



The PRAIRIE PROMOTER

Igniting Relationships with the Land

Summer 2025

The Meaning of 'C'

Can using
coefficients of
conservatism inform
land management?

Plus

Prairie Games

Erbe Grassland's Expansion

Learning from Prairies





Erbe Grassland—A Growing Refuge

By Reid Bartholomew, Chapter Support Mission Advancement Coordinator

Erik Goplin remembers a time growing up around the fields and pastures off Erbe Road when he and the other neighborhood kids would roam outside across property lines. Exploring the rocky places that couldn't be farmed, he cultivated his fascination with the precious remaining prairie ecosystems on the properties around his home. In 2007, when The Prairie Enthusiasts protected a 64-acre parcel near Erik's family farm, he volunteered to be the site steward.

That habitat, called Erbe Grasslands, is a blend of original remnant prairie, savanna sod and former

The rolling hills of Erbe Grassland. Photo by Ron Lutz II.

cropland being restored back to prairie. It is a gently rolling landscape, where grass sways in the wind and shifts into oak savanna. The calls of seven species of grassland birds of Greatest Conservation Need ring out from the landscape, including the bright, buzzy song of the dickcissel and the bobolink's sharp, bubbly ramble, making it a hot spot for birders in the area. Erik most adores the plants in the dry, rocky spots of the property, where dwarf blazing star and birds-foot violet paint purple splashes in short, rough patches.

The work that The Prairie Enthusiasts did on the property clearing walnuts and reintroducing prescribed burns to the land drew the attention of the neighbors, beginning conversations that have led to the gradual expansion of the property. The Ihm addition in 2012 added 36 acres of prairie and oak savanna, and Erik's family sold their own property to the Prairie Enthusiasts in 2022, protecting 40 acres of high-quality remnant prairie and reconstructed prairies that The Prairie Enthusiasts had been stewarding for 20 years. Most recently, the site charmed nearby landowner Greer Deneen.

Like Erik, Greer grew up on a picturesque Wisconsin farm. She has fond memories of her father and mother milking cows and tending the land. "My brother Greg and I had the honor of growing up in a place off the beaten path. I couldn't see another house; it was just beautiful rolling hills all around us," Greer recalls. Her family dedicated their lives to transforming the property into a thriving, bountiful farm, starting with regenerative agricultural practices, and then eventually returning acreage to prairie.

When Greer's parents passed, the family wanted to ensure their caring legacy continued for generations to come. Greer was searching for a pathway to make this dream a reality. One day, she drove by Erbe Grassland. "I saw this thriving prairie, and I wondered how this remarkable place came to be. I stopped by the neighbors to learn more, and they got me in touch with The Prairie Enthusiasts."

Greer's family was thrilled to work alongside The Prairie Enthusiasts to add their 77 acre property to Erbe Grassland. Not only was the property protected in March of this year, but thanks to this supportive community, the entire \$1.1M fundraising goal was also met. With the addition of the Uren Trust property, plants, animals and people may enjoy a combined 217-acre preserve. The family's decision means that a community of land stewards will carry on her family's caring legacy, ensuring future generations may experience the natural beauty that Greer's family cherished for decades.

Today, Prairie Enthusiasts are working to expand and enhance the critical habitat that's comprised of over 100 native plant species. Volunteers are working to remove invasive species from the expanded Erbe Grassland, reducing populations of invasive wild parsnip, as well as routinely conducting prescribed burns and interseeding the old pasture with native plants. One of the major goals Erik has for the property is to control the woody invasives like buckthorn within the oak savanna, opening up some light for the native species on the ground.



Dickcissel on compass plant (Silphium laciniatum) at Erbe Grassland. Photo by Joshua Mayer.

Erik is thrilled that others are able to experience this land in the way that he did as a child, roaming freely and learning to identify the native flora and fauna by experiencing them firsthand. With the help of Erik, Greer and her family, and many other volunteers, the property will remain a refuge for people and wildlife alike for years to come. ■

Thank you to the Dane County's Conservation Fund Grant Program, Wisconsin's Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, Bobolink Foundation, Dane County Conservation League and members of The Prairie Enthusiasts who helped make the protection of this fire-dependent ecosystem possible.

The PRAIRIE PROMOTER

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St. Croix Valley volunteers
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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 annual photo contest winner
showing a chipmunk reaching for cup plant seeds.
Photo by Catherine McKenzie.



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



President's Message

Why the Urgency in Our Mission?

Jim Rogala, President

I've enjoyed seeing the old railroad prairie remnants while running and biking on the La Crosse River State Trail since moving to West Salem in 1994. Over that time, I've witnessed the loss of those railroad prairie remnants at an alarming rate. Most of that loss has been from woody encroachment, but also from the spread of invasive herbaceous species along the trail. One little remnant close to West Salem was the source of some seed for my CRP planting in 2001. Species that I collected included white wild indigo (*Baptisia lactea*), cream gentian (*Gentiana flavida*), yellow coneflower (*Ratibida pinnata*), stiff goldenrod (*Solidago rigida*), and prairie cinquefoil (*Drymocallis arguta*). I could not find any of these species in that location last year. The species replacing them were sumac, aspen, honeysuckle, leafy spurge, wild parsnip and spotted knapweed. Very depressing!

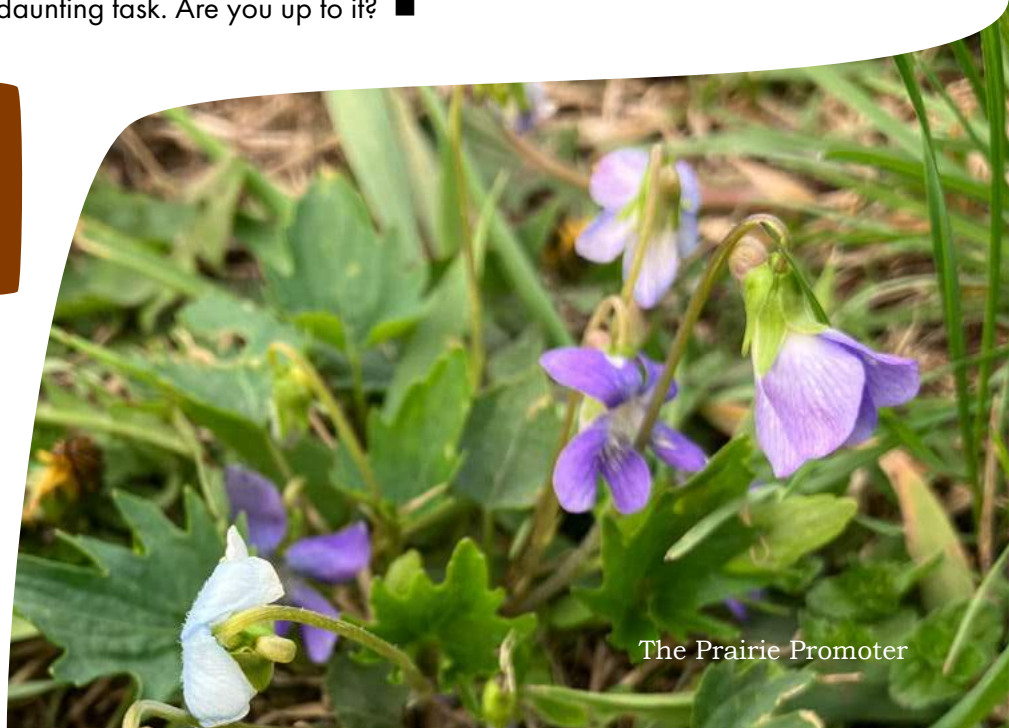
The obvious losses of prairie remnants exhibited by changes in plant communities are just part of the concern, as all the associated components of prairies that rely on the plants are likely lost as well. A big part of the prairie conservation movement is reconstructing prairies by planting prairie plants on land such as old agricultural lands. Those can be somewhat successful and get more prairie plants (although mostly the common species) in the landscape, but prairies are more than plants. Much of the biodiversity on remnant prairies can't be "planted," and we don't have any evidence that many of the prairie obligate species such as some invertebrates have established on reconstructed prairies.

The urgency in our mission to protect and steward prairie remnants is that these remnants harbor species that simply can't be found anywhere else. The size of remnants and the distribution across the landscape are concerning. Without management, encroachment from woody species continues to reduce the size to the point where populations can't sustain themselves. Even when encroachment is slow, the lack of fire on most remnants results in thatch build up that alters the plant community and associated animal communities. Eventually, well-functioning prairie communities are lost; thereby reducing connectivity, making species and genetic exchange difficult. Population sizes are certainly being reduced, and some species are very likely to be lost, as remnants continue to be degraded and lost.

With this urgency in mind, the Board of The Prairie Enthusiasts has been pursuing unprecedented growth in our organization. We need more staff and volunteers to make as much progress as possible before we lose more remnants. We intend to ramp up our land protection, provide more support and increase the number of volunteers who do critical land management, and reach more landowners with resources for managing their own remnants. However, at the same time, we need to ensure that the remnants being protected and cared for now are still protected and stewarded for many generations to come. This is all a daunting task. Are you up to it? ■

Up for the challenge of protecting and caring for remnants? Learn how to get involved by emailing Info@ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org

Prairie violet (*Viola pedatifida*) by Sammy Dalati.





Executive Director's Message

Inspired by Collaboration

Debra Behrens, Executive Director

Logs soared through the air, and our laughter echoed back from the valley below. This is the season of action and our team was celebrating our annual day of service for Earth Day. Coulee Region Chapter volunteers Todd Huffman, Laurie Arzaga, Max Sorenson and Jim Rogala hosted us and joined in lofting dead wood down the bluff. The cool morning turned into a warm day, and we chatted with one another, laughing and feeling the triumph of clearing the area.

For many of us, this was our first-ever visit to Marowski Bluff, a Coulee Region Chapter project that was protected by The Prairie Enthusiasts in December 2023. This was a rare chance to witness how the behind-the-scenes work we do has a real mission impact—the accounting, fundraising, project management and more that have allowed The Prairie Enthusiasts to permanently protect rare habitat and support volunteers in their stewardship of the land.

We Prairie Enthusiasts are a driven bunch. We know that the work we do is important and there is much to be done. Today, less than 1% of old-growth prairies remain, and only a small fraction of what is left has been protected. Yet these remnant ecosystems continue to slip away due to lack of fire and the unrelenting pressures of development and production. It is a tragic loss of biodiversity and of the knowledge we need to restore healthy native ecosystems in the places we live. When we lose native habitat, we lose the species that rely on these systems—the thrum of crawling, slithering, flitting, fluttering, flying and leaping life that sparks delight for our senses on the prairie.

Through ignorance and greed, too many of our native ecosystems have been plundered and squandered. But that is not the whole story. Over the past 50 years, people with heart, tenacity, awareness and a willingness to act have stepped in to protect and restore the land. Person by person, they developed communities willing to work for these places and ignited a growing movement of Prairie Enthusiasts fired up to seek out and protect what remains.

With this increasing momentum and the urgent need for action, The Prairie Enthusiasts is building capacity towards an ambitious goal: to double the number of sites we have protected by 2032. The challenges ahead are daunting but knowing what is at stake, and what a dedicated few have already accomplished, I think the only true failure would be not to try.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by habitat degradation and loss, but what The Prairie Enthusiasts offers is an opportunity to *do something* that makes a tangible difference for threatened ecosystems right where you live. I feel grateful for the legacy that has already been created for us and responsible not only for caring for the places we have protected, but to seek out and restore what remains before it is lost to us forever. Our grassroots community inspires me to believe in what we can accomplish together.

We are a community of ecologists, landowners, artists and poets. Some have been learning about prairies and caring for them for 50 years; others are just now finding their place in the prairie. The season's work parties, field trips and trainings are opportunities for us to share knowledge and encouragement with one another. It's easy to get caught up in the *doing* of our mission, but this season I urge you to also take time to *enjoy* your efforts. The connection with one another is just as valuable as our connection to the land.

By working together, throwing one log at a time, we cleared a burn unit that will allow us to restore more habitat at Marowski Bluff. By joining us, you can experience the rewards of doing your part within a community of people working alongside you. Together, we are restoring the land, our sense of community and ourselves. ■



Chapter Support Team and Coulee Region Members at Marowski Bluff. Photo by Sarah Barron.

Management Toolbox

Curated 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. For this issue, our land management committee was exploring best practices for species diversity at a site in reference to an article in the *British Ecological Society*. I encourage others to provide ideas for articles. You can send those ideas to me at JRogala@ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org.

Point of View: Research

By Dan Carter, *The Prairie Enthusiasts Ecologist*

I recently sent an article to Rich Henderson and other titled: *Establishing the plant component of a tallgrass prairie restoration using a remnant reference ecosystem model: A case study* by Sluis, Kucera and Sullivan (2025). One interesting finding of their research was that clonal species with widely spaced ramets (stems) may accelerate successional processes—the development of old-growth-like characteristics. Some of these species were established in that study using plugs (e.g., wild strawberry, *Fragaria virginiana*). Others were established by seed (e.g., northern bedstraw, *Galium boreale*). In my experience, a common denominator among the prairie plantings that best approximate original prairie is establishment of such species—not just because they are also important components of our original prairies, but some of them seem to be associated with low statured vegetation and high small-scale diversity, due to partial parasitism, allelopathy, and/or direct competition. In the early years of a planting, most of these species establish relatively dense, discrete patches, but over time they grow into and through one another, which also seems to contribute to diversity. In old-growth remnant prairies these species often occur as widely spaced stems over large areas, forming a rich matrix within which many other non-clonal species exist. Rich Henderson replied with some comments about work along these lines that is ongoing on The Prairie Enthusiasts' properties.

Image of wood betony, *Pedicularis canadensis*, by Jessica Bizub.

Point of View: Practice

By Rich Henderson, *Empire-Sauk Chapter Board Representative and Mounds View Grassland Site Steward*

The study produced very useful data and documentation, although I was a little disappointed that while they pointed out the hemi-parasitic effect/role of *Comandra umbellata* (bastard toadflax), they neglected to also mention wood betony (*Pedicularis canadensis*).

At Mounds View Grassland, we have planted out 1,191 wild strawberries to date. They have been establishing and spreading very well in wet-mesic to mesic soils but have been a little slower in dry-mesic soils. From a single 4 x 4 foot raised bed box I have been extracting approximately 200 growing points per year with no discernable drop in production.

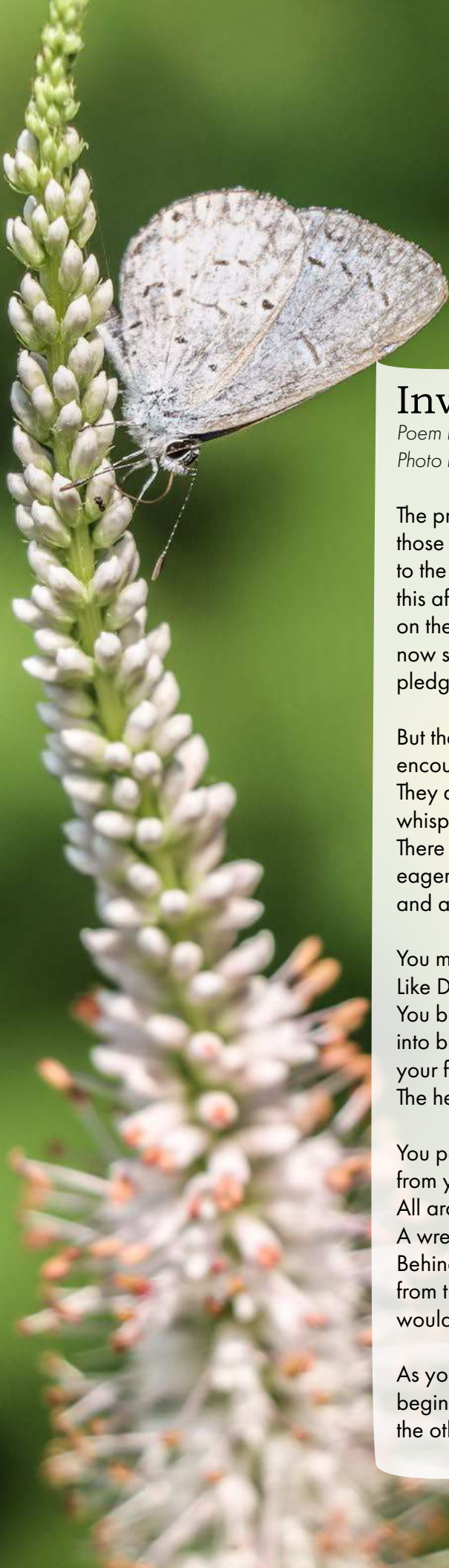
My limited efforts to plant out root sections of *Comandra umbellata* and *Galium boreale* (northern bedstraw) have not proven successful. The seeding of these two species has been working better, but it seems to take 10-15 years before the plants become evident from seed, and only in low numbers, at least for *Comandra umbellata*. I have been upping our efforts to collect more seeds of these species.

I have been wanting to start root-production beds of *Carex meadii* (Mead's sedge) for some time—I have given up trying to collect seed—but have not gotten around to it. I'll make a real effort this year. ■

The link to the publication being referenced can be found at: <https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/2688-8319.70014>



You can contribute to this research by volunteering on one of our sites. Send a message to Info@ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org to learn more and get involved.



Invasives

Poem by Susan Chambers, Many Rivers Chapter Chair

Photo by Brandie Myhre

The prairie promises weeks of blazing stars:
those purple spears that point right up
to the full moon which creeps across
this afternoon, a pale silver surprise
on the sapphire sky. Big bluestem grass
now stretches almost to your shoulder,
pledges to grow even taller.

But there are cottonwood seedlings,
encouraged by heavy summer showers.
They are scattered among the best blooms,
whisper "shade is the prairie's enemy."
There are bursting thistle blooms,
eager to spread their seed faster than a hailstorm,
and as destructive to the steadfast prairie flowers.

You move the acres armed only with a trimmer.
Like David facing Goliath you show no fear.
You brush by head high compass plants, just coming
into bloom. You nod to grey cone flowers,
your floppy hat fanning your face.
The heat is visible in waves across the forbs.

You pause to take a deep drink
from your iced jug of water.
All around the field bluebirds call.
A wren chastises you for your approach.
Behind, half the prairie is freed
from those non-native freeloaders who
would like to overwhelm this piece of heaven.

As you raise your tool,
begin to move steadily forward,
the other half calls out your name.

Flagging Tape Dispenser Instructions

Article and Photo by Bob Retko, Southwest Wisconsin Chapter Member

Flagging tape has a multitude of land management applications, from prairies to oak savannas. We often use it to mark outbreaks of invasive plants on our property. Once the seal is broken on a roll of flagging tape, it should be in a dispenser of some kind to prevent it from unrolling. Flagging tape dispensers are available online; however, some are rather pricey.

Flagging tape comes in 1 inch and 1³/₁₆ inch widths in 150 foot rolls. The best dispenser I found for 1 inch wide flagging tape can be made from a 1¹/₄ inch high, round tuna can, preferably steel. However, should the lid have a pull tab, do not pop the top lid. Tuna also comes 1³/₄ inch high cans that work well for 1³/₁₆ inch wide flagging tape.

To remove the lid, I use a manual safe cut can opener that leaves no sharp edges. Once the lid is off, I drill a 1/4 inch diameter hole in the center of the top and bottom of the can. I then insert a 1/4 x 2 inch long steel rivet. A 1/4 inch diameter bolt or nail would also work. I then drill two 1/4 inch diameter holes in the lid to monitor how much flagging tape remains on the roll. A 1/2 inch hole is then drilled in the side of the can where 3/8 inch inside diameter rubber grommet is inserted. Drilled holes may require some filing to smooth the rough edges. The lid is replaced on the can and the rivet shaft is marked to receive a drill hole for a small hitch pin allowing for enough pressure to keep the lid in place. If the lid has a pull tab, drill out the pull tab rivet and remove the tab. The can center rivet or bolt is then cut to length. Once the flagging tape is inserted through the rubber grommet, the lid is placed back on the can and the small hitch pin is inserted. The flagging tape dispenser is now complete and will cost you less than \$2 when you deduct the cost of the tuna. Most all hardware stores have small hitch pins and rubber grommets. I prefer using 1 inch flagging tape in a 1¹/₄ inch can as it fits better in a pocket. ■



Photo Contest Reminder



Every February, The Prairie Enthusiasts hosts a photo contest as part of our annual conference. It's an opportunity to highlight the places and people throughout our tri-state region. The winning photo is also the cover of one of the issues of *The Prairie Promoter*. The cover of this summer issue is this year's photo contest winner Catherine McKenzie. As we're in peak bloom time, we encourage all of you photo bugs within our community to consider sharing what you've captured with us.

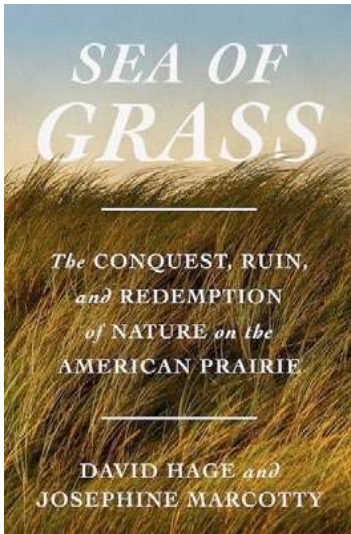
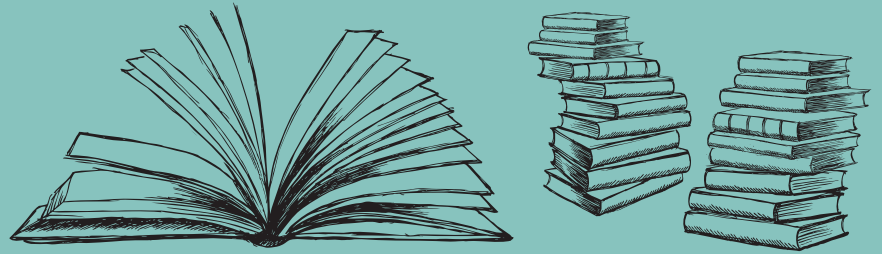
The contest includes five categories: Fauna, Flora, Landscapes, People and Seasons. Contestants are welcome to submit one photo per category. We will be accepting submissions now through January. Submissions and contest questions can be sent to Info@ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org. ■

2025 Landscape Contest Winner. Big Prairie at Fair Meadows in June. Common spiderwort (Tradescantia ohioensis), white wild indigo (Baptisia alba), and northern bedstraw (Galium boreale) are shown in full bloom. Photo by Gary Shackelford.

Book Review

Sea of Grass

Written by Dave Hage and Josephine Marcotty
Reviewed by Connie Nelson



When I look at the little piece of cornfield I've been trying to turn into something of a prairie, I don't see the grasses—the big bluestem, the switchgrass—or the forbs. What I see are waves. Waves of subtle color, gracefully swaying in the wind that seems always to be blowing in this part of western Wisconsin.

I think of it as my sea, my sea of grass.

In the 15 or so years I've been tending it—watching it transform from row crop to CRP to dandelions to a prairie under restoration—I've learned a lot. I've seen how my tiny slice of wannabe prairie weathers wet and, now more commonly, dry years. How its tough-as-nails plants form deep, tenacious roots that keep the soil from washing down the coulees. How it naturally attracts a bounty of birds, butterflies and, come late spring, fireflies.

But I didn't understand the history, the promise and the power of American prairie until I read the riveting new book by Dave Hage and Josephine Marcotty, *Sea of Grass: The Conquest, Ruin and Redemption of Nature on the American Prairie* (Random House, \$32). Nor did I understand that this unique and long-overlooked ecosystem is both essential to the planet and under threat.

In almost poetic terms, Hage and Marcotty describe how the prairie evolved over millenia, how it thrived in concert with Indigenous Peoples, and how it has been misunderstood and misused ever since European American settlers came to "tame" the west.

Using oral histories, period writings and diaries, the authors document how the government, land speculators and settlers came to consider the prairie a "wasteland" that needed to be privatized and developed for the "public good." They examine how most of America's grasslands have been plowed under and its potholes and wetlands drained. And how the modern-day industrial agriculture that has replaced it has wreaked havoc on the land, the water, the animals and insects that once inhabited it—as well as us humans.

In interviews with a host of scientists, Hage and Marcotty (both former journalists), take fairly deep dives into fertilizer use, soil composition and water toxicity. But they do so in an accessible way, making it easier to understand how a plowed prairie releases greenhouse gasses, that our reliance on synthetic fertilizer was a boon that became a bane and how the loss of plant diversity leads to the loss of pollinators—and why we should care about all of the above.

While they don't blame those who now work what was once mid-America's vast prairie, Hage and Marcotty do take aim at the policies and systems that continue to promote the thoughtless destruction of what is widely considered "one of the world's last buffers against climate change." They also highlight the efforts of contemporary farmers, ranchers, conservationists and scientists who are "working with nature rather than fighting it."

The message of the book is undoubtedly dire: The continued destruction of the prairie puts our planet at peril. And yet I came away from *Sea of Grass* with an overriding sense of awe at what this simple seeming landscape provides, its majesty and why the authors call it "one of the greatest ecosystems on the planet."

I know that one little patch of prairie like the one I'm lucky enough to tend isn't going to halt climate change or keep rivers free from toxins. But I also know that a field of blue stem and wild white indigo is a wonderland, not a wasteland. Thanks to this deeply researched, beautifully written book, I know I'll never take for granted the sight of a monarch feeding on a stalk of milkweed or the fireflies gliding over the grasses after sunset. ■

Connie Nelson is a retired writer and editor. She is working to restore a small patch of prairie in the Driftless area of western Wisconsin.



Assessing Ecological Integrity: An Example from Grazed and Ungrazed Nachusa Old-Growth Prairie

Story and Photos by Ecologist Dan Carter

In recent issues, I contributed a series of articles about how old-growth fire-dependent ecosystems originate from and are perpetuated by stability more than by disturbance in relation to stewardship practices—especially use of fire and grazing.¹

One way we measure the extent to which an ecosystem has the abiotic and biotic elements needed to perpetuate itself—an ecosystem's ecological integrity—is by assessing floristic quality. In particular, we assign "coefficients" of conservatism to vascular plant species on a scale of zero to ten based on how faithful or "conservative"² they are to old growth (remnants). Species assigned a value of ten are the most conservative. These numbers have ecological meaning. Relatively conservative species tend to be the most specialized to their abiotic and biotic environments. They often have more or stronger symbioses with other plants, fungi, insects, and other organisms, and they are usually part of communities structured by limiting nutrients or water compared to communities structured by competition for light in the presence of abundant available nutrients and water. For example, conservative species like prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*, Wisconsin coefficient of conservatism 10) are associated with and dependent on mycorrhizal fungi,^{3,4} have more co-evolved relationships with consumers (e.g., invertebrates like the red-tailed prairie leafhopper, *Aflexia rubranura*⁵) and are strongly associated with old-growth prairies (or efforts that re-create their conditions). In contrast, weedy or opportunistic native plants like mare's tail (*Conyza canadensis*, Wisconsin coefficient of conservatism = 0) are less mycorrhizal,⁶ interact with relatively few consumers and are largely restricted to disturbed

Figure 1. Yellow star grass (*Hypoxis hirsuta*, Wisconsin C = 8), a relatively conservative native species of old-growth herbaceous vegetation in prairies, oak woods, savannas, and fens.

environments where nutrients are more available. If you bring me a specimen of mare's tail, I won't know if it came from your vegetable garden, a fallow agricultural field or the soil disturbance associated with a mammal burrow out on an old-growth prairie. I will know that it came from a place where competition has been removed or suppressed and where light and nutrients are readily available. Most of our native flora (~84%) is at least moderately conservative, with coefficients of four or higher, and these species also largely comprise our old-growth ecosystems. Plant communities with mean coefficients of conservatism (mean C) among constituent species above 4.5 are typically of natural area quality (Fig. 1). Species with lower coefficients aren't bad, but when abundant, the land is convalescent.

In plant community ecology, mainstay metrics like species richness,⁷ evenness⁸ and diversity⁹ give us information about how many species are present and how equitable their abundances are, but they do not provide the vital context of what kinds of species they are. Are the species present associated with disturbed and degraded land? Do they indicate that an ecosystem is changing states from one type to another? Are they species associated with old-growth, intact ecosystems with their many biotic and abiotic relationships? The mean C of the flora in a place gives us that context. Despite that, it's still often omitted from studies of prairie and other old-growth plant communities, and without it, it can be difficult

or impossible to judge whether community changes are associated with loss or gain of ecological integrity.

A recent study by Chakravorty et al. reported responses to five years of bison grazing at Nachusa Grasslands.¹⁰ They included areas of old-growth prairie subject to bison grazing and exclosures that kept out bison activity from portions of those prairies. They also included prairie plantings, wetlands and degraded savannas. Given the pre-European paucity of bison on eastern prairies, and effects I observed on more western prairies as a graduate student, I was interested in what this study had to report (see “Stability Part Two: Why I Seldom Recommend Grazing” in the Summer, 2024 The Prairie Promoter).

Chakravorty et al. found little effect of bison on diversity and composition across community types, though there was some evidence of an increase in non-native relative to native plants after five years of grazing. In other words, bison didn't seem to be hurting things, or at least not much. However, the study did not examine ecological integrity. Were there any changes in mean C in the remnants at Nachusa? The authors provided access to the data used in their analyses online at Dryad,¹¹ so I decided to have a look.

I examined data from the paired grazed and ungrazed (exclosure) plots from the six old-growth prairies included in the study and added coefficients of conservatism developed for Illinois¹² and obtained from Universal FQA¹³ (floristic quality assessment).¹⁴ Six is a small sample, but that's difficult to avoid in the study of old-growth prairies. I calculated mean coefficients of conservatism that were weighted by the relative abundance of each species for grazed and ungrazed plot pairs in the six remnants. Weighted mean C can be more sensitive to change than simply calculating the mean of all coefficients of species observed, because weighted mean C can change without loss or gain of species—just changes in their abundances. For example, in my graduate work¹⁵ I studied changes in mean C across a series of prairie plantings of different ages. Mean C did not change (increase) with planting age, but mean C weighted by relative abundance did change—it increased with age. That's because even the more conservative, slower developing species are detectable in young plantings as small, immature plants if you look closely enough! Those then increase in their relative abundance as plantings age and fast-establishing but less conservative species diminish.

I tested the null hypothesis that there was no difference between grazed and ungrazed portions of the



Figure 2. Giant ragweed (*Ambrosia trifida*, Wisconsin C = 0), an opportunistic native species of a wide range of high light, high nutrient settings.

old-growth prairies against the one-sided alternative that weighted mean C was lower where bison had access for five years. The data were not normal, so more precisely, I tested median differences (Wilcoxon signed rank test in Program R). The difference was not large, but there is marginal evidence that weighted mean C is lower on the bison-grazed portions of the old-growth prairies at Nachusa. Given the data, there is only a 7.8% chance that the null hypothesis is true ($p = 0.078$). The data are represented with a line plot to show all the paired points, with brown dots representing average weighted mean C of both grazed and ungrazed areas before bison grazing started for reference.

There is no evidence that bison are benefiting old-growth prairie ecological integrity after five years, and there is some evidence that the presence of bison may be starting to reduce it. However, weighted mean C values of grazed and ungrazed areas both remain very high (well above 4.5). When data from the most recent five years become available, it will be interesting to see if differences become more pronounced. Five years is not much time.

There are rare species' habitat reasons and cultural reasons for bringing bison back on to the landscape. However, it may not be judicious to put bison

Weighted Mean C in 2019-2020 After 5 Years of Bison Grazing

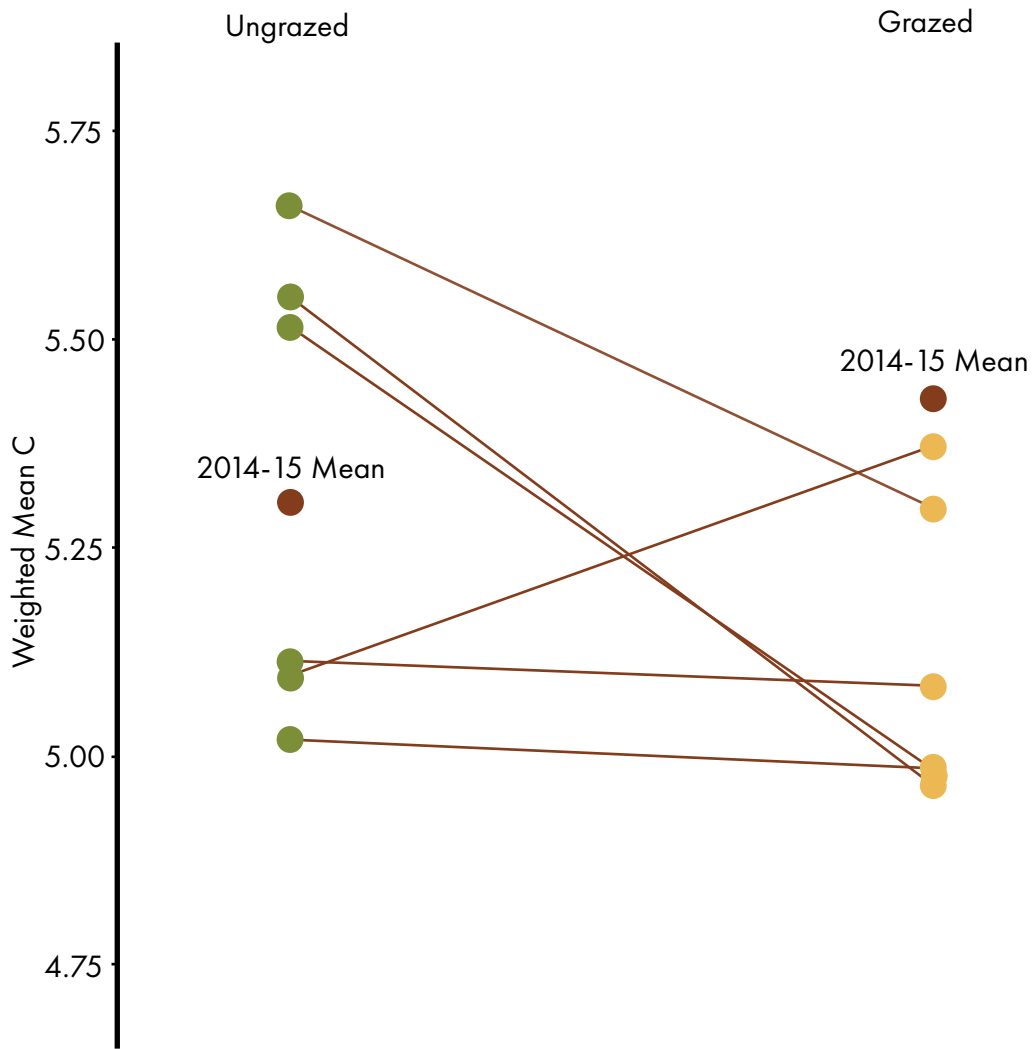


Figure 3. Line plot showing paired points connected by lines representing plots protected from bison within exclosures (green, ungrazed) and accessible to bison (orange, grazed). Gray dots represent mean values prior to grazing inside and outside of exclosures for reference; exclosures did not start with higher weighted mean C. Sampling and initiation of bison grazing were staggered over two years on different prairies, so sampling after five years of grazing occurred in 2019 and 2020.

on our precious few remaining tracts of old-growth prairie, especially if one of the objectives is to sustain ecological integrity. Fortunately, there are plenty of opportunities to do so elsewhere.

When presented with information about how plant communities respond to various practices or treatments, please ask, “how did mean C respond?” Without mean C or other assessments designed around ecological integrity concepts, it is more difficult to assess relevance to our mission—perpetuation of prairie, savanna and other associated ecosystems of the Upper Midwest. Maybe if we keep asking, we’ll start to see mean C more often reported in research, or maybe it will influence more of us to find ways to collect data to inform our work, which Nachusa and those doing research there should be applauded for. I plan to get to work in that regard this field season with the support of the philanthropy of our members.

For those interested in coefficients of conservatism and floristic quality assessment, I recommend reading

Spyreas (2019)¹⁶, and watching a presentation called Ecesis: The Nature of Nature with Justin Thomas on YouTube (most relevant discussion after the 33-minute mark) in addition to some of the other work cited above.

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

The Raccoon

Poem by Carolyn Pralle

Photo by Eric Grycan, Empire-Sauk Chapter Member

At midday, I find the raccoon
asleep, slanted in the crook
of the red oak by the meadow edge,
strong black paws gripping the branch
while the great gray belly droops,
fat this year from turtle eggs.

How simple to think us enemies,
each in our own masks. Instead,
let us share a dream, wild one,
of a world with more turtles,
more long days of summer,
and a cool breeze while you sleep.



Prairie

By Steve Deery, *Prairie Sands Chapter Member*

While working in your prairie bent over pulling weeds or some other tasks, you have a lot of time to think. Recently, I began thinking about what I have learned in the 20 plus years since I started my feeble attempt at turning an old farm field that was a grassy mess, into a prairie like I saw in magazines.

I decided to use each letter of the word **PRAIRIE**.

P is for patience. For me, this is the big one. If you think you are going to do a quick seeding with some mail order species and next year, see a spread of flowers, you will be disappointed. A prairie requires a lot of patience. It will take years to establish, and in the end, you will realize that is part of what makes it so cool. Mother nature works wonders, but at her own pace.

R is for respect. With a prairie project, it will teach you to respect nature. You can try all the things you want, and sometimes nature just says no. Things you expected to bloom, sometimes don't. Refer back to the letter P.

A is for arrogance. You have read all the "how to's" but surely you can cut some corners and get good results sooner, right? Wrong! Developing a prairie is one of the most humbling projects a person can take on. Even when you follow all the guidelines, mother nature can slap you down with a dry spring and summer, and all your expensive seed sits there doing nothing. We are not in control, get used to it.

I is for information. Seek it out. The Prairie Enthusiasts has so much information available to help you. Take advantage of it. There are a lot of forums out there to ask questions and get advice. Try to use them. On letter A, I ignored experienced advice that was out there and wasted a lot of money on seed that would have produced better if I had listened to advice and had patience.

R is for reward. For this I am not just talking about the beautiful prairie that you will see years down the road. Every minute you spend in your prairie working is time spent reflecting or just having quiet time. A small plant suddenly appearing in the spring that wasn't there before is a reward for your work. Every spring is like waiting for Christmas to see what you got.

I is for inspiration. When things aren't looking like you expected and you are feeling down, seek inspiration from taking a trip to another prairie site around the state. There are so many beautiful places to visit. While you may never get your "dream" prairie full of flowers like you imagined, you can be inspired to know that what you are doing is making a difference. Any native plants you care for are more beneficial than a farm field or mown lawn.

E is for enjoy it! There are not many things that can inspire the word beauty as well as a prairie in full bloom. Manage your expectations along the lines of what you can afford, equipment you have and time you can devote. Watch the canvas change through the seasons and over the years, realizing you were the artist that painted that picture. ■

Photo of spotted beebalm (Monarda punctata) by Laurie Arzaga



Coloring Page: Wild Rose

Prairie (*Rosa arkansana*), Early (*R. blanda*), Swamp (*R. Palustris*)

By Lisa Yourell

These three wild roses have such delicate flowers, but they're tough plants! The shorter prairie rose will grow back after a fire and its deep roots make it very resistant to drought. The early wild and swamp roses can grow up to five feet tall. They all attract a lot of pollinators, especially bees. The flowers develop into large, red seed pods called "rose hips" which provide food for birds, squirrels, deer and coyotes throughout the winter months. ■



To purchase your own coloring book, *Native Wildflowers And the Creatures Who Depend on Them*, contact Lisa at layourell@proton.me or pick up a physical copy at Pearl Street Books in LaCrosse, the Upper Mississippi River Wildlife Refuge in Brice Prairie, and KEPS and Sparta Floral in Sparta.

Prairie Connections

By Kysh Lindell, AmeriCorps Member

Just as in the game offered by The New York Times, this Prairie Connections challenges players to find common threads between 16 words. Identify the four categories connecting four words.

Answers are on page 20.

**SMOOTH
BLUE**

HARRIER

LINE

ROSE

WEATHER

SMOKE

BADGER

AROMATIC

HEATH

PARSNIP

TRIANGLE

BREAK

RATTLESNAKE

**NEW
ENGLAND**

DOCK

DROPSEED

CONNECTION 1 _____

1 INCLUDES _____

CONNECTION 2 _____

2 INCLUDES _____

CONNECTION 3 _____

3 INCLUDES _____

CONNECTION 4 _____

4 INCLUDES _____

A Prairie Crossword

By Kysh Lindell, AmeriCorps Member

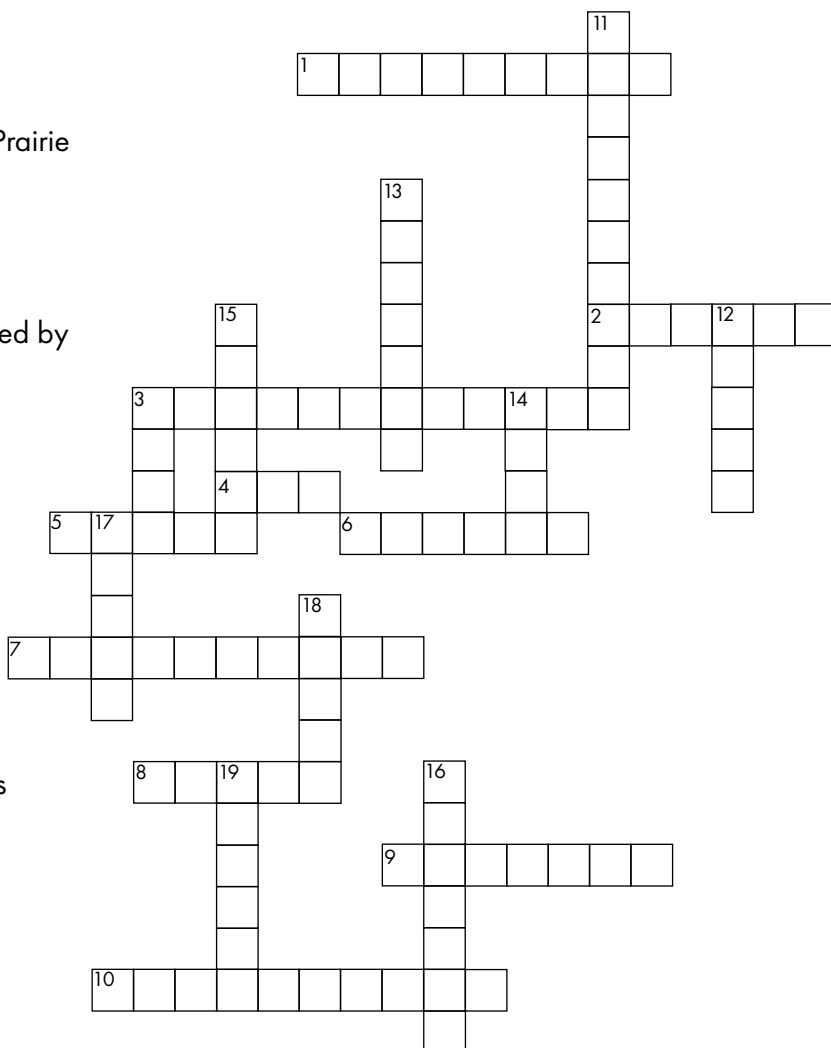
Prompts are related to fire-dependent habitats and The Prairie Enthusiasts.
 Answers to the crossword can be found on page 20.

ACROSS

1. Woody villain
2. The Prairie Enthusiasts' bluff prairie, but not in Prairie Bluff
3. Variety of life
4. Prairie turf
5. Farewell, soil
6. Savanna tree, or an artistic period characterized by ornate works
7. Fence post singer
8. Burn fashion
9. Without cows, plows or house
10. Boots on the ground

DOWN

3. Clown or grassland bird?
11. With 17, aristocratic insect
12. Sorry about your eye, _____
13. Prescribed burn tool, perhaps from the 1920's
14. County with the most The Prairie Enthusiasts protected properties
15. A bird you can't complain about
16. Caretaker
17. With 11, aristocratic insect
18. A genus in the Cyperaceae family
19. Leaves a "Mirk" on invasive species



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Chapter Updates

Coulee Region

By Jim Rogala

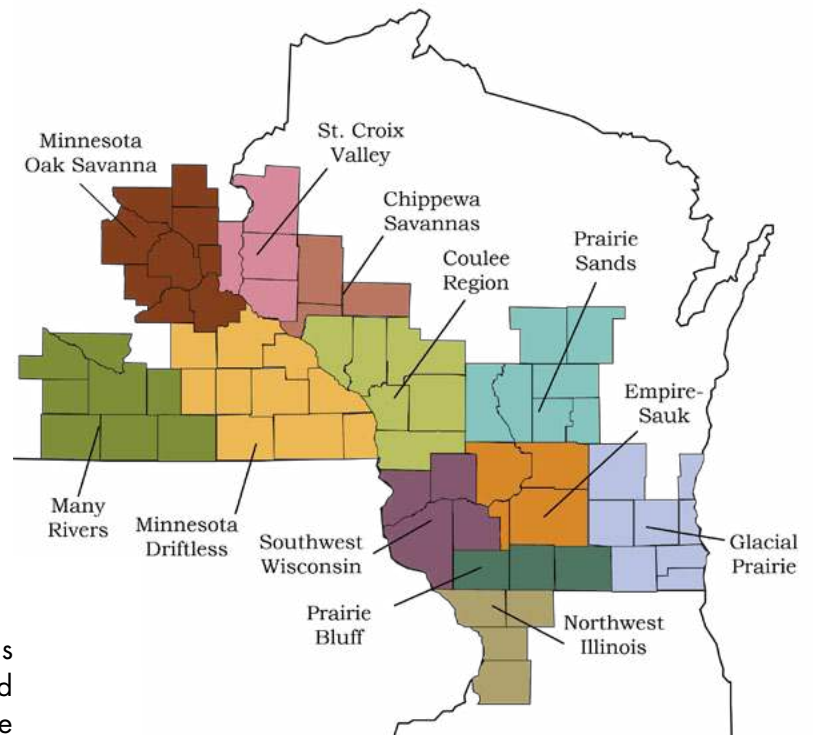
Spring Burn Season Was More Successful Than Last Fall

Our disappointing fall burn season last year was followed by a successful one this spring. We completed all five of our high-priority burns planned on bluff prairie remnants. We got an early start with a January 31 burn and completed our last one on March 27. Two of these burns, Brownsville Bluff Prairie and Marowski Bluff Prairie, were the first burns in many years; the others have been more regularly burned. We got a couple of other burns done in early April on reconstruction projects. Four of the burns were part of our collaboration with Friends of the Blufflands to burn on land in the City of La Crosse. We added to our burn equipment inventory with the purchase of another leaf blower, a chainsaw and six more radios. For the new radios, we added a channel with a Mississippi Valley Conservancy frequency to allow for increased radio capacity when we join on their burns.

Coulee Region Chapter Educational and Outreach Events

We could be found at tabling events throughout the Coulee Region this spring, tabling at six events, including the large Wisconsin Wetlands Association meeting in La Crosse. To enhance our presence at tabling events, with help from Chapter Support, we created a chapter-specific tabletop display to add to our existing display materials. We enjoyed connecting with like-minded people and sharing who we are with visitors.

Our Chapter was involved in two educational events. The first was a sedge workshop in collaboration with the Minnesota Driftless Chapter, and the second was the Celebrate the Prairies of the Driftless event, which was the annual summer large event for The Prairie Enthusiasts this year.



Look for Upcoming Workdays

With the burn season behind us, we switched gears to scheduling workdays. The first one was a Chapter Support Earth Day event at Marowski Bluff Prairie. The timing left us with limited options for work, but we did some major prep in burn units by removing large woody debris, including standing dead trees. That will be much appreciated during mop-up at next year's burn. Most other workdays will be through the collaboration with Friends of the Blufflands. This collaboration has been highly successful in the past, and we continue to look for opportunities to enhance it. Look for weekly workdays this summer and twice a week starting in fall.

More Collaborations

An offshoot of our Friends of the Blufflands collaboration has begun with the Outdoor Recreation Alliance of La Crosse, which oversees maintenance and enhancement of recreational resources on lands in and around the City of La Crosse. We will provide technical guidance for the 35-acre prairie planting on their new property. Another collaboration has begun with the UW-La Crosse herbarium, as we provided financial support towards hiring a student to get the large backlog of specimens in the collection into the electronic database that is publicly available. We hope to be reporting on that progress as the collaboration builds.

Time to Show Off Our Progress With Field Trips

We avoided scheduling field trips in spring and early summer to focus on the large summer event. With that behind us, we are planning a series of hikes focused on comparing areas burned and unburned on bluff prairie where we incorporate refugia. We'll look at the short-term benefits on two sites, Marowski Bluff Prairie and Brownsville Bluff, that we burned this spring that had not been burned in decades. We'll look for long-term effects at one of the bluff prairies at Rogala Prairies that has been burned six times in the last 11 years. We'll add a few other hikes, including a Rockland railroad prairie hike (or bike?) along the bike trail. The Rockland hike will be a memorial hike in honor of Bob Lee who led prairie hikes there for many years before his passing in 2012. ■

Northwest Illinois

By Laura Dufford

Northwest Illinois Summer and Fall Happenings

The Chapter will be picking seed for a project with the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation this summer and fall. We'll have a few volunteer picking days. If you are not already on our volunteer list and would like to join us out on the prairie, please contact Laura Dufford at lauradufford@gmail.com. ■

Prairie Sands

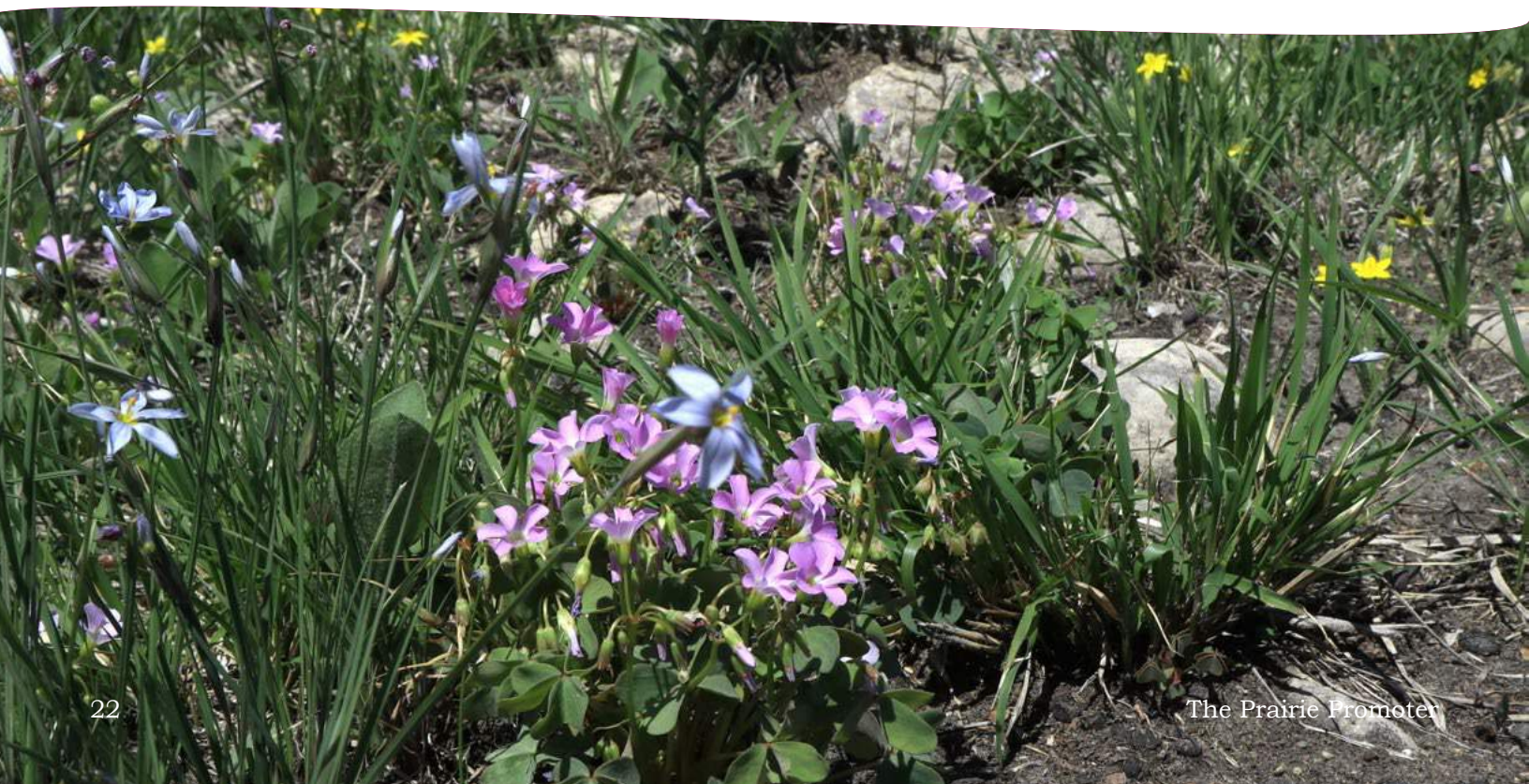
By Matt Dettlaff

Greetings from the Sand Country! It seems our Prairie Sands Chapter members are a pretty independent sort (myself included). Most folks have been busy conducting their own habitat improvement projects with a focus on prescribed burns during this spring. There have not been any opportunities to gather as a group for work parties due to the complication of coordination during appropriate burn windows. The constantly fluctuating go/no-go of the Wisconsin DNR's burning restrictions on a daily basis did not help either. Despite these challenges, great work was completed as depicted in the photos shared by Chapter members.

We have three new offers/opportunities to have a site owned by The Prairie Enthusiasts within the Prairie Sands Chapter, so we can supply stewardship to and provide protection for valuable prairie/savanna habitat in our area. We are currently working with Dan Carter developing proposals to present to the Land Protection Committee. More to come on that process once the site visit reports are finished.

We expect to conduct more Prairie Sands Chapter events and opportunities to meet this summer/early fall. That includes the following:

*Violet wood sorrel (Oxalis violacea), yellow star grass (Hypoxis hirsuta) and blue-eyed grass (Sisyrinchium angustifolium) at Brownsville Bluff Prairie.
Photo by Jim Rogala.*





Our members Marc and Leigh Johnson hosted the 2nd Annual Waushara Nature Fair in Wautoma on Sunday, May 18. This is a great example of our Chapter efforts to build collaborative relationships with fellow nature-based organizations to amplify the positive impact in our region.

Pending another good lupine bloom again this year (2024 was amazing), our members Paula and Ralph Christensen will be offering a “flash” Lupine Picking Party. “Flash” because it will most likely be short notice if and when the full bloom is achieved.

Our own resident Professor Pollinator, Dr. Ben Grady, will be hosting our 2nd annual Pollinator Picnic again this year. The location and specific date(s) are yet to be determined, but we expect it to be within our core area (triangle of Westfield-Wautoma-Montello) in late July or early August.

Because most of the proposed work parties thus far this year involved combatting buckthorn, we are shifting our window of participation to fall when the cut/treat method will be more effective.

We also have some other potential projects (establishing my own Pollinator Plots, for example) that will also be best executed in fall. Let’s see how effective my burning efforts this spring will be to knock back the

*Brush removal at Dick Hansen's property.
Photo by Dick Hansen.*

cool season grasses to give the fabulous forbs their best chance of “hitting the ground running” (literally) or if another round of fire will be prescribed (again, literally).

Keep your eyes peeled and check out the events calendar on The Prairie Enthusiasts website for some exciting outings in the Prairie Sands region later this year. Until then, sit back with a cold beverage of choice and enjoy as the fruits of your labors of love burst forth. Also take satisfaction in knowing those efforts enhance not only the plants but the entire fire-dependent ecosystems that benefit. Perhaps start plotting and scheming improvement plans for your slices of prairie paradise now so we can put those plans into action this fall.

I also requested that Prairie Sands Chapter members submit their own ideas and creations related to their interpretation of the organization’s mission. I was positively surprised and impressed by the artistic and creative responses received. I am extremely pleased to share the most seasonably apt submission from our member Steve Deery for this issue (pg. 16). We will share other submissions in future issues of *The Prairie Promoter* as they fit with the seasons. ■



Pocket Prairie event in April. From left to right: Martha Querin-Schultz, David Gibbs (GM librarian), Becky Fernette, Bob Retko, Micah Kloppenburg, and Kay Wienke. Photo by Steve Querin-Schultz.

Southwest Wisconsin

By Becky Fernette

With a relatively mild winter, the work did not stop at several of our sites as we prepared for spring burns. Adaptive Restoration, LLC burned 27 acres at Borah Creek and around 40 acres at Eldred Prairie. Elation was the emotion expressed by site stewards Steve Querin-Schultz, Gary Eldred and Jack Kussmaul. A volunteer crew led by Dr. Chris Baxter from UW-Platteville burned 1.2 acres at Feist, the “pocket prairie” gem southeast of Stitzer. Dan Wallace headed up another crew to burn more than five acres at Iris Drive Prairie. Kristin Westad supervised a late spring burn of seven acres at Thomas Wet Prairie to continue her campaign against reed canary grass. An eagle signaled its approval by flying over the site. “Switchy winds” was an oft-used phrase at these sites, given their unique topography and dry conditions.

Our Event Committee hosted a successful collaborative event at the Gays Mills Community Center on April 12. The event featured Micah Kloppenburg from the Xerces Society who presented on *Pocket Prairies for Pollinators: Guiding Principles for Growing Your Own Habitat* and shared lovely slides of pollinators and their preferred plants. Over 70 people attended the seminar.

Representatives from the Gays Mills Public Library, Connect Communities Gays Mills, Vernon County Over 50, Mississippi Valley Conservancy and Valley

Stewardship Network talked with audience members about their programs and services. Prairie Moon Nursery gave away free seed packets of native black-eyed Susan (*Rudbeckia hirta*), and the Southwest Wisconsin Chapter sold three Parsnip Predators. Fun fact: the presenter Micah was an intern with the Empire-Sauk Chapter at Mounds View Grassland.

Congratulations to Bob Retko for earning “Volunteer of the Year” for his diligent stewardship of Iris Drive Prairie, his insights on improving our organization and his dedication to safety and best practices in our prairie restoration mission.

For me, it’s been a whirlwind four months as Chapter President. My focus has been on growing our membership, specifically our volunteer base to infuse prairie enthusiasm throughout our four-county area and beyond, as well as improving our processes on our Chapter Board. The Prairie Enthusiasts Board Chapter Representative Kay Wienke has been instrumental in developing a database of burn crew members and equipment and is arranging a workshop for the hands-on “Burn School Part Two” to offer to our recent Burn School graduates this summer. At my insistence, we hosted an event for those new to the organization called, “Discover the Prairie” held on June 28 at Eldred Prairie to provide an introduction to The Prairie Enthusiasts and increase awareness of these unique ecosystems.

Our Chapter is in great need of volunteers for our Events Committee to plan and coordinate several activities. The meetings are held virtually or by email, and the time commitment varies, depending on the event and your availability. We’re also looking for 1-2 volunteers to write press releases and other communications to help spread the word about the amazing activities that are happening in our Chapter. Please contact Becky Fernette at bspence@tds.net or (608) 379-0781 to volunteer or for more information. ■

Burn at Borah Creek Prairie in March. Photo by Steve Querin-Schultz.



Empire-Sauk

Report from the Field—Shea Prairie

By Rich Henderson

Except for parts of the dry prairie remnant bluffs, we were able to eventually burn most of Shea Prairie this spring after several efforts to get it all done. This included three embedded CRP fields that were required to be burned this spring and are very difficult to burn separate from the rest of the valley. It was also important to get the wetland restoration areas burned again this year to aid the native vegetation in pushing out reed canary grass.

The Williams-Barneveld Creek was crystal clear, with quick, high-flow volume. Some of the pools at the bends were at least three feet deep. Seeing this Class-1 trout stream at this time of year, without suspended silt from runoff, is a great experience. The sections with rock and gravel runs are a nice added feature. Volunteer Rex Sohn observed an adult native brook lamprey in the stream. The animals require cool to cold water temperatures and are indicators of very good water quality. Also, adults are only active and breed for a short period at this time of year, so seeing them is a treat.

In April, I observed several interesting species along the water. Wilson's snipes flushed from along the stream, and at least eight greater yellow-legged sandpipers foraged along the shores of waterbodies in the valley. A large snapping turtle sunned on the shore of the

Blandings turtle at Shea Prairie. Photo by Rich Henderson.



Trainees burning a black line at the field training session on April 5, 2025. Photo by Rob Baller.

oxbow pond, and a Blanding's turtle sunned itself along the stream bank. I did not hear or see upland sandpipers; however, Empire-Sauk Chapter member Erik Goplin heard one at his prairie and grassland located only 2.5 miles north of Mounds View Grassland along County F. The location is a site on which The Prairie Enthusiasts holds a conservation easement. If visiting Shea Prairie and/or the rest of the Mounds View Grassland Preserve, be on the lookout for upland sandpipers and their distinctive "wolf-whistle" call.

New Burn Crew Members

By Scott Fulton

A team from the Empire-Sauk Chapter (Rob Baller, Scott Fulton, Rob Schubert and Andy Sleger, joined this year by Pattie Haack) have been conducting a training program for prescribed burn crew members for several years. The program includes a day of classroom training (either online in conjunction with the annual conference or in person), a half-day field training session on the key equipment, including live fire exercises, and participation in two regular burn units as an apprentice under the mentorship of a trainer. This spring, 13 people completed the entire program and are now fully certified burn crew members—Evan Peepo, Jefren Olsen, Pam Sprecher-Galka, Darrell Budic, Brenna Budic, Glee Brechler, Andy Nelson, Megan Stelljes, Bill Coyle, Chase Fredrick, Ellie Sovcik, Reid Bartholomew and Tim Gander. Please welcome them to the Chapter's growing community of burners! ■



St. Croix Valley

Update and photos by Evanne Hunt

Safety Course Well Attended

In January, the Chapter hosted an adult CPR/ Stop Bleed course that taught essential life-saving skills. It was limited to cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) techniques and methods to control traumatic bleeding. Since our work parties are less than 30 minutes from an EMT rescue, we wanted to focus on saving a life rather than typical first aid. Recently, Evan and Cheryl Johnson related how they were able to use their training in a restaurant! He and his wife followed protocol: assess the patient, ensure they can breathe and call 911. They must have looked like rock stars!

In-Progress Prairie Series

As part of our follow-up to the November How to Plant a Prairie Workshop, we held a series of events to build on the knowledge learned. In February, Harvey Halvorsen and Ruth Hilfiker gave a virtual class on how to select a pre-packaged seed mix from a nursery and augment it with specific flowers and grass. Throughout the spring and summer, we visited seven Chapter members' prairies in progress. The host took us around their planted prairies and explained their goals and methods. The first visit was to Peter Fritz's half-acre lawn conversion to a prairie planting with plugs and seeds. The second visit was to Alex Bouthilet's 3-acre, 10-year-old prairie created by burning and overseeding. Additional visits included Prescott Bergh's large planted and native prairie, Heidi Kassenborg's 3-acre prairie installation, Evanne Hunt's one-acre hand seeded prairie, Harvey and Ruth's property, and Mike Miller and Susan Goode's property.

Snow Seeding at Alexander Oak Savanna

On March 1, Alex Bouthilet led a group in a dormant season seed distribution of the old agriculture field at Alexander Oak Savanna. Seed from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Seed Farm was mixed with chaff and hand broadcast. Despite the lack of snow at the time, snow and rain later that month worked the seed into the ground. The site was burned in April. A grant from Tropical Wings, a group supporting education and conservation for Neotropical Migratory birds, will be used to mow the inevitable weeds throughout the summer.

Workshop attendees visit Alex Bouthilet's 3-acre prairie.

Prescribed Burn Season Ends

The Chapter conducted nine prescribed burns this spring (111 acres). For the first time in several years, the weather enabled us to burn all four project sites: Alexander Oak Savanna, Blueberry Hill, Foster Cemetery Conservation Area and Rocky Branch Oak Savanna. They looked great this summer! We also conducted five burns on private property, raising \$4,400 for Chapter expenses. Thank you to the 45 crew members, including 22 new members, who helped this spring!

Outreach Activities

Thank you to Buck Malick, Ed Parsonage and Becky Kleager for joining Evanne at EarthFest 2025. We talked to a lot of people about prairies and the importance of planting natives! We also added 20 people to our chapter email list.

And thank you to Joe Fusilier and Peter Leete for working the Wings of Spring Migratory Bird Festival. They educated people on the connection between birds and prairie/savanna habitat.

The Chapter also staffed a table at the Belwin Bison Festival for the first time.

Later this fall, we will be at the Carpenter Nature Center Pollinator event, the Kinnickinnic River Land Trust Nature Night event, and the First Presbyterian Church Community Care Fest. Lots of great opportunities to teach people what we are all about! ■

Workshop attendees visit Peter Fritz half-acre lawn.



An eastern redcedar crowning on the Izaak Walton Club prescribed burn. Photo by Jack Spear.

Many Rivers

By Rich Perrine

Come with us on a hike through the prairie! Every fourth Monday at 6:00 p.m. through October, we will be hosting informal hikes for people interested in prairies, held on publicly accessible land in the Many Rivers Chapter area. These hikes are open to the public (humans only, no pets). Hikes are planned to last 1-2 hours; participants may leave at their leisure. The goal of these hikes is to help people connect with the beauty of prairies, and to inspire their protection.

To learn more and to see dates and locations, visit [The Prairie Enthusiasts' Events Calendar](#).

The Many Rivers Chapter will host a potluck picnic and annual meeting on Saturday, September 6 from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at Henry's Prairie near Good Thunder, MN. ■



View of oaks above "Oculus."

Minnesota Oak Savanna

Update by Greg Heberlein. Photos by Regina Flanagan.

How, Actually, Do You Start A New Chapter?

When Debra Behrens met me last summer in St. Paul, relaying The Prairie Enthusiasts' goal of starting a new Chapter for the greater Twin Cities region, and inviting me to be a part of that effort, I felt both intrigued and, to be honest, a bit overwhelmed. Reading about and witnessing what other Chapters have been doing gave me a strong sense of what's possible. But Debra made it clear she couldn't provide us with a comprehensive assembly manual that laid out all the tidy steps required to create it. It would be a process of figuring things out as we go, shaping the Chapter to the contours of this particular region and our particular members. As someone who really likes clarity, it was going to be a challenge. However, after my spouse and I attended the September Multi-Chapter Gathering at Mounds View Grassland, and seeing so clearly what a dedicated and skillful community can accomplish with time and effort, I

felt my ambivalence dissolve. It was very inspiring!

Beginning last October, Debra led our Chapter Leadership Group—which includes Alex Carroll, Regina Flanagan, Heather Holm, Anthony Pini and myself—through several meetings, orienting us to the organizational structure, operations and the requirements for forming a Chapter. With her help, we were able to gain official recognition as a Chapter of The Prairie Enthusiasts at the November 2024 Board meeting. Over another two meetings she helped us deepen our understanding of the organization's core values, focus and the V/TO goal-setting structure. Finally, she led us through the process of setting our Chapter's one- and three-year goals, and then gently nudged us out of the nest.

We knew that our Chapter area already held a significant number of members, so we were excited to connect with many of them during the Chapter Chats at the annual conference in February. Those Chats made it clear how much interest and energy there is for this Chapter, and how much expertise and engagement members are bringing to it.

We decided to do a survey of our Chapter members to further understand their backgrounds,

interests and priorities for the Chapter. Sent out shortly after the conference, we received 54 responses—yet another reflection of the level of interest and engagement that's present here.

The survey gave us a clearer sense of the abundance of knowledge and expertise that members possess and want to share. There were a number of great ideas for programming and building membership, for potential partnerships and management sites. Our challenge now as a Leadership Team is to develop ways to set priorities and effectively focus that abundance of energy and talent. To that end, we held a visioning session on June 2 with those survey respondents who expressed an interest in helping build our Chapter infrastructure and capacity.

In addition, we've scheduled two Chapter events, are in the process of scheduling a third, and are exploring other possible activities for our members this year.

On Saturday, August 16, we are throwing a Launch Party, a christening of sorts for the Minnesota Oak Savanna Chapter. It will be held from 12:30-4:00 at The Richardson Nature Center in Hyland Hills Park in Bloomington. Presentations, refreshments and a plant walk are being planned.

On Wednesday, September 17, from 10:30-1:30 the Chapter will host a seed collection event at the Crow Hassan Park Reserve in Hanover. Their restored prairie had its start over 50 years ago and now hosts almost 100 species of wildflowers.

Our Chapter is also working with Steven Winter from the Minnesota Driftless Chapter to schedule a Burn School in the Twin Cities Metro area sometime this coming Fall.

We are feeling our way forward, (gotta crawl before you can run) and no photos yet of smiling Chapter members at a burn site or happily cutting buckthorn at a work party. But stay tuned, those should be coming soon! And we're so grateful for the support we've received from Debra, other Chapter leaders and everyone at Chapter Support. We couldn't be doing this without you behind us! ■

All photos taken taken at the Helen Allison Savanna, East Bethel, Minnesota that is located in Anoka County (within our chapter boundaries). They are part of Regina Flanagan's experimental documentary film "Landscape Stories." From top to bottom: hoary puccoon (*Lithospermum canescens*), spotted bee balm (*Monarda punctata*), rough blazing star (*Liatris aspera*), rabbit tobacco (*Pseudonaphalium obtusifolium*).





Chippewa Savannas

Update by Keith Gilland. Photos by Kathy Stahl

The Chippewa Savannas Chapter held our annual burn school Saturday April 12 at UW-Stout and at our Chapter site, Dobbs Landing, in Colfax, WI. We hosted 26 participants in our in-class portion! For the morning classroom session, Chapter members Mark Leach, Kathy Ruggles, John Thomas, Julia Chapman and Keith Gilland spoke about the ecology of prescribed fire, putting together burn plans, weather considerations and site prep and ignition. In the afternoon, the crew moved East to Dobbs Landing where we were joined by one of our Chapter burn bosses, Al Broadfoot, and several other Chapter members who completed their burn training and have been active with our Chapter's fire efforts over the last few years. After some small group work practicing ignition and suppression techniques, we burned two of Dobbs Landings' planted prairies. These new volunteers are contributing to years of stewardship, seeding, controlling weeds and applying prescribed fire, which is making the prairie look fantastic.

Throughout spring, members completed several burns at Dobbs Landing including burning areas on the western side of the property where we have been working to remove brush and open the ground to some much-needed sunlight and restore a degraded oak/jack pine community. Make sure you make it out to Dobbs this year to look at some of these wonderful projects!

Now that burn season has wrapped up, keep an eye on your email and the Chapter's Facebook page for opportunities this summer and fall, continuing our brush clearing work, improving our fire breaks, and collecting seed at Dobbs Landing. ■

Above: Congratulations to everyone who successfully completed burn school and thank you to our many volunteers who helped make it a success!

Below: At burn school, everyone got a chance to work with several pieces of important equipment including drip torches, back cans, rakes and flappers. Participants got to practice spraying wet lines, lighting backing fires, suppressing spot fires and mopping up smoldering woody debris.



Prairie Enthusiasts Remembered

Memorial gifts dedicated between
March 21 and June 3, 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.

In memory of:

Betty & Peggy

Remembered by
Craig & Mary Thompson

Robert J. Hahlen

Remembered by
Heidi Hahlen

George Howe

Remembered by
John & Carole Bast

Lou Millevolte

Remembered by
Walter & Alice Mirk

Patricia O'Hare

Remembered by
Shelley

Joyce Powers

Remembered by
Lois Komai

Jim Schultz

Remembered by
RuthAnn Schultz

Rusty Schultz

Remembered by
Matt Switzler

Bill Stroud

Remembered by
Elaine Stroud

Mary Sulzer Puntillo


Remembered by
Urs & Mary Gafner
Patricia McQuiddy

Sitting Bull & Colonel Buffalo Bill Cody

Remembered by
Dale Heusinkvel



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Welcome, New Members!

March 21 to June 3, 2025

Chippewa Savannas

Vicky Ebensperger
Benjamin Gau

Coulee Region

Robert Bauer
Abbie Hawes
Sylvie Rising
Max Sorenson

Empire-Sauk

Carole Blemker
Patrick Bohlen
Joe Leeser
Jessica Lloyd
Judith & Rodney Nelson
Chris Schuelke
Alexandra & Jody Smith
Matt Switzler

Glacial Prairie

Lucy Anich
Paul Brunette
Michael Connell
Mike Dietrich
Dina Drankus
Denise Erickson

Jared Fero
Marnie Hess
Marty Honel
Birgitta Lambert
Greg Reichelt

Minnesota Driftless

Jennifer Breitlow
Tom & Nancy Groeschner
Julie Porcher

Minnesota Oak Savanna

Marne Gerdes
Andrew Montain
Noelle Olson
Lida Tunesi
Alec Werning

Prairie Bluff

Susan Anderson
Dorene Disch
Urs & Mary Gafner
Heidi Hahlen

Southwest Wisconsin

Angela Clearfield
Tim Gander
Dale Hein
Connie & Brian Larson
Laura Vuchetich

St. Croix Valley

Janet Bliven
Jan Hayman
Chris Johnson
Jon Washington

Unaffiliated

Russell Biebl
Steph Dawson
Steven Hood
Dave & Jan Kozlovsky
Alexander Meeder
Wil Oden
Bernie Rauen
Mike Roberts
Brian Schneider
Leslie Shad
Douglas Stinson
Zach Tarble
David Warner