



The PRAIRIE PROMOTER

Igniting Relationships with the Land

Spring 2025

50 Years at Muralt Bluff

How a passion
for prairies
ignited a
movement

Plus

Considerations for Old
Growth Habitat

Exploring Soil Crusts

Capturing Prescribed Fire



Habitat for State Endangered Plant Gets Protected in Southern Wisconsin

Story by David Myers

Photo by Eric Preston, Empire-Sauk Chapter Member

Pale false foxglove (Agalinis skinneriana) which the property was named after.

Wisconsin residents and visitors will now be able to enjoy hiking and sightseeing at one of the area's last remaining prairies. Agaski Bluff, a 38-acre property protected by The Prairie Enthusiasts in December of 2024, features spectacular views and is home to some of the state's rarest plants and animals.

Agaski Bluff, located in the Driftless Region, features dry bluffs, a narrow ridge and striking rock outcroppings with remnants of original prairie and oak woodland and savanna. The site contains many rare prairie species including Wisconsin's largest population of pale false foxglove, a Wisconsin Endangered Species. The site is also adjacent to the 12-acre Swenson Bluffs, another property protected by The Prairie Enthusiasts. Protection of Agaski Bluff will now allow easy access to Swenson Bluffs, which previously could only be accessed by hiking in a half mile from the road.

The previous landowners, Eric Preston and Kim Kreitinger, purchased the property in 2021 and had intentions of building a home on the site. As lifelong conservationists, they immediately started restoration efforts. They cleared invasive cedar trees, planted prairie, conducted prescribed burns and began restoring the oak woodland and savanna. As their restoration continued, they questioned the impact of building a home on the site. It was a difficult, even heartbreaking realization, but they came to believe the best thing would be for The Prairie Enthusiasts to own and manage their land for generations to come.

"We both are very strong believers that biodiversity is important. Native plants have been here for thousands of years if not hundreds of thousands of years and deserve to be protected," Eric said.

The Prairie Enthusiasts Executive Director Debra Behrens appreciates the enormity of Eric and Kim's decision. "The Prairie Enthusiasts is grateful that Eric and Kim decided to protect this unique place," Debra said. "It's an absolute honor to help them with their land conservation goals and ensure Agaski Bluff will be available for all to enjoy long into the future."

Protecting and stewarding this rare example of Wisconsin's Driftless Area landscape isn't something Eric and Kim take lightly. "It matters to us, and it matters to a lot of people in our community," Eric said.

Support from Wisconsin's Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, the Community Foundation of Southern Wisconsin's Southwest Badger Natural Resource Conservation Fund, Iowa County, and Members of The Prairie Enthusiasts have helped make the protection of this fire-dependent ecosystem possible.

To learn more about Agaski Bluff, including recreational information and volunteer opportunities, visit ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org/Project/Agaski-Bluff. ■

Thank you all for helping to protect 38 acres!

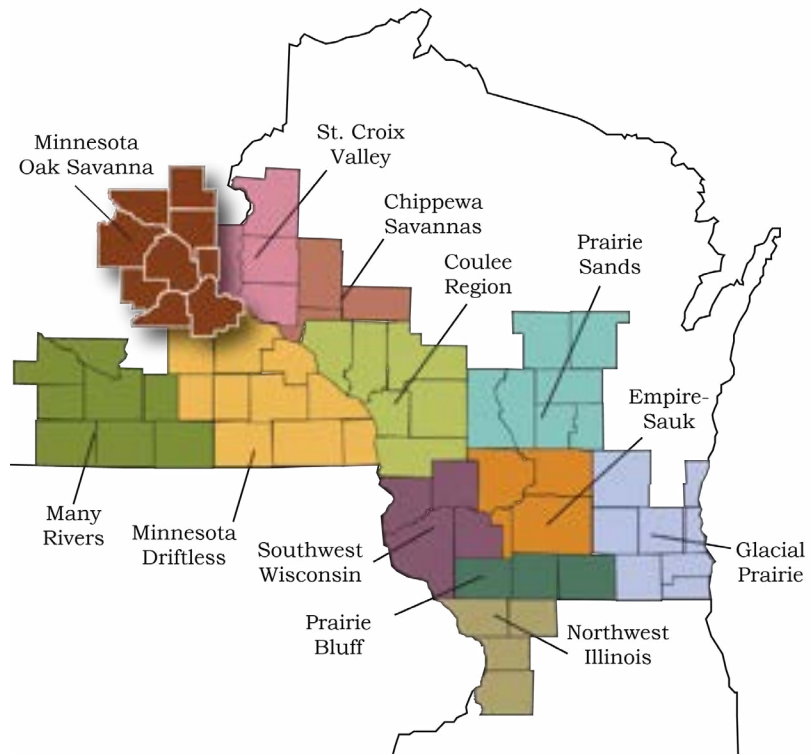
Join Us in Welcoming Our Newest Chapter: Minnesota Oak Savanna

By Kysh Lindell, *The Prairie Enthusiasts AmeriCorps Member*

The Prairie Enthusiasts is thrilled to announce the formation of a new chapter! The Minnesota Oak Savanna Chapter will be serving Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Isanti, Ramsey, Scott, Sherburne and Wright Counties.

Though a third of Minnesota was once prairie, less than 2% of Minnesota's native grassland habitats remain. The Minnesota Oak Savanna Chapter is so named because of the historic abundance of oak savanna ecosystems in what today comprises the greater Minneapolis-St. Paul metro area. These open grassland habitats are comprised of scattered oak trees and an understory of sun-loving prairie plants, both of which support fascinating native wildlife like the state-endangered Henslow's sparrow and federally-endangered rusty patched bumblebee. Though agriculture and urban development have largely replaced these essential native ecosystems, a few remnants—extraordinarily rare sites that have been largely undisturbed and retain most of their original plant communities—have persevered.

Inspired by an outpouring of interest in caring for native ecosystems, the Chapter is invested in providing hands-on education, training and volunteer opportunities



for everyone in the local community, regardless of experience level. Attendees at local education events and work parties can expect to learn what makes prairies so unique, how to identify and control invasive plant species, how to enhance habitat for pollinators and how to conduct prescribed burns. Along with these tangible skills, the Chapter strives to inspire hope. "In the face of climate change, it's easy for people to feel discouraged, dispirited and powerless. We believe that creating community, exploring the wonders of our native places and joining together in skillful work to protect and restore such places is uplifting, hope-inducing and rewarding," says Minnesota Oak Savanna Chapter Board Representative Greg Heberlein.

Beyond the proven environmental benefits of stewarding native ecosystems—from providing critical habitat for threatened wildlife and enhancing soil health to combating carbon emissions and improving water quality—Minnesotans stand to gain a priceless connection to the natural communities in their own backyards. "I grew up in Minnesota, and I lived there for 40 years without really knowing what a prairie was until a few years ago," says Debra Behrens, Executive Director of The Prairie Enthusiasts. "Thinking of young people learning about the land around them and being inspired to care for that land ... it's truly a wellspring of hope."

Please join us in welcoming our new Chapter, and if you would like to sign up for the Chapter's emails, send a message to Info@ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org. ■



*Wild lupine (Lupinus perennis) by Alex Carroll,
Minnesota Oak Savanna Chapter Contact.*

The PRAIRIE PROMOTER

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In 1975, some of the original Prairie Enthusiasts conducted their first major prescribed burn. Some of the crew here left to right: Dan Hazlett, Gary Eldred, Jonathon Wilde, Reynold Zeller, Chuck Phillipson. Photo by John Ochsner.



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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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Cover photo of American lady caterpillar on *Antennaria* spp. at Agaski Bluff.
 Photo by Eric Preston.



The accreditation seal is awarded to land trusts meeting the highest national standards for excellence and conservation permanence.



President's Message

Embracing the Complete Conservation Movement

Jim Rogala, President

When considering the extent of conservation needs on our planet, The Prairie Enthusiasts have a narrow focus. Our mission constrains our work geographically and to fire-dependent ecosystems. We also put an emphasis on remnants of these ecosystems. There is much to do outside our mission, and we should appreciate the agencies and organizations that have those needs within their mission.

Land practices related to agriculture have far-reaching effects. As mentioned in The Prairie Enthusiasts' video "Prairie Enthusiasm", imagine a migratory species like the monarch trying to find floral resources in a landscape covered with row crops that have little ecological value. In the Driftless Area, these same row crop farming practices result in erosion that not only degrades the land but often reaches aquatic systems resulting in negative consequences. We all understand the need for crop production and appreciate the hardworking farmers who deliver the products, but at the same time we want to minimize negative environmental effects. Agencies and organizations have been working to address the problem by providing programs to take land out of production for conservation purposes and encouraging better farming practices. Prairies fit into these conservation measures by promoting the planting of prairies or surrogate grasslands on the landscape.

Urbanization causes equally alarming environmental damage. Although often thought of as isolated patches within our landscapes, the effects are far reaching. Some of these are obvious, like air and water pollution, while others like light pollution are not as evident. Other effects are starting to get more attention, like the ecological deserts these urban areas often create. Again, we see progress, but that doesn't happen without regulations and an effort to bring an awareness of the issues. The opportunities to include prairies in these landscapes through backyard planting have become more popular in recent years.

In addition to what happens across the landscape, humans are also creating problems with the choices we make. Many of these problems occur on large scales, but they are a result of an accumulation of actions of individuals. The burning of fossil fuels, whether directly or indirectly, is something all of us do. The use of plastics in our society is very concerning, as we are just starting to uncover the by-products of their use. Other pollutants driving our high standard of living are too numerous to cover here. Some people, either on their own or as dedicated members of agencies or organizations, are taking actions to alter the way we live. Prairies can counter some of these problems, such as carbon sequestration by deep-rooted prairie plants.

I like celebrating our narrow mission while at the same time knowing others have a similar passion for other conservation needs. For all these missions, it seems like much action is needed to address serious problems, but are humans willing to sacrifice to get it done? Time will tell, but we know for certain that without the conservation movements, we have little chance of retaining life on this planet as we know it. As we continue to live our mission as Prairie Enthusiasts we should also support efforts addressing all the conservation issues that we face. ■

See the "Prairie Enthusiasm" video on our website at
ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org/Mission

Brush cleared on hillsides showing the newly acquired Agaski Bluff along with Swenson Bluff. Photo by Eric Preston.



Executive Director's Message

Transformational Fire: The Planned and Unexpected

Debra Behrens, Executive Director

It is burn season for The Prairie Enthusiasts and I am awestruck by the community-wide effort invested in this critical element of our stewardship. Over winter, we strategize which units we'll burn and draw up detailed plans. As the days grow longer, we shake our crews from their winter rhythms and excitedly gather for fire refreshers. We keep one ear always tuned to the forecast and the other to the waiting land. Install the firebreaks, clear the brush and assemble the gear. When the go-ahead message comes, we don our suits, take up our tools and fall into alignment. The moment that first, dry blade of grass catches orange, our focus dials—the fire line, the voice on the radio, the march of the black. We take the instructions from our burn bosses seriously, and we act accordingly.

We do all this because as Prairie Enthusiasts we know that fire can be difficult to predict. Fifty years ago this April, a group of prairie-lovers gathered to conduct a prescribed burn on a dry, bluff prairie remnant in Green County—Muralt Bluff. The fire famously escaped, racing up the bluff and inciting chaos among the crew. Luckily, no one was hurt and the fire died down naturally as it ran out of fuel. That spring, the land responded with more blooms than any of the crew could have imagined. This “failed” burn is one of our origin stories as Prairie Enthusiasts and has something to teach us about planning for the unexpected still today.

I've been learning this lesson again and again in my time with The Prairie Enthusiasts. In 2021, the looming dangers of the COVID-19 pandemic drove our annual February conference to an online format. While many were saddened that we couldn't gather with our fellow Prairie Enthusiasts in-person—myself included—the virtual nature of the conference attracted an unexpected new audience. During the conference, I connected with several prairie-lovers active in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. Some were seasoned restoration experts or well-respected nature artists, while others were spirited young people looking for a way to make a difference in the world. All of them were bursting with the same enthusiasm I've come to recognize in the eyes of each member of our community. They wanted to bring this show to the Twin Cities, but they needed support from our community to do it.

Now, after much collaborative work to build the foundation of this community, the brand-new Minnesota Oak Savanna Chapter takes its first steps into the world. It is a moment akin to setting down the drip torch and watching the fire do its work. This group will flourish and grow in its own unexpected way, as every one of our grassroots Chapters does. Though none of us can predict what the future holds, I'm excited to watch this first growing season unfold.

Prescribed burns have an element of unpredictability, and we should do everything in our power to prepare and execute them well. But the goal of burning a prairie is to bring renewal, stabilization and hope. It is to envision and reach for a future where fire-dependent ecosystems are healthy and abundant, and allow them to grow and diversify in ways we can't entirely predict. We've set ambitious goals to protect more threatened prairies and help more people find their place in the prairie this year. Who knows which way the winds will blow, but I hope you find yourself beside us, flapper in hand, revitalizing the land—and people—around us. ■

Prairie Bluff Chapter members enjoying the bloom of shooting stars after a burn at Muralt Bluff. Photo by Jerry Newman.



Management Toolbox

By Jim Rogala, President



The purpose of this regular section of *The Prairie Promoter* is to keep proper management methods fresh in your mind. These short articles will sometimes reference past or future articles that contain details on the selected topic. Others will just be some food for thought. Here's my latest contribution. I encourage others to provide ideas for articles. You can send those ideas to me at JRogala@ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org.

Cutting, Cutting, and Cutting: A Viable Option to Herbicide?

I have long been a proponent of using non-herbicide methods for killing unwanted species, whether nonnative or native. For example, I've had a lot of success in controlling sumac by cutting the whole clone twice a year over a couple of years¹. We also heard from Coulee Region Chapter member Jon Rigden about his experiment using repeated cutting of small buckthorn showing promise². At our 2024 annual conference, we heard of a cutting technique called "critical period cutting" that was found to be effective on large buckthorn³. From these examples, it seems like it is possible to kill a good proportion of a population of some species by repeated cutting at the right time of the year and at the right frequency.

I took this idea and applied it to other species, both clonal and nonclonal, and woody and herbaceous. There are multiple clonal shrub species on my prairie remnants, including gray and round-leaved dogwood and hazelnut. I want to retain some of these natives, but their abundance is taking up valuable prairie sod on my small remnants. Outside the remnants where I have tried to recover the prairie in wooded areas, clonal herbaceous species like brambles and sunflowers are problematic. I've heard that people use herbicide to control these shrub and herbaceous species, but I didn't want to use basal-spraying or foliar spraying because of concerns for collateral damage, and cut-stump treatments seemed too time consuming and may also result in collateral damage. I deployed repeated cutting during the growing season to control these clonal species and have seen moderate success.

I've also used repeated cutting on a nonclonal species. I repeatedly cut honeysuckle in an area that

had a mix of resprouts and plants that matured from the seed bank. I varied my frequency based on proximity to quality remnants, with more frequent cutting nearby, and cut over several years. It was obvious that my cutting was not frequent enough farther from the remnants. I did no recordkeeping and the work was haphazard, but nonetheless it appeared that some control was possible as the frequency increased. As a side note, I did see a lot of leaf blight on the resprouts between cuttings, and although mortality didn't result, the blight may have added additional stress to the plants.

There are some things to consider when using repeated cutting. First, these methods are feasible only for small clones or areas and a commitment to revisiting often must be made. Second, as is true for herbicide use, we want to minimize collateral damage. Repeatedly cutting nontarget native species while cutting target species can cause harm. I minimize those undesired effects by switching my methods as I make progress. I might start with broadcast cutting with a handheld brush cutter or scythe, and then I start using a more targeted cutting of stems with a handheld brush cutter, loppers or hand shears. Perhaps the most important aspect to consider is some sort of integrated approach. I couple the repeated cutting with prescribed burning and interseeding. The moderate success I observed in control has been mirrored by the establishment of native species where once a dense clone existed.

I'd like to hear from others who are using repeated cutting to control unwanted species. Also feel free to contact me if you'd like to get guidance on such methods. Yes, they can be time-consuming and require multiple visits, but the advantages of not using herbicides may be worth it. ■

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From Chance Encounter to Dedicated Leadership

My Journey with The Prairie Enthusiasts

By Jessica Bizub, Operations Director

This spring brings new beginnings for me personally and professionally. I transition from my role as Glacial Prairie Chapter Chair and Board Representative into a new role with The Prairie Enthusiasts as Operations Director. With these changes in progress, I cannot help but reflect on the journey that led me here. My introduction to both the organization and prairies started by chance—The Prairie Enthusiasts offered the only Wisconsin Master

Naturalist training that fit my schedule. Hosted by the Empire-Sauk Chapter at Schurch-Thomson, the training sparked a passion for prairie. I was (and still am) fascinated by the high diversity of plants within a small area of prairie, the vast plant communities that vary by site type and location and the rhythms of seasonal changes that are so apparent on prairie landscapes. At Mounds View Grassland, Schurch-Thomson Prairie is one prairie nestled in an expanse of over 800 acres of prairies, grasslands, wetlands, savannas and woodlands. Its panoramic views offer a glimpse into conservation potential at scale.

The people of The Prairie Enthusiasts made an equally impactful first impression. Throughout my career, I've worked with dozens of nonprofits, and I was immediately struck by the detailed depth and long-term dedication of people like Rich Henderson, who make progress on sites such as Schurch-Thomson possible. This level of effort is uncommon and special. Volunteers drive progress on local levels, where we can positively influence the ecosystems we love.

After returning home to Milwaukee, I tried out a work party with my local group, the Glacial Prairie Chapter. I still vividly remember the pleasant Saturday morning seed collecting at Lulu Lake State Natural Area with Walter Mirk—the warmth of the autumn sun, learning more about plants by getting to know their seed forms, hiking from dry hilltop prairie to shady oak woodlands, connecting with other volunteers over our shared appreciation for the natural environment, and, of course, Walter's expressive storytelling and Alice Mirk's delicious cookies. Over the years, field work with prairie friends has remained my favorite volunteer activity, whether it is collecting seed, controlling invasive species or conducting prescribed burns. In my opinion, there is nothing more satisfying than observing an area I've personally worked on positively respond with expanding native plant communities through the efforts of many over time.

One thing led to another, and I soon found myself in a leadership position with Glacial Prairie as Chair and Board Representative. In these roles, I've come to appreciate the hard work that happens "behind the scenes"—the planning, budgeting, organizing, coordinating, communicating and persistence it takes to keep things rolling for a Chapter. Through Board and Chapter Leaders Collaborative meetings, I met other chapter leaders and learned about the uniqueness of how each implements the organization's mission. I've also enjoyed meeting volunteers from other areas at our annual conferences and summer events. While we do things slightly differently in each chapter, we share common goals, interests and values, so it's easy to connect. This local work further depends on a strong Chapter Support team, who find and administer grant opportunities, fundraise for acquisitions and land management, develop branding to keep us looking fresh and identifiable, facilitate our land trust accreditation and burn insurance and much more. It takes all of us working together to help The Prairie Enthusiasts thrive.

While I am sad to leave my roles with the Glacial Prairie Chapter, I know the Chapter is in good hands. This next step in my journey feels more like a variation on a theme, or the changing of seasons, rather than a major shift. I look forward to further serving The Prairie Enthusiasts, an organization that, like prairie landscapes, is at the same time one thing and many—a tapestry of interdependent threads that adds up to more than the sum of its parts. ■

Hands and Knees Botany

Story and photos by Gary Birch, Smith-Reiner Drumlin Prairies Site Steward with Empire-Sauk Chapter

On a sunny day in late November, two people are crawling on their hands and knees on top of a hill, sometimes putting their faces to the ground and excitedly calling out plant names. Is this a scene from a Monty Python movie or two guys botanizing late in the year?

Well, as I found out, you can actually do some serious botany in late November and see next spring's plants beginning to come up. The Prairie Enthusiasts Ecologist, Dan Carter and I were picking boutique (rare or unusual) seeds on Smith-Reiner Drumlin Prairie in November at the top of one of the Smith-Reiner drumlins. The tops of the drumlins are dry with a mix of sand and gravel soils, perfect for short-stature prairies. More importantly, this prairie is often burned, leaving room for patches of Wisconsin desert crust.

Desert crust, also known as biocrust, is a living layer of soil found in dry lands. It can consist of an association of fungi, lichens, bryophytes, algae and cyanobacteria that live on the soil surface. At Smith-Reiner, it exists as a lumpy, mostly black, leathery surface with very few, small plants growing through it. Most of the year, this living crust is inactive, but sprinkle a little water on it and within minutes respiration begins. This partnership of living things can survive if it is not shaded or over-topped by larger prairie plants or unburned thatch. This is where frequent fire in dry areas helps perpetuate this interesting community. I've often seen this type of living niche in Utah and Wyoming. But at Smith-Reiner, we have a fine example of it existing in southern Wisconsin. This type of



Downy paintbrush (*Castilleja sessiliflora*) among other prairie species.



Ecologist Dan Carter examining sun sedge (*Carex inops*).

association also exists on Wisconsin's goat prairies in the Driftless Area. This Lilliputian community opens a niche for other common and uncommon plants to make a showing in the growing season, even into late November.

I think of myself as at least a journeyman in prairie biology, but Dan pointed out this late fall show for me. I call it "hands and knees" botany.

The increase in surface roughness and leather-like texture of the biocrusted areas improves resistance to wind and water erosion compared to bare soil. The darkened surfaces of biocrusts decrease soil albedo (a measure of the amount of light reflected off of the surface) compared to nearby soils, which increases the energy absorbed by the soil surface. Soils with well-developed biological soil crusts can be over 20°F warmer than adjacent surfaces¹. This is a real boost for plants growing in the early spring or late fall as illustrated in the photos. Biocrusts do not compete with vascular plants for nutrients, but, rather, have been shown to increase nutrient availability and nutrient levels in nearby plant tissues, which results in higher biomass for plants that grow near biocrusts. Soil arthropod populations also increase with more developed crusts due to increased crust micro-topography. Wherever biocrusts occur, they contribute to increased soil stability in dry soil areas.

Human disturbance can easily disrupt this community through foot traffic and off-road vehicles. Animal hooves can have similar effects. One of the drumlins at Smith Prairie was close to the former farm, and cattle had frequent access to this drumlin. Here, the biocrust is sporadic and in some places absent. In another drumlin farther away from farm activity where grazing was less intense, the biocrust is frequent and, in some areas, dominant.

In my years of stewarding Smith-Reiner, I have only seen biocrust in the original prairie turf and not in the prairie's planted portions. However, the soil in these planted areas was once farmed, is not nearly as dry, and plant stature is taller and more dense than on the drumlin tops. When The Prairie Enthusiasts protects and manages these original sites such as Smith-Reiner, these prairies serve as reference points for restoration of dry prairies in

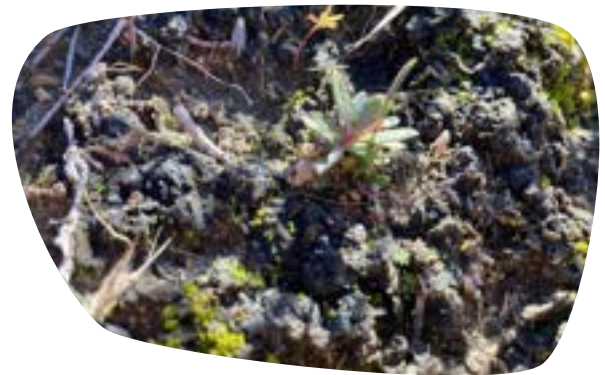
other places in the future.

Working in Smith-Reiner over these years, I have noticed some association between biocrusts and other dry soiled plants. For example, in the spring, there are clouds of bird's-foot violets (*Viola pedata*) with downy paintbrush (*Castilleja sessiliflora*) in the same areas as the biocrusts. Also, uncommon sedges such as Meads sedge (*Carex meadii*), Richardson sedge (*Carex richardsonii*), and sun sedge (*Carex inops*) are found on the same drumlin tops. Does a biocrust provide a niche or some sort of association with other native plants? Others may be able to answer that better than me.

Next time you find yourself on a very dry native prairie in late fall or even early spring, get down on your hands and knees and look closely at the ground and see the tiny, but important, community that you, like me, may have overlooked in the past. ■

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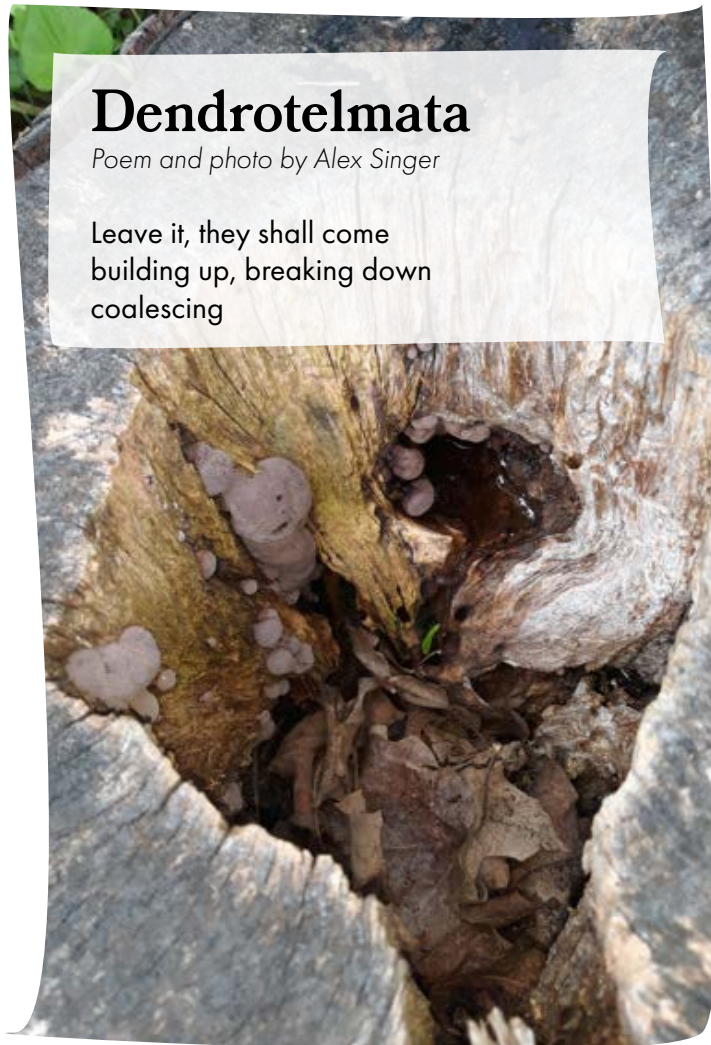
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Close-up of tiny racemed milkwort (*Polygala polygama*) coming through the biocrust layer.



Western sunflower (*Helianthus occidentalis*) in late November.



Dendrotelmata

Poem and photo by Alex Singer

Leave it, they shall come
building up, breaking down
coalescing



Tiny leaves of birds-foot violet (*Viola pedata*) near edge of a glove (top of photo).



Stability Part Three: Promoting Old Growth and Controlling Unwanted Vegetation Should Go Hand in Hand

Story and Photos by Ecologist Dan Carter

This article is the third in a series on promoting stability—or perhaps doing the least damage to it—as we encourage and sustain old-growth prairie, savanna, and oak woodland sods. Prescribed fire¹ and grazing² were obvious topics that were addressed earlier, but the other management practices we use, particularly those that kill or remove excessive woody vegetation or invasive/aggressive herbaceous species, deserve attention. Removing unwanted species represents much of what we do in defense of fire-dependent ecosystems. As with fire and grazing, its effects relate to physical parameters like nutrient availability, light and microclimate, but those effects also relate to direct impacts to what we're trying to save. Sometimes it just comes down to not injuring or killing the good stuff by accident.

Woody encroachment and many non-native herbaceous plants can destabilize old growth composition, structure and ecological process if not addressed. They do this by altering light, water, nutrients and air movement. Some species produce allelochemicals that cause local changes to vegetation. A good example of a species that alters most or all of those parameters is common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), which casts excessive shade and produces emodin, a likely allelochemical. What I find more sinister is the microbial community associated with buckthorn,³ which supports more free-living nitrogen fixing (diazotrophic) bacteria; these ensure that the buckthorn has a continual supply of nitrogen to fertilize the area under its canopy with its fast-decomposing (labile) leaf litter. The increased nutrient cycling and availability from leaf litter inputs of many problem species, woody⁴ and herbaceous,⁵ are a big part of why intervention is needed. However, practices

Spring view of an area where glossy buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*) was removed the previous fall and winter. Little herbaceous vegetation remained beneath. What is visible here is a mix of species seeded immediately after brush work and opportunistic natives like burnweed (*Erechtites hieraciifolius*). Quaking aspen (*Populus deltoides*) was subsequently girdled. Here seeding, aspen girdling, prescribed fire and targeted removal of unwanted vegetation (e.g., pulling and flaming of glossy buckthorn seedlings, pulling of small Canada thistles, *Cirsium arvense*) are being combined in close sequence.

that remove unwanted vegetation usually create physical disturbance or leave behind excessive available nutrients in their wake. These wounds require mending, and their healing requires sustained care.

A common mistake is instead to assume that the ecosystem will heal on its own, either by natural dispersal or from the seed bank. Three inconvenient realities work against that hope. Opportunistic species (most herbaceous invasive species, sometimes “weedy natives” like tall goldenrod, *Solidago altissima*), many of which are problems in the communities we manage, are better at dispersing to open spaces where unwanted species have previously been removed. In many instances the landscape is too fragmented for old-growth-associated species to have any chance to get there. However, disturbed areas overrun with opportunistic species surround the places we care for. Second, physical conditions continue to be altered even after areas are daylight (e.g., nitrogen availability is greater), which further favors re-colonization by opportunistic species. Finally, many long-lived, old-growth-associated species do not persist in seed banks,^{6,7} which means recovery in the wake of invasive species removal relies on remaining

vegetative plants. Often when plants have persisted, they have not flowered and set seed for a long time, so use of heavy-handed management practices should not assume that the seed bank is an insurance policy, but I hear that exact claim or assumption again and again! It is true that there are native species in the seed bank, including uncommon native species⁸ (especially where seed inputs are still ongoing), but flora that may lead to the restoration of ecological integrity⁹ do not reside where old growth vegetation has been suppressed or absent for any length of time.

Healing the damage caused by unwanted species requires integrating approaches that both control those species and actively promote the establishment and persistence of species associated with old growth. In cases where desirable species have been lost or gaps in desirable vegetation have been created in the wake of removing unwanted species, we should gather and broadcast seed or propagate and plant plugs. We can also ameliorate the excessive nutrient availability by facilitating the early establishment of species that produce relatively slow-decomposing litter (native grasses and sedges especially¹⁰), the decomposition of which requires microbes to draw more nutrients from the surrounding environment. Grassier and sedgier vegetation also allows us to reestablish flammability and volatilize excess nitrogen out of the ecosystem using frequent dormant fire. Finally, establishing grassy vegetation (and probably the vegetation of our restoration target community more generally) may slow re-invasion by providing competition for the seedlings of invasive species (e.g., buckthorn¹¹), though I believe complementing the establishment of desirable vegetation with the use frequent fire is important for suppressing invasive species in the longer term. Removal of unwanted species ought to be combined with restoration of core ecological processes—by facilitating dispersal and using frequent dormant fire to promote and sustain conditions (low litter, low nitrogen availability) that allow species associated with old growth to establish and begin to stitch themselves back into a functioning ecosystem.

We often make faulty assumptions about how safe certain applications of herbicide are for ecosystems, but we can also do damage even when we follow herbicide labels to the letter. In old growth the use of herbicide should be very judicious. Where necessary, it should utilize only the most targeted applications of the chemicals that pose the lowest risk, either because they are the most selective or they can be applied in very targeted ways and do not tend to persist in or migrate through the soil.

Do not assume that overspray from herbicide treatments in winter will not affect native vegetation; many old-growth-associated species maintain green tissues above ground that can be impacted. Assessment of that risk is where most mistakes happen. We need to start paying closer attention to and sharing accounts of the collateral impacts treatments have. I'll describe and share photographs of a couple examples from my experience.

The first involves a degraded area where I oversaw the cutting and stump treatment of glossy buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*), common buckthorn and several other unwanted woody species in a dense thicket between late autumn and late winter. I applied 20% triclopyr ester, either in mineral oil with basal dye or basal oil with dye, to cut stumps using a hand-held pump sprayer on low pressure. This allowed me to carefully drip herbicide onto the cut stumps. Herbaceous vegetation was very sparse in the wake of clearing, so the area was seeded heavily with wild ryes (*Elymus spp.*) to quickly establish grassy cover. I also seeded conservative, old-growth-associated species appropriate for the site. In late February and very early March when the ground began to thaw and warm, I noticed that glossy buckthorn stumps, most treated weeks or months before, began oozing sap. None of the other treated species oozed sap in the same way. By midsummer it was obvious that treatment had effectively killed the buckthorn and other unwanted species. Nearly all treated stumps were dead, but around each glossy



Winter application of 20% triclopyr ester in mineral oil with basal dye by drip from a pump sprayer to a fresh glossy buckthorn stump.



Representative late winter/early spring sap flow in a previously treated glossy buckthorn stump.



Left: Broader cut-stump treatment area where damage to pointed-leaf tick-trefoil (*Hylodesmum glutinosum*) occurred. Ten years ago when this area was in the early stages of common buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) and gray dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*) invasion/encroachment, it supported a low woodland sod of false toadflax (*Comandra umbellata*, still visible), Pennsylvania sedge (*Carex pensylvanica*), poverty oats (*Danthonia spicata*), kittentails (*Synthyris bullii*), Carolina vetch (*Vicia caroliniana*), alumroot (*Heuchera richardsonii*), etc. In the wake of brush work, opportunistic species like woodland sunflowers (*Helianthus* spp.) and clonal goldenrods (*Solidago* spp.) are poised to increase unless other actions are implemented.

Above: Representative late July view of a treated glossy buckthorn stump with surrounding bare area inferred to be result of spring sap flow. Away from stumps seeded species as well as seed bank species like burnweed and biennial evening primrose (*Oenothera biennis*) grow. In this setting this collateral effect is probably acceptable, but in cases with remnant old growth-associated vegetation, it would not have been.



Left: February view of green Carolina vetch, a conservative and old growth-associated species of oak woodlands that would have been vulnerable had late fall foliar spray of buckthorn or winter overspray or drip from basal or cut stump treatment occurred in its vicinity.

Right: Pointed-leaved tick-trefoil in the same area that was presumably impacted by herbicide dripped on snow during a winter, 2023 cut stump treatment.

buckthorn stump was a dead zone where no herbaceous vegetation (including seedlings—even those of wild ryes) grew. While the extent of these dead areas and their impact was minor in this instance, the experience has made me wary of treating cut stumps with triclopyr ester in areas with high quality vegetation, especially where the density of treated stumps would be high. It will be worth investigating whether herbicides that are mixed with water (vs. oil) or applications made in summer that potentially have more time to kill stumps ahead of the following spring could produce fewer negative effects.

Recently, I visited a site where several months prior 20% triclopyr ester in basal oil had been used to treat mostly common buckthorn cut stumps with a wick-type applicator. That treatment had been performed in the winter when there was a shallow layer of snow. Still, there was obvious damage to the herbaceous woodland and savanna vegetation, presumably from herbicide that had come in contact with the snow or moist soil and spread out, and probably also leached into the sandy soil without being immobilized or broken down by soil organic matter or microbial activity. Triclopyr has a relatively short half-life, but that half-life depends on temperature, moisture, and sun exposure. In summer we worry about volatilization of triclopyr ester and some other herbicides due to heat, but in winter reduced microbial activity and solar irradiance might allow herbicides more time to migrate to where they can cause damage, even if they are being applied in targeted ways.

In both cases I was surprised by the collateral effects. My own calculation of risk versus reward for my actions and the advice I offer changed. I urge readers to

take a second look at practices that are often taken for granted. Don't just track the efficacy of treatments against unwanted species; also monitor surrounding vegetation before and after treatment. Do areas that receive treatment continue to be problem areas? Perhaps there were collateral impacts to native vegetation that further destabilized the community, or perhaps additional types of care (e.g., seeding, monitoring for re-invasion, more fire) are needed to address underlying problems and get things on the right track. Last year on his Strategies for Stewards blog¹² Stephen Packard offered the following wisdom:

"Is killing invasives our goal? Or restoring integrity and health to the ecosystem? Herbicides are

needed. But herbicide treatments may solve one problem while ultimately not helping, or even making things worse. Restoration requires a wise overall plan with appropriate sequencing. The work then needs close oversight by someone who has a good working knowledge of the site's ecology and the long-range impact of possible treatments." ■

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

Go to: ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org/Blog



Committed to land stewardship, Adaptive Restoration is proud to support The Prairie Enthusiasts' mission. As a full-service ecological restoration and land management company, our goals align with The Prairie Enthusiasts land stewardship—implementing and maintaining prairie, savanna and other fire-dependent ecosystems.



Adaptive Restoration supports The Prairie Enthusiasts community and landowners in the Driftless Region of Wisconsin.

(608) 554-0411 ■ info@adaptiverestoration.com

Artist's Project: RxWalk

By Max Sorenson

Each RxWalk drawing was created by walking a line across the entirety of a recently burned unit. Each charred plant I passed on these walks offered its piece of the unit's collective portrait—the abundant charred elm propagules left branching lines (see *RxWalk, Alanna's Prairie*) while downed heavy fuels scraped the paper with deep slashes (see *RxWalk, Kammerer Meadow*). These drawings are influenced by the fuels present in each unit, topography, moisture regime, and the weather at the time of burning, in addition to countless other variables. However, each still retains a seemingly stochastic resemblance to a restored grassland, reminding us of the goals of this management and our vital and active role in these severely threatened ecosystems.

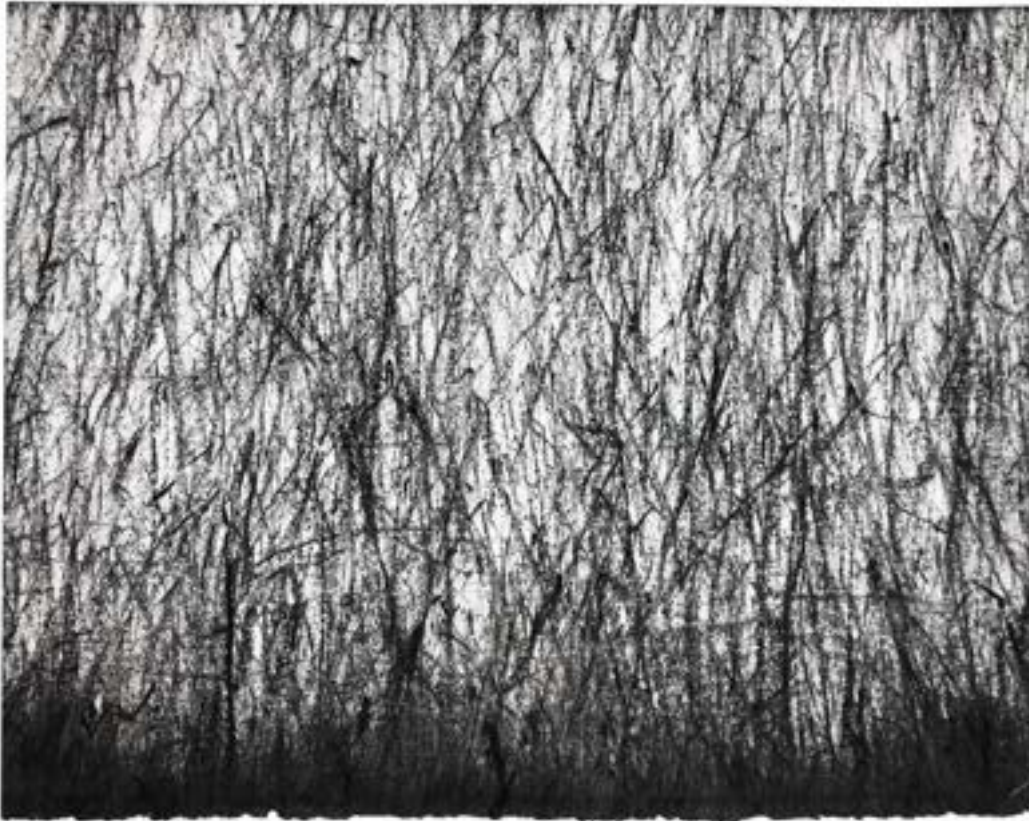
This project consists of drawings made in the restored and remnant ecosystems of the Leopold-Pines Conservation Area during my time as a Land Stewardship Fellow at the Aldo Leopold Foundation, just northeast of Baraboo, WI. This roughly 4,000-acre area is situated on the Wisconsin River on traditional Ho-Chunk, Sac and Fox, and Kickapoo homeland. It is actively and collaboratively managed by the Aldo Leopold Foundation and the Pines family, often in practical and conceptual ways that draw knowledge from these Indigenous stewards of the land, especially with reference to the return of fire to this landscape. ■



RxWalk, Amy's Prairie.
10 x 16 in



RxWalk, Shack Prairie.
6 x 14 in.



RxWalk, Alanna's Prairie.
18.5 x 14.5 in.



RxWalk, Kammerer Meadow.
29.5 x 22.5 in.



Fifty Years of Fire Stewarding Muralt Bluff Prairie

Story by Kysh Lindell, *The Prairie Enthusiasts* AmeriCorps Member

This April marks the historic 50th anniversary of the first prescribed burn on Muralt Bluff Prairie by early Prairie Enthusiasts—an event that would serve as a catalyst for grassroots prairie conservation in Wisconsin and beyond. But why revisit Muralt Bluff? What does this story have to teach us today?

In the early 1970s, two Albany, WI locals independently discovered a dry, bluff prairie remnant near their hometown in Green County. The site was part of an old cow pasture owned by the Muralt family and had been lightly grazed, but never plowed. Gary Eldred—a young outdoorsman who had previously hunted on the bluff—was working as a seasonal employee with the Wisconsin DNR at the time. While helping build the Sugar River State Trail, Gary grew intrigued by the rare and beautiful native plants he encountered in prairie remnants along the trail and soon blossomed into an amateur naturalist under the guidance of his Wisconsin DNR supervisor, Reynold Zeller. Gary spent much of his spare time traveling the backroads of Green County searching for prairie plants. It was the glowing blades of Indian grass and the curious purple spikes of blazing stars at Muralt Bluff that first drew him in, but the realization that these plants were a tangible connection to an ancient world kept him coming back.

John Ochsner, the son of a local cheesemaking family, met the Muralt Bluff prairie in a more unexpected way. Living just down the road from the property, John frequented the Muralt family's farm on his milk route. One spring day in 1973, John spotted a group of college students and their professor—famed UW-Madison botanist Hugh Illtis—gathered for a field trip at nearby Abraham's Woods State Natural Area. Tagging along out of curiosity, he followed as the group visited two

*From left to right: Fred Ochsner, Reynold Zeller, Jonathon Wilde, Deanne DeLaronde and John Ochsner manage the first burn at Muralt Bluff on April 13, 1975.
Photo by Gary Eldred.*

UW Arboretum properties—Abraham's Woods and Oliver Prairie—identifying native plants as they went. Fascinated, like Gary, by the presence of these unfamiliar plants so close to home, John repeatedly returned to Oliver Prairie to identify prairie plants. When he moved into the farmhouse at the base of Muralt Bluff that fall, he began to recognize some of the same native grasses and forbs he had come to know. To his delight, John had found another prairie remnant.

Gary and John independently deepened their connection to Muralt Bluff until one serendipitous day in 1974 when the two happened to meet. Discussing their passion for prairie and Muralt Bluff, it became clear that



*Professor Hugh Illtis (center) shows UW-Madison botany students a Pasque flower at Muralt Bluff in 1975.
Photo by John Ochsner.*



Journalist George Bachay and John Ochsner walk Muralt Bluff, 1974. Bachay was the outdoor writer for the Janesville Gazette for more than 20 years, providing early media coverage about Muralt Bluff and the importance of prairies. Photo by Gary Eldred.

they shared a mission: to protect the Muralt Bluff prairie, to help those fascinating plants thrive and to share this special place with others who could appreciate its value. Shared curiosity bled into a true prairie partnership as the two secured permission to manage the prairie from the landowners and began informal workdays at the site. Allies emerged from the local conservation community, including members of the Green County Conservation League and assorted friends. These newly fledged Prairie Enthusiasts felt called to act and transform Muralt Bluff with fire. And act they did.

On April 13, 1975, a small group gathered at the southeast corner, eager to coax a fire through this ancient prairie remnant for probably first time since early settlement. The crew consisted of Gary and John, Reynold Zeller, and friends Dan Hazlett, Jonathon Wilde, Deanne DeLaronde, Chuck Philipson, Tim and Peggy Hammerly, and John Ringhand. They were hardly the well-equipped, thoroughly trained burn crew you might meet at a burn today. Most had minimal knowledge or experience with burning, and their firefighting tools consisted of a few shovels, brooms, burlap sacks and two questionable water packs. But the rare chance to bring fire back to a prairie compelled swift action.

Intending only to conduct a test burn on a manageable 1/20th of an acre that day, the crew

John Ochsner lighting a brush pile on the slopes of Muralt Bluff, February 1975. Photo by Gary Eldred.

proceeded with little plan or pretense. John raked a thin line in the dry grass across the north end of the unit—a cursory firebreak—and Reynold unceremoniously dropped a match as the group stood leaning on their tools and chatting. Within thirty seconds, the southerly wind had carried the fire north and over the break, roaring uphill and toward the red cedars that dotted the slopes. “There she goes,” remarked Jon Wilde, and the crew scattered to respond.

Activity was panicked as the crew—and a few spectators—scrambled to contain the escaped fire. Snow shovels were pulled from the back of pickup trucks as makeshift flappers, and shirts and jackets shed in an attempt to swat out the flames. The fire raced through the grassy fuels, leaving a striking black scar and dramatically torching many of the cedars in its path. Terrifying on one hand, but practical on another: “I wasn’t really sure whether I should keep it going or put it out,” recalls Dan Hazlett. In seconds, the fire scorched many of the woody invasive plants that the group had been working to remove from the site.

Despite the initial mayhem, Jon Wilde managed the fire’s west flank well, and the fire soon ran out of fuel as the rest of the crew worked to tamp down the last of the flames. All told, the burn lasted just 20 minutes and consumed five or six acres. The only casualties were a few articles of clothing and \$50 owed to the Monticello Fire Department, who had responded to a neighbor’s wildfire call after the burn had already been contained.

After an experience like that, would they ever burn again? “That was without question,” smirks Eldred in response, “we would just be more prepared.”





From left to right: Dan Hazlett, Cliff Kohl, Fred Ochsner and Chuck Philipson extinguishing the last of the flames with unconventional tools. April 1975. Photo by John Ochsner.

What might have traumatized some exhilarated these self-described “prairie freaks.” A chaotic burn was still a burn—an essential, revitalizing process that the Muralt Bluff prairie had not experienced in a very long time. In that instant, the crew became committed to this place, as friends and as stewards. They were the first people since settlement who were willing to learn what this piece of land needed and able to put in the hard work to deliver it. They recognized the incredible history bound deep in the roots of these plants and their responsibility to care for that legacy. The burn was not a failure, but another chance at renewal.

Both the land and the local community responded to the fire remarkably well. As Gary remembers, the spring after that first burn “we had whole hillsides of shooting stars and blazing stars. The whole thing just responded to that fire like a huge breath.” Photos of the striking displays of native flowers and the enthralling story of the burn found their way into the local press thanks to several writers who were connected with the Muralt Bluff crew, including burn crew member Chuck Philipson who wrote for the newspaper in nearby New Glarus.

More than passing publicity, this effort to share the Muralt Bluff story became a grassroots public education campaign on the history and importance of prairies. Wielding a powerful combination of community connections and undeniable enthusiasm, the crew introduced local residents to native prairie plants and wildlife through stories and interviews, photos and illustrations, volunteer days and field trips. Some residents were encountering these native flora and fauna for the very first time in the local paper or on the slopes of Muralt

Bluff. Others were renewing an interest in the flowers and insects they had once glimpsed in childhood, but lost sight of as southern Wisconsin’s prairies gave way to pasture, agriculture and development. Soon enough, one could almost guarantee that everyone in Green County had read or seen something about prairies, and many were on board with seeing them managed as prairies—even when that included the somewhat unfamiliar practice of prescribed burning.

By the summer of 1976, Prairie Enthusiasm proved contagious in Green County. Thanks to collaborative



Invasive red cedar on fire during first burn, April 1975. Photo by Gary Eldred.

efforts to educate the public about prairies and advocate for the protection of this profoundly important natural area, members of the Green County Parks Committee paid a visit to Muralt Bluff to evaluate it for purchase. Thoroughly impressed by the prolific bloom of rough blazing stars and the Muralt Bluff crew’s dedication to caring for this piece of land, the Green County Board of Supervisors soon agreed to purchase and protect the 62.4-acre property using a combination of state and county funds.



As with every site The Prairie Enthusiasts protect, the tale of Muralt Bluff does not end with the inked check. The success at Muralt Bluff spurred these and other early Prairie Enthusiasts to double down on their efforts to find and protect remnant prairies across the Upper Midwest, to form groups of volunteers dedicated to stewarding land and to keep spreading a passion for prairie. All the while, there stood Muralt Bluff—challenging its stewards to experiment, teaching them how to listen to the land and ever urging them to renew their shared commitment to this place.

Though the Green County Board originally assigned official stewardship responsibilities at Muralt Bluff to the Wisconsin DNR, members of the original burn crew and a growing core of Green County prairie-lovers remained the site's most dedicated volunteers. Ownership of the site was transferred to The Prairie Enthusiasts in 2013, and the Prairie Bluff Chapter continues to steward Muralt Bluff today. Over the last 50 years, Muralt Bluff's devotees have faced nearly every predicament familiar to prairie practitioners: invasions of sumac, cedar, cherry and plum, burn restrictions, funding challenges, conflicting management styles, disappearing flora and fauna and questions about when, where and how often

An unusually spectacular bloom of blazing stars and goldenrods at Muralt Prairie, 1989. Photo by Gary Eldred.

to mow, cut, treat and burn on the prairie. While some issues could be solved with time, trial and lots of error, others proved mysteries.

While discouraging losses of rare prairie plants, insects and habitats have played out at Muralt Bluff over the years, so too have natural wonders that could renew the curiosity of even the most downtrodden Prairie Enthusiast. Following a drought in 1988, Muralt Bluff exploded in a profusion of rough blazing star (*Liatris aspera*) and showy goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa*) beyond belief. "I've been going up there for 50 years," reminisces Gary, "I never knew that those plants were there. There's hundreds and hundreds of them and they're blooming, so that indicates they were mature plants. God knows how long those root systems have been lying dormant in that soil before the drought shook them up enough to sprout. I was absolutely flabbergasted. It'll never look like that again in my lifetime, so what is the secret there? How long have those blazing stars been dormant?"



When you stick around long enough, as Muralt Bluff's devotees have, prairies have a way of surprising you like this. A rare plant emerges, blooms once and folds itself back into the soil, never to be seen again by the same eyes. New grassland birds find tiny pockets of prairie in a sea of corn and soy, making themselves at home as if they have always lived there. Amidst extreme weather events and a rapidly changing climate, the prairie dips into its well of resilience and acts.

This and Muralt Bluff's many other mysteries bring into focus our role as Prairie Enthusiasts: to recognize what we are losing, and the immense power of what we still have. "Your whole perspective on who we are and what we're here for changes when you visit Muralt Bluff," says Prairie Bluff Chapter volunteer Jerry Newman. To steward this place is to humbly return to it with respect, curiosity and wonder, putting in the difficult work to restore a place, all the while knowing that the prairie holds a wisdom much older than you. Like that first burn, prairie conservation is a chaotic, dynamic and deeply collaborative process. The important thing is to keep trying at it, even when the fire jumps your breaks.

In many ways, the Muralt Bluff story endures as the model for The Prairie Enthusiasts' land protection efforts today. We understand that if we want to save the prairies around us, we must act, and we must do so holistically. Like those early Prairie Enthusiasts, we build trust with landowners and local communities. We share land management knowledge and take initiative to steward land, embracing uncertainty and failures. We connect people with prairies through field trips, work parties, education and art. We find creative ways to raise funds and collaborate with others to further our impact. We do not let our enthusiasm dwindle, even after 50 years. This is a resilient method of conservation because it depends, at its core, on people loving the land enough to want to protect it and make it better. This enthusiasm is alive and well at Muralt Bluff and everywhere there are prairie people, and that is something to celebrate. ■

*Regal fritillary butterfly feeding on wild bergamot, 2017.
Photo by Gary Eldred.*



Top Left: 20th anniversary of the first burn, 1995. From left to right: Tim Hammerly, John Ochsner, Peggy Hammerly, Gary Eldred, Dan Hazlett. Photographer unknown.

Top Right: 30th anniversary of the first burn, 2005. From left to right: Jonathon Wilde, Dan Hazlett, John Ochsner, Gary Eldred (front). Photographer unknown.

40th anniversary of the first burn, 2015. From left to right: John Ochsner, Dan Hazlett, Gary Eldred, Jonathon Wilde, Chuck Phillipson. Photographer unknown.



We're Listening and Learning

By Jessica Bizub, Operations Director

In 2024, The Prairie Enthusiasts fielded another round of its member survey to learn about the motivations, interests, and preferences of supporters. With over 60 variables, this survey provides the organization with a rich source of information, but I want to highlight two consistent and strong themes here.

A Community of Shared Values

In addition to protecting the unique flora and fauna of prairies and related ecosystems, supporters rank alignment with their personal values as a top reason for their involvement. This indicates that we are connected not only by our goals and objectives, but by wanting to see our deeper motivations reflected in the world around us.

The Importance of Getting Into the Field

When asked how they started their journeys in nature, 85% of survey respondents said it was by spending time in nature. How many of us were oblivious to prairies until we were guided by someone in “seeing” them for the first time? (Certainly not everyone, especially those who started young, but this is a common narrative for many of us!) This reminds us how important it is to get people out onto quality sites to help them connect to the unique and vanishingly rare ecosystems we protect—people cannot care about something they are unaware of. Field trips, outdoor social events, and work parties are all opportunities to share our contagious enthusiasm.

Many thanks to everyone who has responded to the survey in recent years. Your feedback has helped us understand more about who our supporters are and what is important to you. And I hope you'll consider joining fellow Prairie Enthusiasts in the field this summer at one (or both!) of our summer events (see page 29)! ■



Hahnaman Sand Prairie

Story by Kay Wienke, Southwest Wisconsin Chapter Member and Board Representative

Photo by Greg Wahl

Prickly pear cactus (Opuntia humifusa)

In 1820, Illinois had 21 million acres of prairie lands. Prairies were mainly in the northern two-thirds of the state. All but nine counties had large areas of prairies. In central Illinois, trees could only be found in scattered sites called "prairie groves" or along waterways.

Less than 100 years later, much of Illinois' prairies were gone, primarily being converted to agricultural lands. By 1978, less than 2,300 acres of high-quality prairie remained in the entire state. Most of the undisturbed prairie sites today are found along railroad rights-of-way, in pioneer cemeteries and in places that are not suitable for farming.

Although Illinois is still known as the "Prairie State," less than 0.01% of Illinois's original 21 million acres of prairie remains. What once was a vast sea of rich prairie, now survives only as tiny, isolated patches. Remaining sand prairies make up only 0.0001% of those 21 million acres.

In 2023, The Prairie Enthusiasts Northwest Illinois Chapter added Whiteside County into their chapter geography. Southern Whiteside County includes portions of the Green River Lowland which were created by the Wisconsin Ice Sheet, creating a flat plain dominated by glacial drift and windblown sand.

Sand prairies are present along the Mississippi, Illinois, Green and Kankakee Rivers and along Lake Michigan. These areas are incredibly rare; therefore, any example of a sand prairie is a great addition to The

Prairie Enthusiasts' focus of preservation.

Glacial drift and windblown sand dominate more than 300 acres of privately-owned Hahnaman Sand Prairie found in the Green River Lowland of Whiteside County. Those lucky enough to see this unique, sand-dominated habitat are awed by the vastness as well as the varied flora and fauna. There are several small, isolated wetlands and wet prairie areas as well. Trees are widely scattered, and sand dunes rise about 50 feet above surrounding lowlands. These features provide for varied soils and a unique property. The Illinois DNR describes the rarity of this prairie stating, "Sand prairies are present along the Mississippi, Illinois, Green and Kankakee rivers and along Lake Michigan. Only 2,360 acres (poor and good quality) of sand prairies remain in Illinois. The majority of these sites are less than five acres in size."

Greg Wahl, a Northwest Illinois Chapter Member, began restoration of this threatened habitat in 2008 when he acquired 143 acres. He continues to add to the prairie by purchasing contiguous land when it becomes available. This property is home to 13 species of interest and state-listed endangered species. A foundation has been created to protect this rare place and provide long-term management. Preservation plans are also in progress.

As we all know, to manage even a small area of prairie restoration is a job of great proportions! Managing over 300 private acres has become a daily labor of love for Greg. His devotion to his land, heritage and legacy is to be admired.

To find out more, like *Hahnaman Sand Prairie* on Facebook, or check out *Assessment of the Hahnaman Sands Natural Area* by John C. Nelson, Bill Kleiman & Arron Lange. ■

Only 2,360 acres, including poor and good quality, of sand prairies remain in Illinois today.

Prairie Extraordinaire

Poem by Catherine Young

Photo of Muralt Bluff by Gary Eldred.

There is nothing ordinary
about prairie.

You can't order it
in a fashion catalog
or at the local convenience store.
It comes of hard work,
of pairing people, plant, element—
of heartfelt care.

What then, if our great deeds
are writ
in seeds
we collect and cast,
and in setting the fires
for prairies
that will outlast us?

Or in choosing which lands
to prepare?

There's nothing ordinary
or common
about prairie—

nor the people
who restore them
everywhere.

Poet Catherine Young lives in Richland County. Her ecopoetry collection *Geosmin* is the recipient of the Midwest Book Award. Read more of her work at: catherineyoungwriter.com

2025 Conference Recap

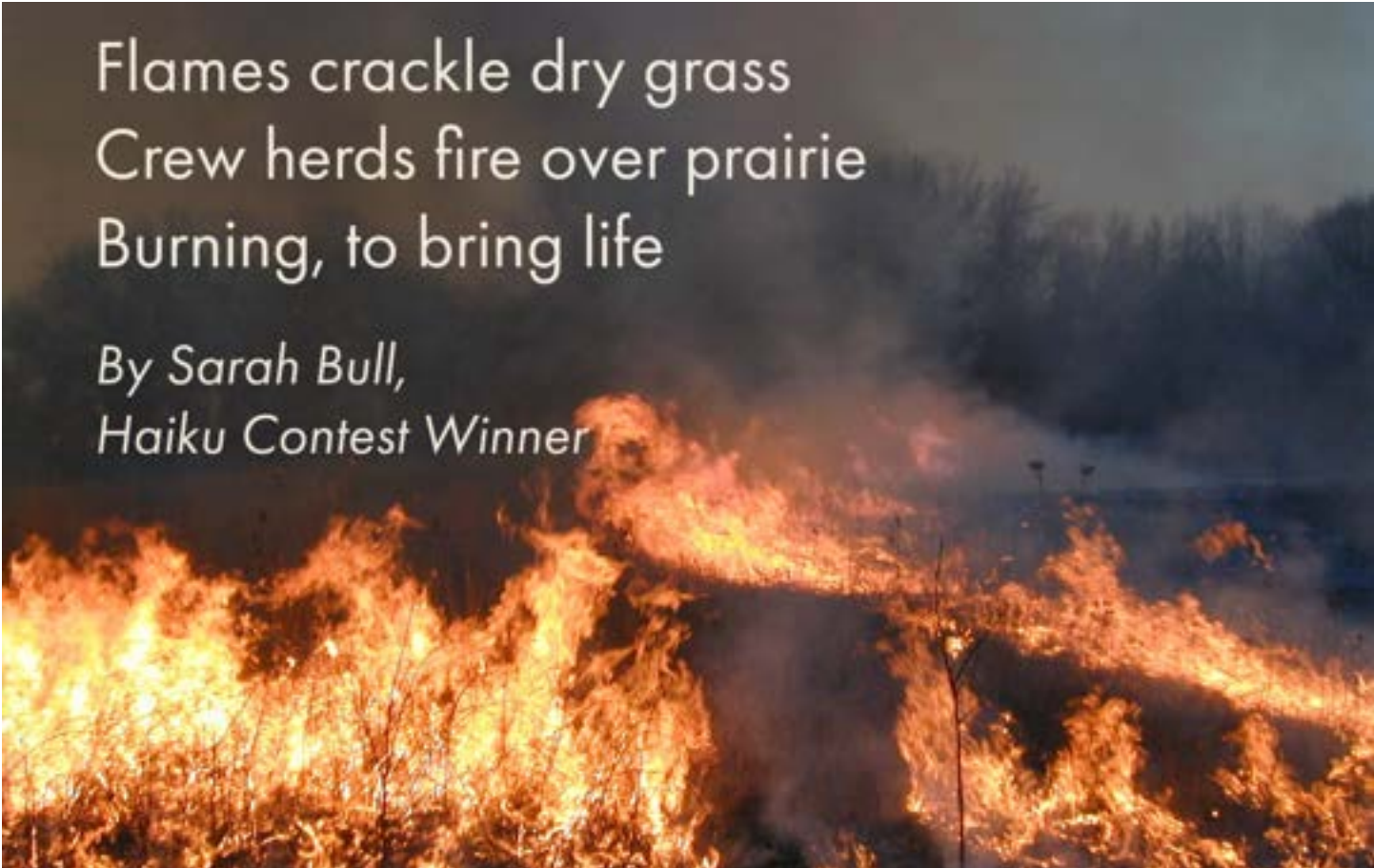
Finding Your Place in the Prairie

By Cassidy Coulson

This year's virtual conference, "Finding Your Place in the Prairie," created a space for attendees near and far to gather virtually and discover their relationship to all things prairie together. Our speakers created a lively agenda that gave way to even livelier discussions, cementing the fact that we all have our own place in the prairie, whether we are newly curious about prairies or prairie experts.

We had over 500 attendees tune in to presentations from creatives, researchers and educators who spoke on various topics relating to how we find our place in the prairie, including Indigenous connections, making art on the prairie and land management considerations. In discussion boards, attendees bonded over stories of their favorite prairies and prairie memories, shared work party preparation tips and dove deep into details of old-growth species and composition. Over 100 eager participants joined for our annual Burn School, paving the way for new folks to bring fire back to the land.

We are grateful to all our attendees, presenters and sponsors who made this year such an inspiring experience and allowed people to gather together regardless of distance. **Our 2026 conference dates have been confirmed for February 18-21** for those wanting to save the date for next year. This summer, we are happy to announce that we will have two summer events as options for those who would enjoy continuing the momentum from the conference by gathering in person to learn about and enjoy the wonders of the prairie. The Coulee Region Chapter will be celebrating the prairies of the Driftless Area by offering prairie tours and educational workshops near La Crosse, WI the weekend of June 21-22. The Glacial Prairie Chapter will be offering a special glimpse of the regionally unique Mukwonago River Oak Barrens near Eagle, WI on July 27. We hope to see you there! ■



Flames crackle dry grass
Crew herds fire over prairie
Burning, to bring life

By Sarah Bull,
Haiku Contest Winner

Photo by Rob Baller

2025 Photo Contest Winners



Flora Winner

"Blazing-Sun at Three Rivers Parks Elm Creek Park"
by Michelle Davis



People Winner

"We are Not Afraid" by Rob Baller



Fauna and Overall Winner

"Chipmunk Reaching for Cup Plant Seeds"
by Catherine McKenzie



Landscape Winner

"Big Prairie at Fair Meadows in June" Gary Shackelford



Seasons Winner

"Fall Lake Prairie" by Robyn Jacobchick

Thank you to our sponsors who helped make our conference possible!

PRESENTING



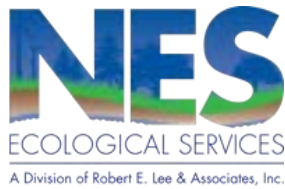
PLATINUM



GOLD



SILVER



BRONZE

Blue Mounds Area Project (BMAP)
Illinois Public Media

Celebrate Nature Near You This Summer

New to fire-dependent habitats? Miss connecting with other prairie-minded people? Want a tour of rare habitats? Join the Coulee Region Chapter and the Glacial Prairie Chapter this summer to enjoy rare prairies and socialization with fellow Prairie Enthusiasts. No matter your home Chapter or prairie experience, we invite all to attend!

Celebrate Prairies of the Driftless Hosted by Coulee Region Chapter Friday, June 20 to Sunday, June 22

La Crosse, WI and Ferryville, WI

Join our first big summer event hosted by the Coulee Region Chapter. On Friday evening, there will be an optional social gathering. Saturday includes prairie hikes and workshops. Connect with fellow Prairie Enthusiasts for dinner and a presentation at the Concordia Ballroom in La Crosse Saturday evening. Continue exploring local prairies in La Crosse on Sunday. Multiple registration options are available to suit your interests. This event is open to and appropriate for both longtime Prairie Enthusiasts and those who are completely new to the field. It is family-friendly, and no prior knowledge is required.



Hikers at Rush Creek State Natural Area. Photo by Melinda Knutson.

Celebrate River Oak Barrens Hosted by Glacial Prairie Chapter Sunday, July 27 – 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Mukwonago River Oak Barrens in Eagle, WI

Join Prairie Enthusiasts to explore and celebrate this regionally unique property containing oak barrens, moist savanna, low prairie and sedge meadow. The event includes a tour with Site Steward and Ecologist Dan Carter. Registration will include a simple lunch onsite. Come enjoy the rare species on this site and see the progress made in 2024 to restore habitat. There is a 40-person capacity limit at the site, so register today to reserve your spot!



Ecologist Dan Carter providing a tour at Mukwonago River Oak Barrens. Photo by Jessica Bizub.

**Learn more about these events and register on our website at
ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org/Summer-Events**

Upcoming Events

Chapter work parties and events are a great way to learn about the habitats near you, connect with your community and feel a sense of accomplishment while stewarding the land. No matter your experience, all are encouraged to attend!

Find a full list of our events on our website at ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org/Events

50th Anniversary of Muralt Bluff Prairie Celebration

Prairie Bluff Chapter

Sunday, April 13 – 1:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Location: Muralt Bluff, Monticello, WI

Celebrate five decades of land stewardship at Muralt Bluff and learn about its history from the folks who dropped a match 50 years ago, followed by a discussion of current management. The event will include a hike to enjoy the stunning vista and hunt for pasque flowers.

Tiffany Bottoms Train Ride

Chippewa Savannas Chapter

Saturday, May 17 – 1:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Location: Durand, WI

Enjoy an open-air train ride through the 13,000 acre Tiffany Wildlife Area. This event is a fundraiser for The Prairie Enthusiasts Chippewa Savannas Chapter. Proceeds will support the Chapter's local prairie and savanna restoration efforts and educational events. Learn about local birds and plants from experts Brian Collins and Mark Leach. There are several stops with chances to explore prime bird and pollinator habitats, including open prairies, wetlands and bottomland forest. This event is hosted in collaboration with the Chippewa Valley Motor Car Association.



A child is introduced to a fragrant prairie plant on a public tour of Muralt Bluff, August 1977. Photo by Gary Eldred.

Butterfly Field Trip

St. Croix Valley Chapter

Saturday, June 14 - 10:00 a.m. to Noon

Location: River Falls, WI

Bob Marquis, noted botanist, biologist, and insect expert, will lead a butterfly survey of Alexander Oak Savanna. Perhaps you've volunteered to help restore this spectacular site. This is an opportunity to enjoy its splendor and help us document its butterfly fauna. Learn the different types of butterflies, how to capture them without harming them and how to photograph them.

What would you like to learn? Where would you like to explore? We'd love to hear your suggestions!

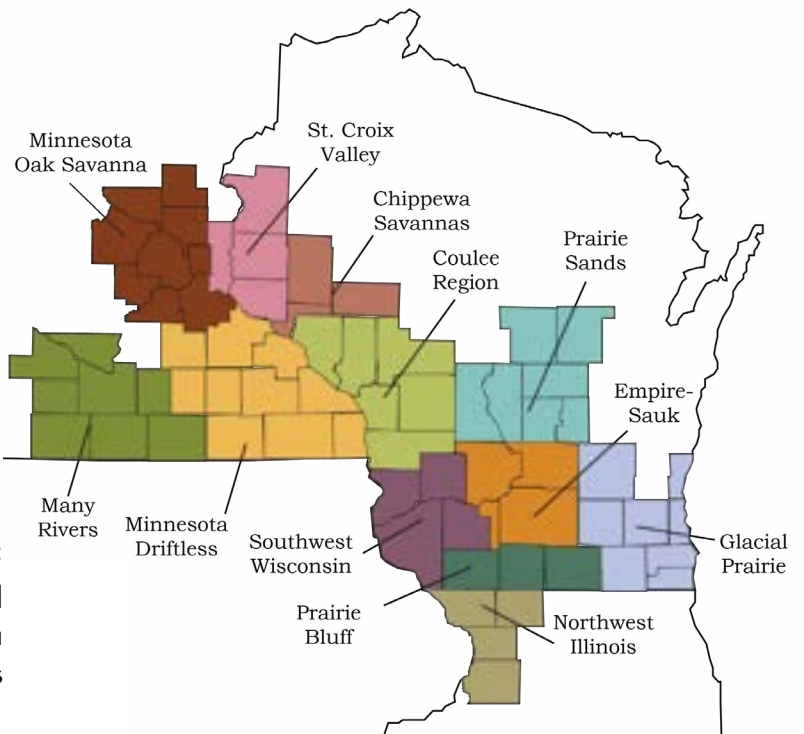
Send a message to Info@ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org

Chapter Updates

Northwest Illinois

By Laura Dufford

Seeds, insects and sand...our chapter has been busy in 2024! Our Steering Committee, Barb Siekowski, Jay Rutherford, Leanne Martin and Laura Dufford, continue to keep the chapter running. Both of our properties—Hanley Savanna near Hanover and Elmoville Prairie near Stockton—are flourishing with flora and fauna. It's exciting to explore the variety of plants and animals that call the prairie home!



Seed Gathering for the Future

Barb Siekowski is our ever-diligent Seed Program Coordinator and once again organized the Chapter's seed collection efforts. Last year we provided seed for Rutherford Refuge, a property owned by Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation (JDCF). Under Barb's guidance, we collected 243 species for six different ecosystems on 10 acres. That is 623 gross pounds of seed! In a few years, you will be able to see those species at Rutherford Refuge.

Hanley Savanna Phenology Walks

Volunteers Pam Johnson, Carol Mantey and Laura Dufford carried out weekly walks last summer at Hanley Savanna. This was a continuation of the project they started in 2023. The focus of this exploration was to document bumblebees, but the group also recorded species of birds, butterflies, dragonflies and damselflies. Blooming dates for flora were also noted.

The group was disappointed in the low number of bumblebees and butterflies that were seen on each outing. Populations of both bumblebees and butterflies seemed much lower than last year. Without an easily identifiable cause and effect, it is difficult sometimes to understand why this happens. Two possible explanations could be early summer rains or pesticides.

Other volunteers also helped spot and identify various species throughout the summer. Here is the total species count: 6 bumblebees, 67 birds, 24 butterflies, 7 dragonflies and 4 damselflies. The sightings of bird

species included the returning yellow-breasted chat and a newcomer to the property—male and female blue grosbeaks which were of special interest this summer.

We plan to do a monthly walk in 2025 as a continuation of this project. Members will be notified of any public walks via email.

Ayer's Sand Prairie Tour

In September, the Chapter sponsored a prairie tour of Ayer's Sand Prairie, an Illinois Nature Preserve. The tour was led by retired Illinois DNR Heritage Biologist, Randy Nyboer. Randy gave us the local and natural history of this site as we walked around the unique sand prairie. We were able to see some unusual species found only on dry, sand prairies. Some species of note were the Illinois State Endangered beach heather (*Hudsonia tomentosa*), clustered poppy mallow (*Callirhoe triangulata*), flax-leaved aster (*Ionactis linariifolius*) and prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia humifusa*). The group enjoyed Randy's lively discussion, knowledge of the preserve history and identification of plant and animals living on Ayer's.

Property Stewardship Management

The Chapter has evolved into a smaller working crew. In the past we had our very active Management and Crew Leader, Ed Strenski. With Ed and other long-time staff retiring or pursuing new careers, we have outsourced our land management to private contractors and some volunteer help. We need to especially thank Becky Janopolous for her professional work at Hanley Savanna the last few years and Jeni Pearce for her



Hixon bluff prairie archipelago. Photo by Mike O'Brien.

volunteer work at both Hanley Savanna and Elmoville prairies. We also have used the services of the Driftless Stewardship Initiative for some larger projects. As we move into the future, we will need to continue outsourcing our stewardship on these properties, but welcome volunteer support as well.

Chapter Expansion: Whiteside County

We welcomed Whiteside County as an official part of the Chapter in 2024. We look forward to including members and hosting activities in this region of our Chapter in the future.

The Year Ahead

Our Steering Committee is continuing to carry on. We hope to offer another tour to a remnant prairie again this summer or fall. We also hope to have a couple of prairie walks at Hanley Savanna. Seed picking continues, with the Chapter providing seed for a 16-acre planting at another JDCF property, Big Sky Nature Reserve. We will be looking for volunteers to help with this. Please look for emails this spring and summer inviting you to join us! If you'd like to participate in being a part of our Steering Committee, planning events, or helping with land management, please contact Laura Dufford (lauradufford@gmail.com). We welcome enthusiastic volunteers to be a part of our Chapter's future! ■

Coulee Region

By Jim Rogala

Collaboration with Friends of the Blufflands Grows

The Coulee Region Chapter continues to work with the Friends of the Blufflands (FBL) to restore bluff prairies on land owned by the City of La Crosse. In 2024, we completed 15 workdays consisting of 342 volunteer hours. The workday activities included typical restoration work such as brush control, wood pile burning, seed collecting and burn unit preparation. The work on burn breaks and clearing burn units has set us up for four spring burns, three of which are in La Crosse's Hixon Forest, and one on a bluff prairie just outside of Hixon Forest. Mike O'Brien provides a blog post with a nice summary of FBL accomplishments in 2024 (see friendsoftheblufflands.org/post/the-blufflands-2024-review-in-pictures-mike-o-brien). The Prairie Enthusiasts also secured a grant from the Paul E. Stry Foundation for contract work on one of the remnants. We hope to continue this successful collaboration and be a part of the impressive restoration efforts on bluff prairies in La Crosse.

Collaborative workdays also occurred on sites

the Coulee Region Chapter are stewarding, including Brownsville Bluff Prairie, Holland Sand Prairie, Rogala Prairies, and Marowski Bluff Prairie (owned by The Prairie Enthusiasts). In total, 10 workdays and 240 volunteer hours were completed. Similar work was done on these sites, including putting in fire breaks on Marowski Bluff Prairie.

Looking Ahead After Challenging Fall Burn Season

Fall burning is always difficult with suitable conditions often eluding us. The 2024 fall burn season was a bust, with not a single burn completed. That leaves us with a full schedule for spring. On the upside, additional time was available for doing prep work for burns. In addition to the necessary burn break work, a lot of interior burn unit work was done. We removed a lot of large, downed wood out of burn units and dropped snags near burn breaks. We also cut and treated small trees and invasive brush within the unit. The latter is always appreciated in the following years when these trees and shrubs would have been top-killed in the burn and required more work cutting and treating many resprouts from each stump. We are now poised for a great spring burn season and are hoping for enough days with suitable conditions to complete all our planned burns.

Join Educational Events This Summer

In addition to the usual field trips we offer, we will have at least two additional events. The first event is a sedge workshop in collaboration with the Minnesota Driftless Chapter. We hope to leave attendees with better skills in sedge identification, which as we know, can be difficult. The second event is the second annual Summer Gathering large event. Last year the Empire-Sauk Chapter hosted a multi-day event that got abbreviated due to the

The Marowski Bluff Prairie work crew on December 7, 2024. Photo by Connie Weedman.



weather. Our chapter hopes to fare better this summer and not get rained out the second day. See the article on page 29 that has some details about the event. Field trips and these special events are the best opportunity to learn, and they also serve as a great way to socialize with fellow Prairie Enthusiasts. ■

Prairie Sands

By Matt Dettlaff

Greetings from the Sand Country! 2024 was a pretty good year for the Prairie Sands Chapter. With some folks settling into their new leadership roles and more members becoming active in meetings and workdays, we seem to be starting to find our stride. Let's start with a quick overview of the accomplishments Prairie Sands achieved in the past year.

- Conducted five workdays on members' properties, achieving much-needed habitat improvement while also sharing best practices. The common enemy seemed to be the dreaded B-word (buckthorn).
- Held our inaugural Pollinator Picnic at John Muir Park with our own Dr. Ben Grady serving as host and guide to the interesting insects with which we share our prairie paradises.
- Our members Marc and Leigh Johnson took the initiative to host a Nature Fair in Waushara County with other nature-based groups from the area. There was good foot traffic through the fair allowing us to spread the good word about fire-dependent ecosystems and the critical work done by The Prairie Enthusiasts.
- We held our annual end-of-year meeting to review where we stand year-to-date on our 1- and 3-year goals and objectives. Although we are not achieving the level of performance we expected for 2024, we did develop several ideas on how to close those gaps in 2025.

So, overall, we had a very good year in 2024 by gaining traction as a group and illustrating we do have a positive impact with our efforts. By identifying those areas in which we can expand and others in which we can improve, we expect to gain more momentum and see better results in 2025.

Keep your eyes peeled and check out the Events Calendar on our website for some exciting outings in the Prairie Sands region later this year. Until then, stay warm while plotting and scheming improvement plans for your own prairie paradises. ■



St. Croix Valley "Plant a Prairie" workshop attendees.
Photo by Robert Marquis.

St. Croix Valley

Sparkling Local Change: Planting a Prairie Workshop at Camp St. Croix

By Robert Marquis

On November 9, 2024, the St. Croix Chapter hosted an all-day workshop on "How to Plant a Prairie" at the scenic YMCA Camp St. Croix on the bluff above the St. Croix River, just south of Hudson, WI. The immediate goal of the workshop was to provide information to beginners on how to plant their own personal prairie. The long-term goal was to increase the number of prairie owners and the amount of prairie in the region. We saw this workshop as the first step in this process. Instruction was provided for those wanting to stay small scale (i.e., planting a prairie garden) to those wanting to return multiple acres of land to continuous prairie. The workshop was well attended (114 registrants), and participants were enthusiastic and motivated about the topic.

The morning talks focused on "why" and "how to" establish a prairie. Harvey Halvorsen and Ruth Hilfiker first discussed the value of prairies. The Prairie Enthusiasts Ecologist Dan Carter discussed how to treat a tract of land to get a prairie started: assessing what to plant, when and how to plant, and how to be successful in the

first stages. Alex Bouthilet then described approaches for maintaining success over the next 5-10 years.

After lunch, more presentations were covered: local ordinances regarding burning (Prescott Bergh), The Prairie Enthusiasts St. Croix Valley burn program (Evanne Hunt), funding opportunities and logistical help from local government agencies and non-governmental organizations (Ka Vang), and a description of services provided by a local prairie restoration contractor, focusing in particular on prairie gardens (Owen Scherping of Prairie Restorations). The final session was a panel discussion following four short presentations on the successes and trials of five landowners' experiences of establishing their own prairies. The panel consisted of Ruth Hilfiker, Harvey Halvorsen, Ginny Gaynor, Prescott Bergh and Alex Bouthilet.

Participant packets included a list of local seed companies and native plant nurseries (several of whom offered discounts for participants), a list of contractors that provide the first steps in prairie establishment (for those who are not totally do-it-yourselfers), information on support and funding, and a chart of various strategies for successful prairie establishment.

Participant questionnaires filled out at the end of the workshop were overwhelmingly positive. Attendees suggested some areas of improvement such as additional information on seed mixes, different kinds of herbicides

and budgeting.

To support and encourage participants' prairie establishment efforts, we planned 2-3 Zoom roundtables this winter and spring. The first roundtable covered how to select seed mixes. Other topics are still being discussed. During the summer we will sponsor field trips to various local members' prairies that are "in construction." We hope that these additional efforts will work to maintain enthusiasm and turn that enthusiasm into action. The Zoom roundtables and field trips are open to everyone, with online registration via the St. Croix Valley Chapter webpage.

Workshop planning began about 16 months in advance by the Chapter Education Committee (Prescott Bergh, Ginny Gaynor, Evanne Hunt, Bob Marquis and Ginny Yingling). A grant from the St. Croix Valley Foundation helped support the workshop. The committee wishes to thank the Foundation, speakers, all registrants and the staff of the YMCA camp for making the event successful. We especially thank Greg Korman for helping with all things AV during the workshop itself.



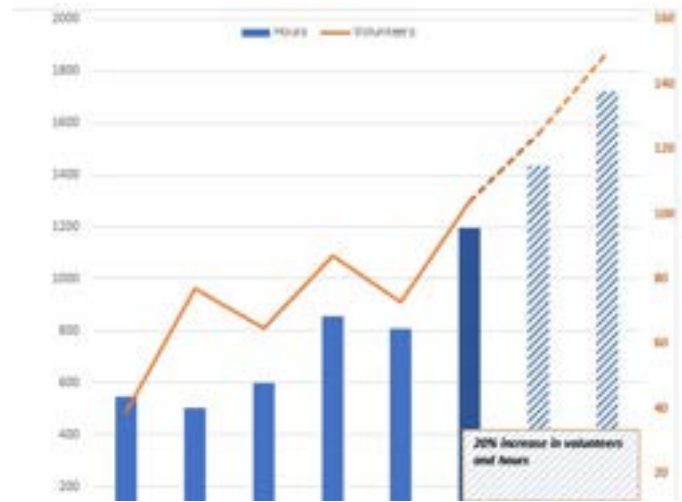
St. Croix Valley Chapter Member, Robert Marquis (left), is joined by Ecologist Dan Carter (middle) and Evanne Hunt (right). Evanne and Dan were two of the presenters at the at the Planting a Prairie workshop. Photo by unknown photographer.

We Were Busy in 2024!

By Evanne Hunt

Our Chapter collected seed, cut buckthorn and invasive non-native trees on our project sites including Alexander Oak Savanna, Blueberry Hill, Foster Conservation Area, Rocky Branch Savanna, and River Hills Park in 2024.

We planned a 20% increase in volunteers and hours. However, we realized a 43% increase in the number of volunteers that attend our work parties and a 48% increase in the hours volunteered for work parties and outreach events!



Events Planned for 2025

By Evanne Hunt

Our Chapter has a robust list of field trips and outreach events scheduled for the spring and summer. Join us!

The Chapter will have a table at Earth Fest on Saturday, April 26, 2025, from Noon to 4:00 p.m. at the UW-River Falls University Center. Evanne will reach out to volunteers in early April.

We will also have a table at the Belwin Bison Festival on May 17, 2025, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Evanne will reach out to volunteers in late April.

Field trips to "in progress" prairie plantings as follow up to the "How to Plant a Prairie" workshop and to our project sites are planned.

We will also have monthly Chapter social events, not business meetings, scheduled around a talk or educational presentation. Evanne is looking for a volunteer to help plan and implement these events. Anyone interested should reach out to Evanne at evanne.hunt@outlook.com. ■

Glacial Prairie

By Jessica Bizub

New Year's brings an opportunity to reflect on what's happened, and 2024 was a busy year for our chapter with multiple field trips, educational outings and gatherings. We'd like to share the progress made over the last year on properties the Glacial Prairie Chapter manages.

Benedict Prairie

Our chapter has a management agreement with UW-Milwaukee, the property owner. Located in Kenosha County and stewarded by Alan Eppers, significant progress has been made on this remnant located along an abandoned railway. Through monthly workdays, over a dozen volunteers have cut and treated buckthorn and honeysuckle with Makutus, girdled box elders, pulled dame's rocket and sweet clover, collected prairie dock and several other prairie plant seeds, and consolidated previous site plant inventories. As an indicator of progress, Dan Carter spotted Waxy-leaved meadow-rue (*Thalictrum revolutum*) in an area cleared, a plant which hasn't been seen since 1993.

Adelman and Schwartz Preserve

The Prairie Enthusiasts owns this small hillside prairie in Walworth County. The new site steward, Michaela Rosenthal, has been steadily implementing the updated management plan with volunteer assistance. Brush clearing of several non-native, invasive plant species along the periphery of the dry prairie remnant was much of the restoration focus during winter months.



Glacial Prairie Chapter volunteers clear brush at Mukwonago River Oak Barrens. Photo by Dan Carter.

This property was burned in April 2024 and March 2025, and it will be burned regularly moving forward. With support from several regular volunteers, a host of early season herbaceous invasive species—garlic mustard, dame's rocket, lily of the valley—were removed to reduce population size and seed spread. Coppicing cuts on encroaching cottonwood saplings and smooth sumac suckers filled our summer workdays.

Ellis Easement (Shining Oaks)

Located in western Jefferson County, we hold the conservation easement on this private property. Our Chapter continues to search for a site steward, but progress was made in 2024 through contracted services to remove buckthorn and honeysuckle on the hillside oak opening. The Chapter will follow-up on this work in spring and prepare the property for a prescribed burn during the next dormant season.

Mukwonago River Oak Barrens

Along the Mukwonago River in Waukesha County sits a regionally-rare sandy oak barrens. Dan Carter, site steward, has been diligently at work with volunteers to remove conifers and invasive brush, collect and spread seed, and conduct prescribed burns. In 2024, volunteers logged over 650 hours at the site. Presently, work is focused on connecting open areas of oak barrens habitat with the wetlands along the Mukwonago River by removing areas of conifers and brush and maintaining isolated pockets of remnant vegetation until they can be connected to the larger open areas.

The Glacial Prairie Chapter looks forward to showing off this property at the summer event on July 27 (read more on pg 29).

Joint Work Days with Wisconsin State Natural Areas (SNA) Volunteer Program

Nancy Gloe continues to lead our monthly workdays on high-quality properties owned by the Wisconsin DNR. Volunteers have made significant progress clearing invasives at Scuppernong Springs Nature Trails in the Kettle Moraine State Forest-Southern Unit. More recently we've started clearing brush at Lulu Lake SNA. We also collected seeds at Scuppernong Prairie SNA and along the Ice Age Trail. A highlight of the year was returning to the state's largest bat hibernaculum in Dodge County to continue improving its ability to safely host Wisconsin bats.

Many, many thanks to our volunteer site stewards and workday helpers! None of this would be possible without you, and our area's precious few high-quality natural areas are on a better trajectory because of your efforts. If you'd like to get involved, sign up for our e-newsletter on The Prairie Enthusiasts' website to receive notices about upcoming opportunities to help in the field or learn something new about prairies.

Leadership Changes

As Jessica Bizub transitions to a new role with The Prairie Enthusiasts, the Glacial Prairie Chapter welcomes familiar faces into new positions. Now serving as Interim Chair, Kat O'Connell Valuch previously served as Vice Chair and brings significant organizational strengths to the position. Nancy Gloe, dedicated SNA workday coordinator, will represent the Chapter at Board meetings. Many thanks to all for their service! ■

Southwest Wisconsin

By Jack Kussmaul. Photos by Becky Fernette.

Things have taken place in our Chapter that have allowed us to make large leaps forward in land management. In August, we received a tractor, which meant the end of a lot of manual labor. In November we completed two weeks of forestry mowing at Eldred Prairie and at Borah Creek. Steve Querin-Schultz had obtained a \$10,000 grant for this purpose. It allowed thicket to be cleared both at Borah Creek and at Eldred Prairie. It completed necessary work that could not have been completed without the forestry mower.

There has been a change in leadership for the Southwest Chapter. At our January 15 meeting, Jack Kussmaul retired after seven years as President, to be succeeded by Becky Fernette. Becky has served as Secretary as well as being site steward for Feist Prairie and is an active member of the Barn Committee. Becky will be replaced as Secretary by Lynnette Dornak. Jack intends to remain active in the Chapter, continuing



Southwest Wisconsin Chapter members enjoying a New Year's bonfire at Feist Prairie.

as site steward for Eldred Prairie and Chair of the Land Management Committee and will be joining the Scholarship and the Events Committees.

Two members, Debbie Pavick and Shaun Murphy-Lopez, have retired from the Board, and we have one new board member, Ross Shrago. Ross has been one of the most regular participants in work parties. Personnel may change, but our work goes on.

Individual Site Stewards and others continue to work on all our sites on a regular basis. Two sites schedule regular workdays to bring in larger numbers of volunteers. One of them is Feist Prairie, where Becky has orchestrated several work parties to clear thicket from the edges of the prairie to allow for expansion of the habitat and to prepare fire breaks in anticipation of a spring burn. The other is Eldred Prairie. Much of the back side of this site was forestry mowed this fall. Due to terrain, the machine could not clear out the full area of thicket. To complete the task, volunteers have been working there with chain saws and brush cutters. A major donation to The Prairie Enthusiasts has made it possible to hire Bob Costanza to do additional brushing there.

On the evening of January 4, Becky Fernette hosted a gathering at Feist Prairie. Illuminated by the light of eight burning brush piles, attendees enjoyed food and beverages that Becky prepared over a campfire. The gathering was the first of its kind in our Chapter and was a great success.

The annual Chapter dinner was held January 25 at the Cottonwood in Fennimore. Twenty-three members enjoyed food, camaraderie and drawings. The evening was another success. We look forward to what we can achieve in the upcoming season. ■

Meet the new Southwest Wisconsin Chapter President, Becky Fernette!



Sauk Prairie High School AP Environmental Science class students at Moely Prairie. Photo by Amy Chamberlin.

Empire-Sauk

Sauk Prairie High School Students Explore and Contribute to Local Prairie Ecosystems

By Amy Chamberlin

Students in Patrick Leigh's AP Environmental Science class at Sauk Prairie High School recently took their classroom learning outdoors to deepen their understanding of prairie ecosystems. In a hands-on experience, they were joined by Amy Chamberlin and Paul Anderson, volunteer land managers at Moely Prairie, for a presentation on the importance of prairie restoration. The students learned about the critical role these ecosystems play in supporting biodiversity and maintaining healthy environments.

Following the classroom session, the students embarked on a guided walking tour of Moely Prairie, where they saw firsthand the principles of restoration in action. The tour helped solidify the concepts they had studied and provided a deeper appreciation for local conservation efforts. The students then participated in collecting native seeds from the prairie—seeds that will be used to enhance and restore areas of the prairie that have undergone ecological restoration.

Involvement in environmental stewardship is a key part of the experience, as it encourages students to develop a lifelong appreciation for natural spaces. Many of the students who participated in this project return to Moely Prairie with their families to volunteer at restoration work parties, earn volunteer hours for graduation, or pursue projects for programs like National Honor Society or the National Eagle Scout Association. The volunteer land stewards at Moely Prairie are passionate about

involving young people in these vital efforts and fostering a connection to nature that lasts a lifetime.

Through experiences like these, students not only contribute to meaningful conservation work but also gain a deeper understanding of their role in preserving local ecosystems for future generations.

Volunteer Needed to Lead Restoration Project

By Rich Henderson

Our success in expanding Mounds View Grassland to 830 acres has brought with it an ever-increasing need for management to improve and expand critical habitat for the 35 rare and declining prairie/grassland and oak savanna species that rely on the preserve. These include plants, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals. With volunteers, grant money, and staff, we have made great strides in healing the prairie remnants, establishing oak savanna, planting former cropland back to prairie, controlling targeted invasive plants, removing post-settlement trees and brush, and restoring wetlands and streams. However, there is still much to do.

As of this year, we have stopped leasing the 25-acre pasture in the northeast portion of the A to Z unit of Mounds View. Thus, we are free to begin restoring the pasture back to its original prairie. The pasture is unplowed original prairie sod; however, it is highly degraded. Some prairie species are evident, most notably a large population of marbleseed (*Lithospermum onosmodium*). But we do not yet know how much remains. We are looking forward to seeing just how much native prairie is still present following stimulation of the vegetation by burning. The pasture is in much need of tree and brush removal, some invasive plant control, prescribed burns and eventual re-introduction of lost plant species.

We need a volunteer to be the point person on this focused recovery project. This person would work with Mounds View's site steward, land management staff, and other volunteers in developing a management approach and plan for the site, establishing a time table and schedule for the work, organizing and leading (or at least co-leading) work parties, monitoring and surveying the site for management needs, conducting independent management work and lining up people to conduct baseline plant, bird, and insect surveys.

If you wish to learn more about this opportunity to get involved and make a difference, contact Rich Henderson at tpe.rhenderson@tds.net. ■

Prairie Enthusiasts Remembered

Memorial gifts dedicated between
November 22, 2024 and March 20, 2025

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

Excerpt from unattributed Indigenous
Peoples song recorded in the Bureau
of American Ethnology bulletins.

Photo by Jesse Bates.

Keith Relyea

December 8, 1941-

November 4, 2024

Remembered by Evanne Hunt

Keith enjoyed the outdoors and volunteered many hours helping The Prairie Enthusiasts restore remnant prairies. He also helped build and maintain hiking trails with the Ice Age National Scenic Trail.

I remembered working with Keith, "our conversations while cutting buckthorn were always so interesting. He brought a world view to our work that helped me see beyond our little Chapter. Cutting buckthorn was then never a mindless chore." ■

In memory of:

Susan Connell-Magee

Remembered by
Kevin & Deborah Magee

Brennan Peter DeLap

Remembered by
Russell Delap &
Bonnie Schlinder-DeLap

Janice Froelich

Remembered by Robert Novy

Michelle Gaard

Remembered by Harriet Mason

Ashley Gramm

Remembered by
Gretchen Hoffman
Anna Oldenburg

Elizabeth Hardin

Remembered by Carol Hardin

Don Justin

Remembered by Donna Justin

David Lovell

Remembered by Christopher McVoy

Craig Maier

Remembered by
Gary Werner & Melanie Lord

Patricia O'Hare

Remembered by Shelley O'Hare

Mary Sulzer Puntillo

Remembered by
Chuck Anderson & Kassie Stahl
Gloria Baertschi
Nancy Baumgardner
Don & Martha Blum
Sandy Borman & Paul Untiet
Joy Brown
Louise Brunkow
Roger & Daphne Brunkow
Victoria Rozak Colle
Betsy D'Angelo
Micki & Ken Duerst
Gene & Alice Fahrney
Jeff Falkner
Eugene Gessler & Karen Clinger
Duane & Gloria Godfrey

Don & Sue Halvorsen

Dale & Bill Hustad

William & Eloise Kuenzi

Sandra & Walter Ladik

Martha & Douglas Nelson

Sharon Olson

Rick Orton & Karin Wells

Jean Prueher

Stacy Regehr

Sonja Short

James Sulzer & Denise Gander

Jim & Jan Veloff

Janice Wexler

Pam Wickersham

Keith Relyea

Remembered by
Mike Miller & Susan Goode

Rhyan Schicker

Remembered by
Peg Furshong & Steve Petrich

Phyllis Reiner Smith

Remembered by Glenn Smith

Keith Solimar

Remembered by
Mike Miller and Susan Goode

Bill Stroud

Remembered by Robert & Mary Stroud

Bill Weege

Remembered by
David & Paula Kraemer

Wendell Wood

Remembered by Cindy Harper



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Welcome, New Members!

November 22, 2024 to March 20, 2025

Chippewa Savannas

Marc Aguirre
 Cindy Harper
 Roberta Kuchta
 Adam Poch
 Gordon Simon

Coulee Region

Emma Aleckson
 Allan Beatty
 Anita & William Doering
 Kris Lawson
 Maggie Meador
 Sharon Olson
 Eric Rotert

Empire-Sauk

Nancy Baumgardner
 Louise Brunkow
 William Coyle
 Hannah Crispi
 Samantha & Bruce
 Crownover
 Lynn DeRolf
 Jeff Falkner
 Chase Fredrick
 Mary Goonan
 Lance Green
 Meghan Hessler
 Dale & Bill Hustad
 Dave Hogg
 Marie & Ralph Jackson
 Wendy Kennan
 Sandra & Walter Ladik
 Jane Lambert
 Jennifer Lange
 Kurt Laning
 Tanya McDonnell

Matthew Millar
 Jocelyn Milner
 Tara Mohan
 Alton Multhauf
 Rick Orton & Karin Wells
 Lera & Matthew O'Sullivan
 Anne Slaughter Perrote
 Jeanne Prueher
 Debra Ready
 Stacy Regehr
 Sally Rossmiller
 Sonja Short
 Jeffrey Shumate
 Nancy & Tom Sundal
 Robert & Mary Stroud
 Jim & Jan Veloff
 Donald Waller

Glacial Prairie

Jean Bosebecker
 Paul Didion
 Mary Faith Cook
 Dave Ginger
 Andrew Harry
 Bob & Patti Heindl
 Di Minardi
 Thomas & Cathy Ryan
 Diane Schmidt
 David Skaros
 Alice Thompson
 Marianne Walsh
 Clare Wolf

Many Rivers

Steven Olson

Minnesota Driftless

Bill & Mary Bailey
 Carla Gallina
 Anna Oldenburg
 David Warner

Minnesota Oak Savanna

Kelly Billig
 Mark Bloomquist
 Mary Bolla
 Gregory Brunko
 Ben Bullard
 Connie & William Caldwell
 Hella Cohen
 Martha Daines
 Richard Edlich & Patricia
 Cooper
 Gretchen Hoffmann
 Jonathon Jongma
 Mark MacLennan
 Martha & Douglas Nelson
 Jim Proctor
 Michael Porter
 Adrienne Richardson
 Roger Schwartz
 Terri Tilotta

Northwest Illinois

John & Merry Hall

Prairie Bluff

Chuck Anderson & Kassie
 Stahl
 Gloria Baertschi
 Silke Barrett
 Don & Martha Blum
 Victoria Rozak Colle

Gene & Alice Fahrney
 Eugene Gessler & Karen
 Clinger
 Julie Gilbertson
 Duane & Gloria Godfrey
 Don & Sue Halvorsen
 Pam Wickersham

Prairie Sands

Jim Bray
 Dona Laufer

Southwest Wisconsin

Jim Bennett
 Eric Gabriel
 Beth Goldowitz
 James Haas
 Kameko Halfmann
 Curt & Kristi Hart
 Sharon Klavins
 Shayne & Denise Labudda
 Christine Richards & John
 Madden
 John and Barb Roethke

St. Croix Valley

Mary Black
 Joe Conrad
 Jeff Grambo
 Shelly Grambo
 Sonja Maki

Unaffiliated

Abby Andrus
 John Ashley
 Libby Balzer
 Carolyn Becker

Danielle Bell
 Gabriel Bertilson
 Mary Blackmore
 Sandy Borman & Paul Untiet
 Joy Brown
 Roger & Daphne Brunkow
 Jeanette Burger
 Giulia Cox & Joshua Kaden
 Savanna Dahl
 Micki and Ken Duerst
 Jane Earnshaw
 Thea Fisher
 Jane Fulton
 Joseph Gannon
 Ruth Gauss
 J. Hamilton
 Steven Hanson
 Kyle Hartje
 Kathleen Hartman
 Laurie Heupel
 Mark & Michaela Holey
 Bob & Deb Huck
 Meggan Kehrl
 Kathy Kerney
 Mark Linder
 Christopher McVoy
 Michael O'Brien
 Brad Reents
 Kim Ritzow
 Virginia Russell
 Sarah Savage
 Ann Sunderman
 John Swanson
 Veronica Tays
 Sarah Toner
 Jack Travis & Diane Morgan
 Daniel Tullis
 Debbie Walters-Kaske