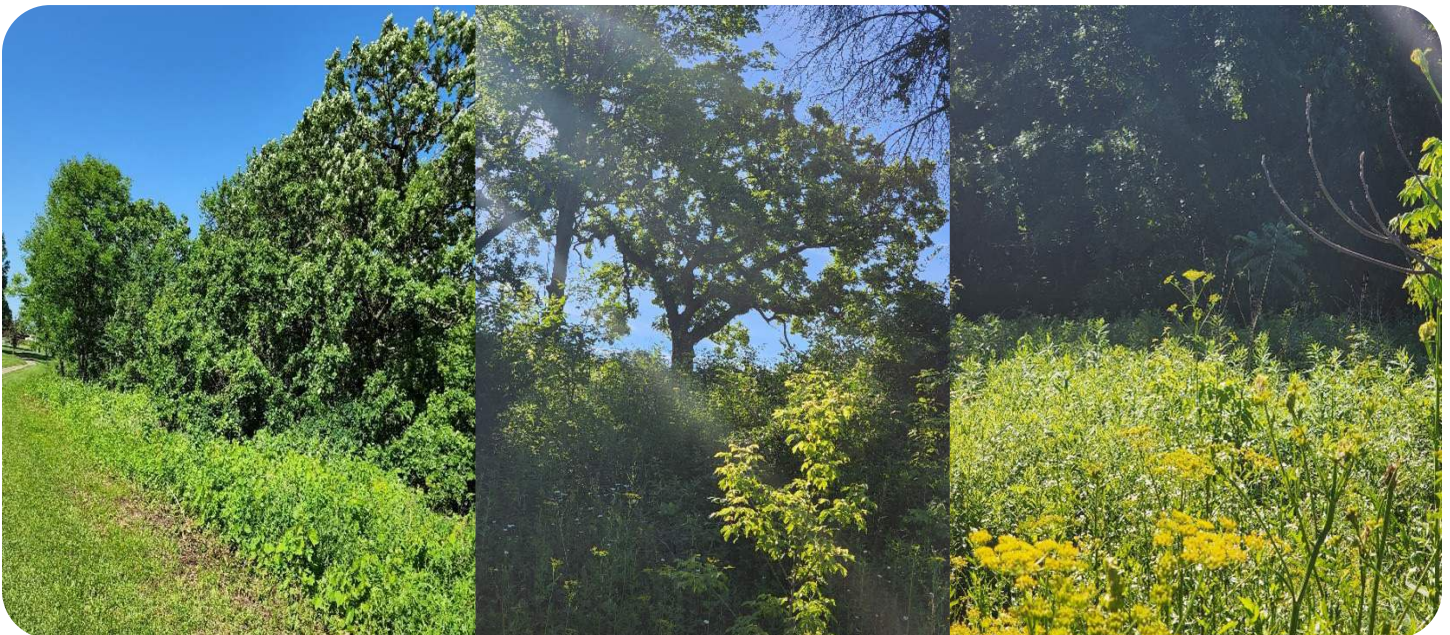
Performing and maintaining this project will require funding, which is limited and will require us to seek grant opportunities. Our management and development plan needs to evaluate economics, as well. To make the project happen, in addition to local tax dollars and grant funding, community volunteer hours will be needed. If we rely on volunteers to help with some of the work in the park, we don't want to burn them out with a lot of annual

maintenance. We need to define what we expect from a restoration project and share what a savanna would look like so we can share it with the community. We have learned that when we add new oak trees in the savanna, we need to have a 10-year period without burning to avoid damaging the new trees. This project will take several years to be fully realized. Numerous trees and several invasive plant species will have to be removed from the area to allow native plants and grasses to be re-established.

Restoration of this area as an oak savanna will provide a valuable educational tool for students and community members as well as other park visitors. Collaboration with multiple partners and volunteers will be necessary to improve the recreational assets in our community. Tree Board members continue to show their commitment to developing those relationships.

Restoration project leaders

Currently, Tree Board members include Margaret Sprague, Cathy Smith, Connie Jackson, Cindy Arndt, Colleen Schwebach and Lorri Zoromski. These members have a variety of reasons to be passionate about the restoration project – ranging from the idea that this area is one of the few places some of our residents have available to get to experience this type of natural beauty. We believe it is a great educational opportunity for residents, visitors, and students in our schools. We want the park to exist for education and enjoyment. We believe that our actions today shape what is possible for future generations. Our love and respect for the land is worth the effort it will take to restore this beautiful area of our community into an oak savanna. For more information on Fennimore's oak savanna restoration project, feel free to contact Margaret Sprague at gsprague@tds.net. ■



Along the south side of the area to be restored. Some clearing has begun.

North side of the park showcasing a majestic oak at the top of the hill.

Along the east side of the park showing dense growth of trees that will need to be thinned and additional wild parsnip that will need to be removed.

2021 ANNUAL REPORT

Education & Outreach



Moely Prairie land managers put up the finished kiosk to welcome visitors and serve as a substitute tour guide. (Photo by Amy Chamberlin)

2020 claimed “unprecedented” as the word of the year, but 2021 had its share of new experiences, too. In February we hosted our first online conference and prescribed burn school. The Minnesota Driftless chapter had been preparing a normal, in-person conference in Minnesota, but the summer surge of COVID cases gave us the opportunity to adapt – and gather online. The conference, themed “Inspired by Fire,” was our best attended ever with over 800 participants – including 200 students and new members. As a consequence, many chapters noticed an increase in burn volunteers freshly trained at the online prescribed burn school. All were inspired by conference keynote speaker, Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer’s, words on integrating scientific and Indigenous worldviews to restore the human relationship to land.

The Prairie Enthusiasts welcomed 471 new members in 2021

A year of new things continued at Moely Prairie, a “conservation island” managed by the Empire-Sauk chapter, where volunteers created a new interpretive kiosk welcoming visitors in HoChunk, Spanish and English, highlighting the history, cultural significance and overall importance of prairie ecosystems. The site is used frequently as an environmental education and field science resource for

local schools. The Many Rivers chapter brings the prairie to the students as volunteers continued to tend to the New Ulm School district’s teaching prairie project.

**In 2021, The Prairie Enthusiasts
hosted or participated in:
21 Field Trips
105 Other events and activities**

Numerous field trips and workshops provided space for learners of all experience levels to deepen their knowledge. The Minnesota Driftless chapter co-hosted a field tour of sites in the Pleasant Valley Pollinator Corridor sites, hosted a tour of a volunteer’s property with high-diversity plantings of various ages, and spotted dickcissel, grasshopper sparrow, bobolink, and eastern meadowlark on a field trip with a few exceptional birders. Bev Paulan, biologist and volunteer of the Northwest Illinois chapter, treated workshop attendees to a presentation titled “Native Plants Need Native Pollinators.” Prairie Sands volunteers collaborated with local partners to host invasive species workshops in the Central Sands region.

The Southwest Wisconsin chapter started a new, annual, scholarship of \$1,000 to support education of the next generation of Prairie Enthusiasts. See the Southwest Wisconsin chapter update to meet the 2022 award recipients! ■

2021 was a year of reemergence and rebalance. After the isolation of 2020, the cancelled work parties and events, we were all eager to nurture our souls and prairies in community once again. Our fire-dependent ecosystems depend on us and we, in turn, depend on each other. Our community of volunteers reappeared on the prairies together like a force of nature. Here are highlights of what your prairie community accomplished in 2021.

Land Protection



The Haag Addition to the Mounds View Grassland buffers the adjacent Shea Prairie, a favorite watering hole for the whooping cranes pictured here.

High quality remnant prairies are becoming more and more rare, which is why The Prairie Enthusiasts community – by the end of 2021 – protected a total of 3,667 acres, and actively managed 37 owned preserves and 15 conservation easements.

Starting small with the Haag Addition to Mounds View Grasslands - 2 newly acquired acres in Iowa County, Wisconsin, while not a vast addition, is still an important contribution to buffer and expand the Mounds View Grassland preserve, with a grant to restore, over the next two years, four acres of the immediately adjacent The Prairie Enthusiasts land back to the wetland habitat (sedge meadow and wet prairie) that was present in pre-settlement times. Having this parcel allows us to add 1.5 acres to the restoration effort and provide additional habitat for 12 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN) currently present

on the preserve that would make use of the addition. This parcel brought the preserve boundary out to Mounds View Road making it easier to conduct prescribed burns.

The Prairie Enthusiasts devoted 69% of its 2021 budget to land protection, restoration, and land management activities.

While the Haag Addition was an example of a small but mighty conservation opportunity, the Prairie Bluff Chapter secured a conservation easement on large and mighty sale: the MacDonald York Prairie Refuge - 125 acres in Green County, Wisconsin. • Read the full story in the article about the MacDonald York Prairie Refuge on page 10. ■

Restoration and Land Management



University of Wisconsin – River Falls students picking seeds with the St. Croix Valley chapter in September 2021. (photo by Mike Miller)

Across all 11 chapters, volunteers were eager to return to working together on the land. Many burns and restoration events were cancelled and postponed in 2020 and, with the dawn of 2021, we returned to the land. Work parties became safer, and burns were back in full swing. The Prairie Bluff chapter completed burns at 28 sites – totaling 219 acres. With brilliant results – including the reappearance of golden alexander.

The Coulee Region chapter worked with partners at Holland Sand Prairie to remove perch trees from encroaching on remnant, while volunteers learned the way of the scythe and girdling (Which is easier than it looks!). The Northwest Illinois chapter's saw their rare plant garden project give new

life in unexpected ways. The St. Croix Valley chapter was finally empowered by the Minnesota DNR to manage remnant prairie at Blueberry Hill – all the seed they pick have to go somewhere!

Volunteers of the Chippewa Savannas chapter partnered with the Karner Volunteer Monitoring program to survey Seymoure Prairie for lupine – and were able to squeeze in a burn at Dobbs landing between bouts of drought and high wind. Thanks to the hard work of volunteers working together with local partners, Dobbs Landing is showing significant results. The Glacial Prairie chapter sponsored the

establishment of a dozen raised beds and hoops for a seed orchard. ■

2021 Landowner Services Program Activity

77

Landowner total visits

42

Conservation plans developed

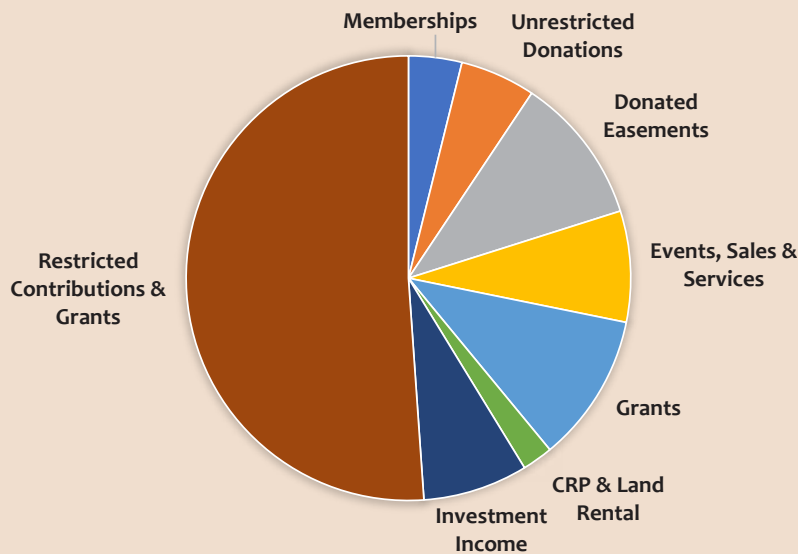
1,657

Total acres of potential habitat improvement and or new plantings

Statement of Activities

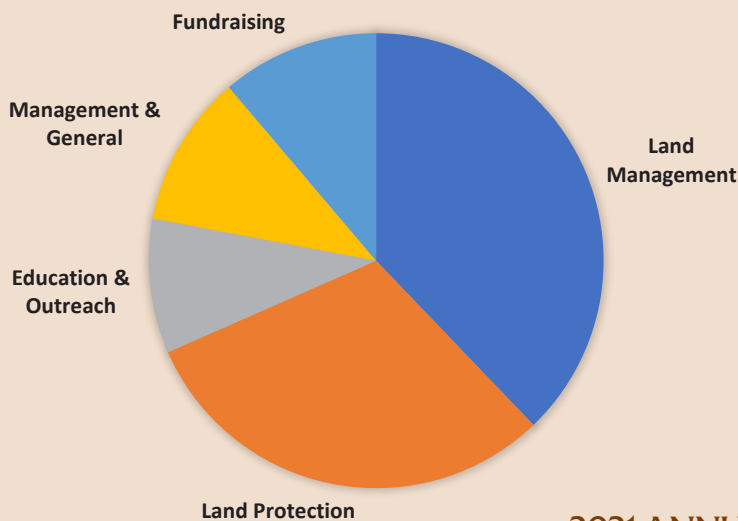
Revenues, Gains & Other Support

Memberships	\$	112,837	4%
Unrestricted Donations	\$	159,570	5%
Donated Easements	\$	313,125	11%
Events, Sales & Services		235,035	8%
Grants	\$	315,344	11%
CRP & Land Rental	\$	64,916	2%
Investment Income	\$	222,162	8%
Restricted Contributions & Grants	\$	1,487,566	51%
	\$	2,910,555	100%



Expenses

Land Management	\$	510,288	38%
Land Protection	\$	412,083	31%
Education & Outreach	\$	129,022	10%
Management & General	\$	145,981	11%
Fundraising	\$	151,030	11%
	\$	1,348,404	100%



Statement of Position

Assets

Current Assets		
Cash & equivalents	\$	577,726
Receivables	\$	526,975
Other	\$	27,014
	\$	1,131,715
Property & Equipment (net of depreciation)		
Land & improvements	\$	9,532,377
Equipment	\$	30,157
	\$	9,562,534
Investments & Restricted Cash	\$	3,795,567
TOTAL ASSETS	\$	14,489,816

Liabilities & Net Assets

Liabilities		
Accounts payable	\$	34,756
Deferred revenue	\$	5,866
Accrued salaries & expenses	\$	39,300
	\$	79,922
Net Assets		
Unrestricted	\$	1,034,485
With donor restrictions	\$	13,375,409
	\$	14,409,894
TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS	\$	14,489,816

Notes

1. Includes both The Prairie Enthusiasts, Inc. and The Prairie Enthusiasts Trust.
2. Financial statements audited by Johnson Block & Company.

The Prairie Enthusiasts CORE VALUES

Rooted in reverence for the Land

All that we are, and everything we do is deeply rooted in our love and respect for the Land – the communities of soils, water, plants, animals, and other living things, of which we are all a part.



Photo credit: Robert Peterson

Long view

The origins of the land are ancient. We are stewards of the present – the legacy entrusted to our care. Our actions will shape what is possible for future generations.



Photo credit: Carol Nelson

Working together

We are responsible for caring for the land. Everyone has a unique ability to contribute. By working together, we form bonds that make our community stronger than ourselves.

Photo credit: Jerry Newman



Sharing knowledge

We honor wisdom and experience, science and the arts. We are seekers and teachers, sharing what we have learned and encouraging others to build on it.

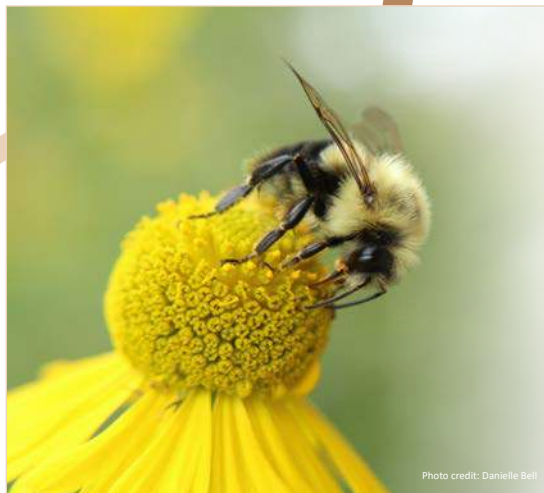


Photo credit: Danielle Bell

Hank's Eagle Scout Project

Hank Hegeman

On November 13, 2021, at the Schurch-Thomson Prairie, I teamed up with Rich Henderson and The Prairie Enthusiasts to conduct my Eagle Scout project. My name is Hank Hegeman, and I'm a 16-year-old Life Scout from Troop 16 located in Madison, Wisconsin. I connected with Rich Henderson, project beneficiary and manager of the Schurch-Thomson Prairie, a few months prior, and he helped me organize the project and educated me about the impact the work would have on native species. With the help of The Prairie Enthusiasts volunteers, my fellow Scouts and I were able to gather and burn significant amounts of invasive walnut trees and brush to help restore an area of oak savanna ecosystem present on the preserve.

I first became interested in The Prairie Enthusiasts through my mom's friends, Rumi and Jim O'Brien. They were once volunteers for The Prairie Enthusiasts and worked at the Schurch-Thomson Prairie years prior but have since retired. After they suggested The Prairie Enthusiasts, I asked them how to start a project. They were very excited and immediately put me in contact with Rich Henderson to start project planning.

The project turned out to be a great success and



Hank, along with Troop 16 Scouts and The Prairie Enthusiasts volunteers at Schurch-Thomson Prairie work to restore the oak savanna ecosystem. (Photo by Steve Maers)

many Scouts and The Prairie Enthusiasts volunteers showed up to drink hot cocoa and listen to Rich talk about the history and mission of The Prairie Enthusiasts, followed by five hours of conservation service. Second Class Scout George Siriani stated, "This is the best Eagle Scout project I've ever been involved in!" If you happen to be a Scout living in Wisconsin in need of an Eagle Scout project, give The Prairie Enthusiasts a call and experience the same joy of restoring remnant prairies as my fellow Scouts and I did. ■

Save the date!



THE PRAIRIE ENTHUSIASTS 2023 CONFERENCE
Reverence for the Land

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 10 – SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 11 2023

Connect with your prairie community!

Friday, February 10

Prescribed burn school and evening social

Saturday, February 11

Conference sessions and evening banquet

TREASURE ISLAND RESORT & CASINO
5734 STURGEON LAKE RD, WELCH, MN 55089

The 2023 conference, *Reverence for the Land*, will celebrate the role you play as a steward of our communities of soils, water, plants, animals, and other members of the land community.

REGISTER BEGINNING THIS FALL

The
**Prairie
Enthusiasts**

ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org

ThePrairieEnthusiasts

Photo credits: Eric Preston, Hugh Gabriel, Pat Trochlell, Ron Lutz II

Chapter Events

Bumblebee Blitz

Saturday, August 6 · 9am - noon

Hanley Savanna Shelter:

9417 S. Whitton Road, Hanover IL, 61041

Join the Northwest Illinois Chapter (NIPE) for the Bumblebee Blitz, hosted at Hanley Savanna in rural Hanover, Illinois. Pam Johnson will give a presentation on bumblebees and explain how to identify them. Then participants will go in search of bumblebees to find and identify in preselected areas of Hanley Savanna's prairies where bumblebees are likely to be found that day.

The Hanley Savanna Shelter is located just southeast of S. Whitton Road's intersection with S. Hanover Road. There is ample parking. Please dress for the weather and bring your own bug spray and drinking water.

In case of inclement weather, the rain date will be Saturday, August 20 from 9 a.m. to about 12 noon. Check NIPE's Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Northwest-Illinois-Prairie-Enthusiasts-NIPE-600210113326514> before heading out to make sure the event will go on as scheduled. RSVPs are not required. If you have questions, please leave an email with NIPE at northwestillinois@theprairieenthusiasts.org or contact Susan Lipnick at 815-908-0483.

St Croix Valley Chapter Picnic

Sunday, August 7 · 1 - 4pm

Town of River Falls Town Hall:

W9015 770th Ave, River Falls, WI 54022

Come and join us for a chapter picnic! Anyone and everyone is invited: new members, active members, less-active members, prospective members, friends & family...you get the point. Get to know your fellow Prairie Enthusiasts, exchange stories, get advice, and relax. We will also take a hike into Alexander oak savanna. Seed exchange -- if you have extra seeds you have collected, bring them and exchange with others. Bring a dish to pass (salads, chips, cheese, relish, tomatoes, etc.). We will provide: Brats, burgers, buns, mustard and ketchup, lemonade, beer, and ice water, plates, napkins, and cutlery and cups.

The ice water will be in a jug so bring a water bottle. Be sure to register so we know how much food we need. Volunteers needed for planning and set up. Contact Evanne at 715-381-1291 or evanne.hunt@outlook.com

Nature Art - Field Sketching Prairie Plants

Sunday, August 14 · 9am · \$20

Mounds View Grassland barn:

8624 Reilly Rd, Barneveld, WI 53507

Come join us for a morning sketching prairie plants surrounded by the beautiful Schurch-Thomson Prairie! This class is for people with little art experience or for artists who want to grow their skills drawing plants. We will warm up with gesture drawings and contour line drawings of prairie plants. From there, we'll practice breaking down plants into simple shapes, working on getting accurate proportions and making plants look 3D. Next, we'll explore ways of adding detail, texture, and creating focal points. The last part of class will be spent making a drawing of one plant using our new skillset. There will be time for Carolyn to work with participants individually to answer questions and provide feedback on their work (if they want!) Carolyn is also excited to share her knowledge of grassland birds, nests, and plants with everyone as we draw. Registration is limited.

Find more details, and register online at theprairieenthusiasts.org/tpe_calendar

Night-Flying Prairie Insects: Blacklighting & Sugaring for Moths

Tuesday, August 30 · 6:30pm · \$10

Mounds View Grassland barn:

8624 Reilly Rd, Barneveld, WI 53507

Prairies support an extremely diverse array of insects. We can easily observe the many butterflies, bees and other insects during the day but what about the moths? There are more than 10,000 species of moths in North America. This workshop will introduce you to the life cycle, behavior and ecology of prairie moth species. You will learn how to identify moths, particularly some prairie-specialist species which inhabit the Mounds View Grassland. We will demonstrate sugaring and blacklighting to collect and observe moths and other night-flying insects.

Find more details, and register online at theprairieenthusiasts.org/tpe_calendar

Visit our online calendar for the latest events · www.theprairieenthusiasts.org/tpe_calendar

Chapter Updates

Chippewa Savannas

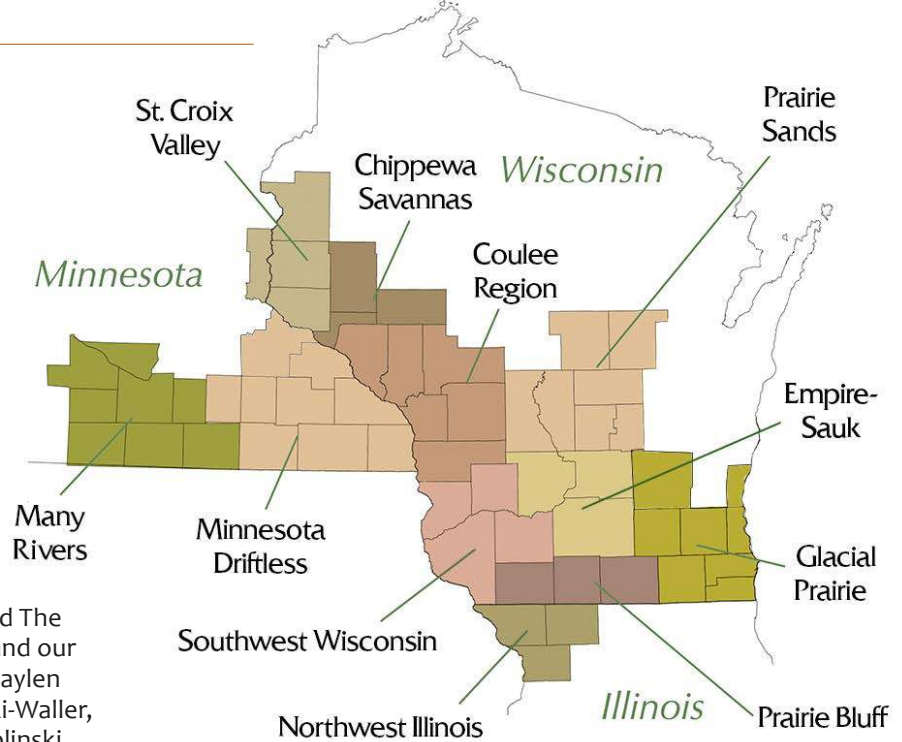
Julia Chapman

Chippewa Savannas had an exciting spring! We welcomed 13 UW-Stout students to our group of burn volunteers after they completed The Prairie Enthusiasts Prescribed Burn School training and our chapter's field training. Kyle Baemmert, Ted Welch, Jaylen Vaughn, Carissa Scholze, Austin Crawford, Halle Maki-Waller, Izzy Krieger, Lacie Peltier, Kal Breeden, Elizabeth Peplinski, Grace Pederson, Bailey Ewing, and Susannah Eberhardt are majoring in Environmental Science and are eager to expand their skill set for potential future careers in conservation and land management. Several of these students are in their first year at UW-Stout, so we look forward to having them help us with prescribed burns for the next few years! In addition to the UW-Stout students, we also welcomed a couple of other new burn volunteers, Sylvia Carr and Jen Peck. Welcome to the crew!

In other burn season news, we achieved a long-term dream of burning the southern Oxbow area at Dobbs Landing using our chapter's burn crew. After several years of work from both our wonderful volunteers and hired professionals, we finally had the area ready to burn ourselves on May 5. Kathy Ruggles and Julia Chapman wrote a burn plan for Dobbs Landing, and we had excellent volunteer turnout for the Oxbow area burn. It was a smoky yet satisfying afternoon!



A test fire is lit at the Dobbs Landing Oxbow area to check fire behavior prior to the prescribed burn. This was the first time the Chippewa Savannas Chapter has burned this particular area of Dobbs Landing with our volunteers. Photo Credit: Julia Chapman



In addition to the burn volunteers mentioned above, we would also like to thank Lisa Herrman, Keith Gilland, Mark Leach, Al Broadfoot, and John Thomas for their time and leadership this burn season.

We seeded many areas of Dobbs Landing this spring with grass and forb species. The northern and southern planted prairies (formerly called the “degraded areas”) are looking much better!

It has been inspiring to see the fruits of our generous volunteers' labors.

We were able to resume our annual Tiffany Train Ride fundraiser this year on May 21. There were smiles all around as a small but excited group of attendees took in the sights and sounds of spring. We saw a number of spring wildflowers in bloom, including prairie violet, blue-eyed grass, and starry false Solomon's seal, and our birders caught glimpses of a sandhill crane, eastern towhee, and Baltimore oriole along the way.



Riders learn about the local history of the Tiffany Bottoms State Natural Area and the rail line on our chapter's fundraiser train trip at the Chippewa Valley Motor Car Association. Photo Credit: Julia Chapman

Thank you to Dave Linderud and Mark Leach for speaking to us about the local ecology and to the Chippewa Valley Motor Car Association for the lovely ride!

Bridging Habitat at Seymour Prairie

Joe Maurer

Members of The Prairie Enthusiasts and the Lake Altoona District planted 3.5 acres of sand prairie seed in the snow on Saturday, March 12th at Seymour Prairie in an effort to bridge prairie habitats at the site where crews dumped 2,000 truckloads of sand. The sand was dredged out of the Eau Claire River to create a sand trap and prevent sand from flowing into Lake Altoona. Now volunteers are working to protect and maintain the natural area surrounding the 80-acre dump site. Many thanks to volunteers Michelle Skinner, Deirdre Anne Jenkins, Kevin McGruder, Hunt Lacey and family, Joe Kirst, Jeff Goettl, Joe Knight, Stan Pietrick, Mandy Heard and Seymour Land Steward Joe Maurer.

Coulee Region

Kayla Witt



Photo - Kayla Witt

Over the weekend of June 3, several of Coulee Region members participated in the 2022 Wisconsin Botanical Foray hosted by the Botanical Club of Wisconsin. Nearly 1,200 vascular plant specimens were collected! Since 2018, The Botanical Club of Wisconsin has been working on adding collections to the Wisconsin State Herbarium, filling gaps in the knowledge of the current status and the distribution of plants. Cataloging biodiversity is imperative in a world that is

ever-changing.

Plant specimens, either in fruit or flower, were collected on steep bluff prairies, wooded slopes, wetlands, savannas, and even cliff faces. This year, plant collections were focused in Vernon and Crawford Counties in the diverse plant communities of the Driftless Region. Locations included sites at the Plum Creek Conservation Area, Sugar Creek Bluff State Natural Area, Tunnelville Cliffs State Natural Area, Rush Creek State Natural Area, and Battle Bluff State Natural Area. Folks had a blast working alongside Botanists, Restoration Ecologists, and other experts in the field.



Plant Presses - Justin Nooker



Kentucky coffee tree - Justin Nooker

Coulee Chapter Meeting & More (in-person!)

Jim Rogala

On May 14, we had our first in-person meeting since the pandemic forced us to have virtual meetings. We met outside at my shack on the Rogala Prairies for a day of brainstorming about the future of The Prairie Enthusiasts and our chapter, socializing, and hiking.

By far, the highlight of the meeting was the opportunity to provide direct input to The Prairie Enthusiasts' Executive Director, Debra Behrens, to help guide the strategic planning process that The Prairie Enthusiasts has begun. In addition to providing input on the development of a new strategic plan, the exercise forced us to do some internal evaluation and forward thinking for our own chapter. We hope the input was valuable. The meeting ended with a quick discussion of possible prairies we may potentially become involved with restoration of and possible ownership of at some point.

A very enjoyable day indeed, meeting face-to-face for the first time in quite a while!

We were all famished and hot by the time the meeting ended at noon, so we found some shade by the shack, drank lemonade, and feasted on salad and baked potato bar and fruit salad, and then cupcakes for dessert. Thanks to my wife, Diane, for providing the delicious meal!



Q&A with The Prairie Enthusiasts Executive Director, Debra Behrens
(photo by Jim Rogala)

After the lunch, most of us then went for a hike. We walked past my prairie plantings and then hiked 300 feet up the hill to look at a couple hill prairies. Both hill prairies were partially burned by The Prairie Enthusiasts this winter. A wide variety of prairie plants were on display, including plenty of prairie and bird's-foot violets in the burned areas, as well as a nice display of hoary puccoon. As is usually the case, we talked a lot about management. I was pleased that people appreciated all the work I've done and the variety of dry prairies plants that have emerged over the years, but everyone realized that there's still a lot to do. We enjoyed a cold beverage and more stimulating conversation after descending the hill and returning to the shack.



Stop in the shade (photo by Jim Rogala)



Hikers on prairie summit (photo by Jim Rogala)

Empire-Sauk

Amy Chamberlin

New Educational Display at Moely Prairie

Moely Prairie is excited to announce a new educational display to experience when visiting the property this summer.

With the generous support of the Sauk County Good Ideas Grant in conjunction with the Wisconsin Arts Board, Moely Prairie volunteers were able to produce these plant identification signs that will be placed throughout the prairie along the walking trails. Visitors will also see two bigger signs that highlight the Integrated Monarch Monitoring Program that the local high school interns conduct every summer.

In addition to the financial support provided by this grant, this project wouldn't have been possible without Alpha Graphics in Middleton, which printed the weather-

resistant placards, community member Sue Kenney who donated the metal stakes, and the volunteers who put the photos and stakes together and distributed them throughout the prairie.

The main goal of Moely Prairie is to restore this important remnant prairie, but in doing so, another goal is to connect the rare ecosystem to the surrounding community through outreach and education efforts like this one. We are so grateful to all who made this project possible.

If you like seeing these signs when out on the prairie, tell us about your experience (<https://www.facebook.com/MoelyPrairie/>) and please share photos of your time spent on Moely Prairie!



New educational displays at Moely Prairie
(photo by Amy Chamberlin)

Glacial Prairie

Alice Mirk

The Glacial Prairie chapter had a fruitful year in 2021 in spite of COVID. We got back into the swing of work parties early in the year and soon established a rhythm for members to count on. We focused mainly on work as 2020 was a lost year in many respects. We had a surprising number of young people join us and thanks to the joint efforts of Tom Zagar and Dan Carter we were able to assemble a qualified burn team that was sorely needed. This is one of the things we were most proud of last year. Our other source of pride is the cohesiveness of our stewardship leaders and volunteers who are willing to travel long distances to support stewardship activities across the entire chapter area.

Here is feedback from our new member Norah Pastorek who graduated from High School this semester.

"Three years ago, I began hiking weekly in the Kettle Moraine. It was a wonderful experience being with nature and often walking a few miles before seeing a road or house. Eventually, I began to slow down and study the ecosystem. In

several locations, I was alarmed. Fifteen-foot tall buckthorn was dominating over young oaks. Instead of biodiverse prairies, there were fields of garlic mustard, teasel, dame's rocket, and other terrible invasives. I felt the call to action and began searching for a volunteer group.

The DNR website advertised the Glacial Prairie Chapter. I saw they held monthly workdays at State Natural Areas in the Kettle Moraine, many of which I had previously hiked at and noticed the issues. It sounded like the perfect group! My first workday confirmed that, as I was warmly greeted and allowed the opportunity to learn something new and use a brush cutter.

Members of The Prairie Enthusiasts are more than willing to answer questions and provide opportunities for volunteers to further their prairie knowledge. Through this organization, I was able to acquire chainsaw training and hands-on practice opportunities. Overall, it is a group where members are encouraged to enjoy nature and work in it.

With the help of many others, Walter and Alice Mirk have created something remarkable. I keep coming back for the supportive members and the opportunity to help our environment. And there is so much work to be done — volunteers are needed and appreciated. To ensure sustainability, we must remove invasive species, replant natives, and properly manage prairies with burning as a tool."

"I am excited to put my chainsaw skills to use, learn more about native Wisconsin ecosystems, and help the environment!"

- Norah Pastorek - recent high school graduate and Glacial Prairie chapter volunteer

Norah has been a faithful and enthusiastic volunteer since she joined us this year. We look forward to working alongside her as her career choices evolve. We are sure it will be something that improves the health of Planet Earth!

We are also very proud of the outstanding work Alan Eppers and his team have accomplished at Benedict Prairie. This iconic prairie remnant was choked with brush and almost died out. The Glacial Prairie chapter, with the help of Chapter Support, entered into a legal management agreement with UW-Milwaukee. Then Alan and his team went to work. They literally have saved the prairie from disappearing forever. Although there is still work to do, after two burns and a lot of brush cutting, Benedict Prairie is on the road to recovery!

The Glacial Prairie chapter major challenge is its geographic size. It stretches from the Wisconsin-Illinois border north to Ozaukee County, and from Jefferson and Dodge counties in the west to the Lake Michigan. We have tried to develop geographic teams and have succeeded in establishing a Southeastern Lakeshore team and a Waukesha County team. The teams are very fluid and support one another with Jefferson County members supporting Waukesha County and Southeastern Lakeshore teams, while Milwaukee County, Waukesha County, and SE Lakeshore team members support both teams as well as sites in distant Jefferson County! In 2022 we will try to establish a Western

team and a Milwaukee County team with members who reside in those areas. The Glacial Prairie chapter has the apotheosis of Esprit de Corps!

News from Mayville Middle School Prairie

We have been busy this spring working with 4th grade students at the Mayville Middle School on their school prairie which they use as an outdoor classroom. On a very chilly spring day in late April, Liz Herzmann, WDNR Wildlife Educator for the Horicon Marsh, and Caleb Jenks, Assistant Wildlife Educator, and two Glacial Prairie chapter members prepared the students for what was to come: the installation of more than 160 prairie plants provided by “Miss Liz.”

At the session in late April the students gathered in winter coats to learn about the characteristics of insects. The groups of students were each given two pictures of different insects and asked to compare the differences and similarities.



Comparison charts (photo by Alice Mirk)

They were then challenged to go onto the prairie and search for live bugs. Because of the temperatures we had to reach really well under thatch, but spirits were undaunted.

We found numerous ants and some very chilly spiders!

The 4th graders were then challenged to create their own insects on carpet squares they were provided by Miss Liz and Caleb, using raw material they found on the prairie!

Day two, May 23rd, we met again with the 4th graders to install prairie plants. With each of the three classes class we discussed how long prairie root systems were and how suitable the roots are for withstanding periods of drought! Then came the challenge of planting. What really helped was the pre-dug holes (thanks to Walter Mirk and Chenyu Wang, a summer and school holiday student, as well as honorary grandson from Shanghai with the Mirk family since 2015) and lots of parent helpers. It took three hours and all the plants were settled into their new home with a lot of water. The students really enjoyed the interaction and their questions and observations made it obvious that the teachers, Miss Liz, Walter and Alice had done a great job teaching all the planting basics!



Planting on the prairie (photo by Alice Mirk)



We water, with buckets and styrofoam cups (photo by Alice Mirk)

The day ended with checking the nesting boxes. We were hopeful that we would find eggs of at least some native species as they were hanging around when we arrived. Well, we did find eggs and the students were thrilled. We quietly disposed of the house sparrow eggs after the students returned to class!



The not so precious eggs of the nesting boxes (photo by Alice Mirk)

Many Rivers

Jim Vonderharr

We finally seem to be emerging from COVID hibernation. During the closure we held a couple of Zoom seminars featuring prairie topics. They were well received and

informative.

On May 14th sixteen members and friends gathered at Brad and Michelle Gaard's home near New Ulm, Minnesota for a spring picnic. A fine smorgasbord of pulled pork and pot luck offerings were enjoyed under a beautiful spring sky (quite rare this spring in Minnesota). A short business meeting was held with several committees submitting reports. A walking tour of Brad's prairies followed. A follow up meeting is being planned later this summer that will include a more extensive business meeting.

Most days this spring in S.W. Minnesota were either extremely windy, wet or both. We did however manage to have a fairly successful burn season. A special "shout out" to Tom Romaine our burn boss, Randy Schindle, back up burn boss and Chris Hughes our record keeper and scheduler for their efforts. We conducted 6 burns totaling about 35 acres utilizing from 4-11 volunteers per burn. We hope the fall season will be more accommodating.

Minnesota Driftless

Stephen Winter

Minnesota Driftless Chapter Happenings in Rochester

The Minnesota Driftless chapter of The Prairie Enthusiasts has been increasing its engagement with chapter members in Rochester and the greater Olmsted County area. In 2020, the chapter began a mutually beneficial relationship with the City of Rochester to assist with an oak savanna restoration project at Prairie Crossings Park on the northern edge of the city (follow this Google Maps link - <https://goo.gl/maps/Uys8tRTguuY55ypu7>). That relationship began with the chapter submitting a Partner Commitment Letter in support of an invasive species proposal submitted by the city to the State of Minnesota's Conservation Partners Legacy Grant Program. In that support letter, the chapter committed to in-kind contributed hours of volunteer labor removing buckthorn and other invasive species, collecting and planting seeds and plugs of native species, and consulting on restoration and management strategies for an oak savanna restoration at Prairie Crossings Park on the northern edge of the city.

The city of Rochester was successful in obtaining the grant funds they sought for the restoration project, and the chapter has since assisted with four workdays: two in 2020, one in 2021, and one in 2022. During the most recent workday, in April of this year, chapter volunteers spread native grass seeds but also helped install woodchips on hiking trails that will facilitate use and appreciation of the park by neighborhood residents. Currently, chapter members are assisting with periodic independent visits to pull garlic mustard as it appears during the spring growing season.

Two chapter members deserve recognition for the large role they've played in making this cooperative relationship with the City of Rochester a success. Joel Dunnette has provided consultation services on restoration strategies, conducted bird and plant surveys, collected and spread

seeds of native plants, and transplanted plugs of native sedges. Angela Smith has served as the chapter liaison and coordinator, working closely with the City of Rochester to schedule workdays, followed by recruiting and coordinating with chapter volunteers and overseeing workday activities. Jeff Feece, City of Rochester Park Planner, also deserves recognition for his foresight in identifying the Minnesota Driftless chapter as a potential partner in 2020 and reaching out to the chapter to discuss possibilities. Jeff's enthusiasm for the project is boundless and the chapter is fortunate to have such a supportive partner.

In March of 2022, the chapter held a meeting in Rochester, hosted by chapter members Glenn and Cynthia Heins at their residence. Twenty-two people attended, one of the chapter's best attended meetings ever, and we were fortunate three staff members from The Prairie Enthusiasts' Chapter Support Office were able to join us: Jerry Pedretti, Caleb Dewitt, and Freddy Ragan. This was the first chapter meeting held in Rochester since the chapter's formation in 2016 and it won't be the last. Much of the meeting was spent on discussions about past and planned activities of the chapter, including the intention of continuing to increase the engagement of chapter members in Rochester, Olmsted County, and surrounding areas. The next planned event in the Rochester area is a July 16th field trip at a local prairie, likely Oronoco Scientific Natural Area, led by pollinator expert Heather Holm.

All members of the Minnesota Driftless chapter of the Prairie Enthusiasts are welcome to present ideas for future meeting locations, workday projects, and field trips, in the Rochester area or elsewhere. Please contact Minnesota Driftless chapter Chair, Steve Winter (wintersl8944@gmail.com), to discuss ideas you have that will provide opportunities for chapter members to get together for learning, working, and building relationships.



Volunteers with the Minnesota Driftless chapter are working to restore oak savanna at Prairie Crossing park in Rochester, Minn. (photo by Steve Winter)



Volunteers gathered at Prairie Crossings park in Rochester, Minn. to spread native grass seeds, install woodchips on hiking trails.
(photos by Steve Winter and Jeff Feece)

Northwest Illinois

From The Prairie Enthusiasts website

What's New

Save The Date and RSVP: On August 6, 2022, from 9 a.m. to about 12 noon, NIPE will host a **Bumblebee Blitz** at its Hanley Savanna in rural Hanover. Check back in mid-June or so for more information about these events.

Out on the Prairie

NIPE needs YOU! NIPE is transitioning away from having a paid Land Manager with staff working on private properties to a primarily volunteer corps getting our work done at Hanley Savanna and Elmoville Prairie. We are always looking for people with interest in or knowledge of invasive species and other troublesome weeds. We also would love to have people with chainsaw and equipment maintenance experience and willingness to haul and cut brush. Some part-time paid help is also needed during the growing season. If you would like to be involved with our group as either a volunteer or temporary paid staff, please contact Laura Dufford at: lauradufford@gmail.com.



Bumblebee Prairie burn (photo by Pam Richards)



Burn equipment: NIPE has taken full advantage of the Freeport (IL) Community Foundation's Luthin Family Endowment Fund. With the almost \$4500 in grant funds, NIPE purchased prescribed burn equipment, including jumpsuits, sprayers, and rakes. We put them to good use at the burn of Hanley Savanna's Bumblebee Prairie in late March.

Burn Equipment (photo by Marilyn Anderson)

Seed Coordinator's Report

Barb Siekowski

Preparations for seed collection are concluding as species lists, field work spreadsheets, and supplies are readied for the upcoming season. Site visits start in March or April and seed harvests begin in May.

Our primary project in 2022 is an 18.6-acre restoration at Casper Bluff Land & Water Reserve, a Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation property located just south of Galena. The site will be seeded with four distinct mixes: dry-mesic prairie, wet-mesic prairie, wet prairie, and dry-mesic savanna. In our ongoing efforts to promote diversity, we continue to expand the number of species in our mixes. Thus, this area of Casper Bluff will be planted with 200+ species. We also hope to conduct very targeted over-seedings of an additional two dozen rarer species.

Lonetree Goings On

Rickie Rachuy reports that the variable March weather precluded any working in the rare plant gardens. When the weather cooperates reliably, garden clean-up will commence. In the meantime, she has two species stratifying in damp sand in the refrigerator (Narrow-leaved New Jersey Tea of Prairie Redroot and Virginia Spiderwort). They will be the only new additions to the east garden this year.

Rickie explains part of her process for encouraging the growth of these plants from seed: "I use damp sand when the seed is very small and a damp coffee filter when it is large enough so I can see and place one seed per pot later on. The sand-stratified seed gets measured out with a teaspoon."

If these seeds successfully germinate, the young plants will go under grow lights April 1 for planting out at the end of May.

Who's Who on the Board of Directors

NIPE welcomes Vicky Wegner, Nancy McMenamin, and Paul McMenamin, who joined NIPE's Board of Directors in March. NIPE now has 11 Board members, with a wealth of experience and interests. Here is the current Board membership:

Laura Dufford (President)	
John Arndt (2nd Vice President)	
Rickie Rachuy (Secretary)	
Jay Rutherford (Treasurer)	Paul McMenamin
Marilyn Anderson	Jake Pulfer
Leanne Martin	Barb Siekowski
Nancy McMenamin	Vicky Wegner

The staggered starts of the various members allow NIPE to more easily weather changes that occur when a Board member steps down either at the end of a term or for other reasons. Board members are required to retire from the Board for at least one year after reaching the end of two consecutive three-year terms.

Prairie Sands

Ray Goehring

On June 3rd, David and Shelley Hamel hosted a group of enthusiasts to tour the rolling hills of their Westfield prairie covered in blooming lupine.



David Hamel talking to the group about the importance of lupine as the host plant for the endangered Karner blue butterfly. (photo by Shelley Hamel)

On July 16th, another Prairie Sands chapter member, Ken Erickson, opened his prairie to the public concurrent with the second flight of the endangered Karner blue butterfly. The public was invited to take self-guided hikes through newly restored Karner habitat, take photographs for a photo contest, talk to members of the Prairie Sands chapter to identify plants and wildlife along the way and then bring bag lunches and lawn chairs to stay and listen to speakers from U.S. Fish and Wildlife and Golden Sands RC&D. Photos of the event will appear in the next issue of The Prairie Promoter. Our chapter helped Ken pay for some of his expenses like a Port-a-potty and hand cleaning station. Thank you to chapter members Ray Goehring and Keri Otte for helping at the event.

Chapter board member, David Hamel, has been working on a way to search old The Prairie Promoter articles. He found that Adobe Acrobat Reader Advanced Search does an excellent job of searching every word of every Prairie Promoter for the past 16 years and presents a list of all the "hits" and a view of the page where found.

However, the application feature is not the easiest to learn and we do not yet have a good instruction page or tutorial for learning to search our Promoter folder. If you or someone you know does have that skill set, David would welcome advice and information about the best way forward. Email him at sdhamel@gmail.com to receive links to the complete folder of PPs and to his current Instructions.

If you would like to have a group visit your property or favorite natural area for a field trip or workday, contact chapter communications liaison, Ray Goehring, at raygoe@yahoo.com.

And, finally, if you would like to share photos of your favorite prairie on our chapter Facebook page, please email them to Ray and she will post them.

Southwest Wisconsin

Jack Kussmaul

From March to May we were able to burn close to 40 acres at Borah Creek Preserve on April 27. The burns were led by Dan Wallace, whom we borrowed from Dane County to provide his expertise, leadership and equipment. We began the burn with about twelve volunteers, though the number was reduced as some people had to leave as the burning approached 8:00 in the evening.



Baptisias in bloom Borah Creek: Kay Wienke, Bob Retko, and Gary Eldred (photo by Steve Querin-Schultz)

18 people were signed up with a UW-Platteville Continuing Education program on prairies to visit Boarah Creek. When it had to be postponed due to rain, only five people were left for the program led by Gary Eldred. **It was a very interested group with a lot of discussion and questions.**

Jack Kussmaul represented The Prairie Enthusiasts at Conservation Days at Kickapoo Schools. Groups of students came through every 30 minutes. The prairie site was located in the sun and it was 90 degrees. Jack showed burn equipment and a highlight for the students was cooling off by spraying each other with cool water from the backpack water pack.

We obtained a \$17,170 USFWS grant for work at Sylvan Road and a USFWS grant for Eldred Prairie in the amount of \$13,330.

This has enabled us to do a burn at Sylvan Road and to do extensive clearing of willows on the wetland there. It has enabled us to do a burn and forestry mowing at Eldred, the forestry mowing having cleared out an area of dense thicket which we can now convert to prairie. On both sites we still have funds remaining for future work. A grant at Double Oak Savanna enabled the hiring of additional labor to work on brushing and invasive species control.

We are also proud of having initiated our scholarship program. **We had planned to give one \$1,000 scholarship to a student going into the conservation program. Due to the generosity of Debbie Pavck, we were able to award two such**

scholarships.

The grants helped us overcome the limitations we have had relying on a limited number of volunteers. The number of volunteers never seems adequate to the number of sites we manage. By hiring contractors and equipment, we were able to take giant, rather than baby, steps.

Another success is the growth of the endowment the chapter has to support its activities. It has grown from nothing five years ago to \$332,558 on February 10. With an annual draw of 4% this will provide the chapter with \$12,000 income annually. Double Oak Savanna has its own endowment, which as of February 11 had a value of \$105,460. This will generate over \$4,000 each year for that site.

We had two days with field trips on privately owned sites. We visited two sites the first day and four on the second, which turned into an endurance contest on a hot, mosquito infected day.



*Private site tour 6.11.2022 Timmerman property in Lone Rock.
(photo by Steve Querin-Schultz)*

We do not keep records on volunteer hours or work parties. We do, however, have records that show that volunteers, led by George Riggin, spent 60 hours on seed collecting at Eldred Prairie. The seed was processed at Empire Sauk and then scattered on areas at Eldred being restored to prairie.

2022 SW Chapter Scholarship Winners

Debbie Pavick

Two University of Wisconsin-Platteville students, Sheri Blossom Ramos of McHenry, Illinois and Grace Trenkamp of Platteville, WI, are recipients of the first annual scholarship program of the Southwest Wisconsin Chapter of The Prairie

Enthusiasts. The \$1,000 scholarships were newly established to provide financial assistance to students pursuing advanced learning in conservation or environmental fields. Trenkamp and Ramos, who are slated to graduate in December 2022 and May 2023, respectively, were among thirteen candidates who applied for the scholarship



Sheri Blossom Ramos of McHenry (left), Illinois and Grace Trenkamp (right) of Platteville, WI, recipients of the first annual scholarship program of the Southwest Wisconsin Chapter.

St. Croix Valley

Evanne Hunt

Earth Fest 2022

Bob Marquis, Marti Piepgras, and Evanne Hunt staffed The Prairie Enthusiasts table on April 24 at the River Falls Earth Fest, a community wide event that will feature a sustainability fair. Despite the cold, we made a lot of good contacts. ***Everyone in River Falls now knows The Prairie Enthusiasts!***



Earth Fest 2022, Bob Marquis and visitor (photo by Evanne Hunt)

Burning!

The chapter burn crew burned the north unit at Blueberry Hill on April 1. This is the newest unit we are managing. Several workdays this past winter were dedicated to removing the non-native trees in preparation for this burn. The last time it burned was probably 40+ years ago, the result of sparks from the nearby railroad tracks. It was spotty and slow, but we expect the next one to be much better.

In the spirit of community outreach, we burned the prairie planting at Rivercrest Elementary. The kids loved it!



Children from Rivercrest Elementary watch the controlled burn.

And we burned the prairie remnant at Hawkins Cemetery near Hammond, Wisconsin.



The Prairie Enthusiasts Burn Hawkins 2022, pictured: Evanne Hunt, Harvey Halvorsen, Carl Nelson (photo by Ginny Gaynor)

Drone videos of all these burns can be found on our chapter webpage: https://www.theprairieenthusiasts.org/st_croix_valley.

We also implemented our new Prescribed Burns on Private Property for fee process. We sent the process document for comments, but the response was overwhelming. The timing, weather, and wind direction enabled us to conduct three burns on private property for a total of \$2,100.



Rivercrest (photo by Greg Korman)

Chapter Picnic

August 7

Come and join us for a chapter picnic!

Date: Sunday, August 7, 2022

Time: 1pm -- 4 pm

Location: River Falls
Town Hall, W9015
770th Ave, River Falls

Anyone and everyone are invited: new members, active members, less-active members, prospective members, friends & family...you get the point.

Get to know your fellow prairie enthusiasts, exchange stories, get advice, and relax. We will also take a hike into Alexander oak savanna.



Harvey Halvorsen
(photo by Evanne Hunt)



Joan and Dick Alexander

Seed exchange -- if you have extra seeds you have collected, bring them and exchange with others.

Bring a dish to pass (salads, chips, cheese, relish, tomatoes, etc.). We will provide: brats, burgers, buns, mustard and ketchup, lemonade, beer, and ice water, plates, napkins, and cutlery and cups.

The ice water will be in a jug so bring a water bottle. Be sure to register so we know how much food we need.

Volunteers needed for planning and set up. Contact Evanne at 715-381-1291 or evanne.hunt@outlook.com

Seed Collecting

We will have a series of seed collection events throughout the summer and fall. Dates are hard to pin down because Mother Nature is surprising. Check our chapter web page and your emails for announcements.

Collecting local ecotype seed enables us to seed areas we have cleared of buckthorn, etc., while preserving the genetic diversity of native species. The seed will be used on remnants and restorations within 25 miles of the collection site.

We provide the seed collecting bags and clippers; you should bring some drinking water and a pair of gloves.



Ginny Gaynor, credit: Evanne Hunt

Welcome, New Members!

April 14th, 2022 - June 26th, 2022

Chippewa Savannas

Julia Chapman

Coulee Region

Amelia Kirchoff

Gail Anich

Jared Vander Loop

Seamus Leahy and Lisa
Zinzow

Empire-Sauk

Donna Read

Donna Wirth

Jean Scoon

Thomas & Beverly

Hartberg

Timothy Bartholow and

Shawna Bertalot

Shraddha Tilloo

Glacial Prairie

Elaine Tamm

Kathryn Prince

Rod Ebben

Many Rivers

Caitlin Golle

Thomas Hoehn

Minnesota Driftless

Andrew and Patty Larson

Mary Beth Magyar

Rose & Daniel Griesi

Northwest Illinois

Bill Parkhurst

Prairie Bluff

Eva Kuzmanich

John Fox

Prairie Sands

Brian Caldwell

Mark Schuler

Southwest Wisconsin

Greg Leston

St. Croix Valley

Nancy and Ed Nygaard


Steve Fester

Unaffiliated

Jiin Wang

Megan Robertson

Veronica Seymore



They will take me home
the spirits,
the thunders and wind,
They will take me home.

Prairie Enthusiasts Remembered

Memorials dedicated between January 1, 2021 and June 6, 2022

Excerpt from unattributed Native
American song recorded in the Bureau
of American Ethnology bulletins

In memory of

Bennie Alvin Bowers

Remembered by Jane and
Dennis Graham

Bernie Brouchoud

Remembered by Jon Brouchoud

Donald B. Lawrence

Remembered by Douglas Owens-Pike

Dr. George R. Barry

Remembered by
Diana and Denny Oostdik,
Don Amphlett and Janet Johnson
Joyce Hetzel
Kathryn Richardson and Janet Rich
Mary Ross
Nancy Reithel

Harold and Crescent Vale

Remembered by Elaine Vale

Janice "Jan" Amberson

Remembered by Barbara Stead,
Edward Schneider
Jean and Ed Stead
Leah Rosch
Theodore Davis

Janice "Jan" Froelich

Remembered by Arlene Lueck,
Elaine Tamm
Jim and Laura Maher
Johnson Block CPAs
Kevin and Mary Krynski
Lisa and Bruce Johnson
Mary Benson and Allan Campbell
Patsy and Wilson Rossman
Ralph Froelich

Jerry Gunderson

Remembered by Bill and Ginny Nelson,
Loren Wagner
Sue Reindollar

Joan Thomson

Remembered by Rollin and Nancy
Cooper,
Toby and Arabelle Carlson

Karen Mlinar

Remembered by Mick Mlinar

Kathryn "Kay" Richardson

Remembered by Annie, Tom, Charlotte,
& Margo Isenbarger,
Beverly Fraley
Carol Bloom
Catherine Lamboley
Charles Wellington
Dave Herrewig
Donna Sorensen
Hans and Bobbi Bernet
Jan Johnson
Jan Swartz
Jenny and Tom Mitchell
Jeri Johnson & Fred Faessler
Jim and Karen Freymiller
Kandace Bergstrom
Kathryn Richardson and Janet Rich
Kenneth Schuetz
Marjorie Klinzing
Mary Hamilton
Nancy Anderson and Jean
Patricia McConnell
Sharon Brantmeier and
Randy Shaver
Susan and Richard Albright
Susan Boulineau
Susan Forster-Cox

Susan O'Leary and Jim Roseberry
Thomas and Friedemarie Farrar
Tim and Diane Kubly
The women of the Nielsen Early
Morning Tennis League

Kim Karow

Remembered by Delores Wolter

Lisa Powell

Remembered by Briana and Douglas King

Martin Schultz

Remembered by Kay Schultz

N. Faye Rogers Hayes

Remembered by Katrina Hayes

Pam Hutchenson

Remembered by Alice Mirk

Scott Seigfreid

Remembered by Jan Ketelle

Susan Connell-Magee

Remembered by Kevin and
Deborah Magee

Tom Brock

Remembered by Dennis Dreher,
Gail and Dan Shea
Jane Phillips
Leslie Gilvar
Ronald and Sheila Endres,
Walter and Alice Mirk



P.O. Box 824
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TIME TO RENEW?

Your annual membership with The Prairie Enthusiasts helps us to carry out our mission of educating about, protecting and restoring prairies, oak savannas, and related natural communities of the upper Midwest. Thank you!

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 Caleb DeWitt at cdewitt@theprairieenthusiasts.org
or call us at (608) 638-1873, Ext. 4

Thank you!

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail: _____

Phone: _____

The Prairie Enthusiasts is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization,
and contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by law.

Summer 2022

The Prairie Enthusiasts Membership Levels:

- ☐ \$35 Little Bluestem
- ☐ \$50 Big Bluestem
- ☐ \$100 Shooting Star
- ☐ \$250 Blazing Star
- ☐ \$500 Monarch
- ☐ \$1,000 Compass Plant
- ☐ \$5,000 Bur Oak
- ☐ Other _____
- ☐ I would like to make a
recurring gift of _____