



The Prairie Enthusiasts



**Community Report
2024-2025**



Gaining Momentum

Debra Behrens, Executive Director

A new Chapter, additional rare habitat protected, new members getting involved in our shared mission and so much more—our 2024-25 program year was a time of flourishing for our community. For the past five years, we have been working together to strengthen the organization to ensure that our Chapters and the legacy of land protected and restored by our volunteers will thrive long into the future.

Much of the work has been painstaking and we have a great deal more to do, but we are gaining momentum. During this time, we have doubled our revenues, which directly equates to increased mission impact. By working to build a solid foundation, we're now able to devote more time and resources into the core of our mission—our grassroots community, protection and stewardship—than ever before.

You are critical to this growth and vital to our future. Our Community Report is a celebration of you that I trust you will enjoy. Thank you for your steadfast support and I look forward to all that we will accomplish together!

Recognizing Stand-Out Volunteers

Story by Kysh Lindell, AmeriCorps Member

Who do you picture when you hear the words 'Prairie Enthusiast?'

Maybe you envision individuals neck deep in big bluestem and yellow blooms, smiling under their sunhats. Or perhaps you see flashes of blaze orange helmets and chainsaws, or people picking fluffy white seeds.

Chances are the people you imagined are not just casual prairie-goers, but volunteers—the people working to steward and share our last remaining prairies, oak savannas and other fire-dependent ecosystems. When it comes to land management, land protection, education and outreach, it doesn't get more boots-on-the-ground than The Prairie Enthusiasts' volunteers.

Whether they are organizing work parties, removing invasive species, leading prairie tours, raising funds to protect land, conducting prescribed burns or collecting native seed, volunteers from our twelve grassroots chapters dedicate countless hours of their time to protecting and promoting prairies across our

region each year. Without these volunteers, thousands of acres of native prairie may not exist at all.

What is perhaps most unique about our volunteers is their breadth of talent and dedication to our shared cause. Our community is bursting with skilled artists and photographers, writers and storytellers, botanists, ecologists and restoration experts, leaders and educators—many of whom have spent decades lending their unique gifts to the shared mission of protecting prairies. Without this enduring enthusiasm and continued generosity, neither our community nor the prairies we steward would be as vibrant as they are today.

We're spotlighted some of the incredible volunteers who contribute their time and talents to caring for the last remaining prairies in the Upper Midwest. These are just a handful of the volunteers who are making a positive impact on the land and their local communities, submitted by members of their Chapter. Thank you volunteers!

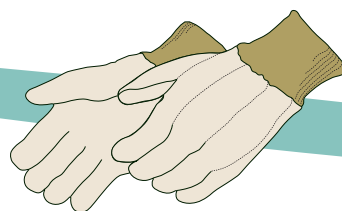


Empire-Sauk Chapter

KEVIN MCKOWN

Submitted by Rich Henderson

Kevin volunteers at multiple sites and attends many work parties. He has done all kinds of volunteer work, including tree and brush clearing, prescribed burning, seed cleaning and planting wild strawberries into restorations. He also helps conduct bird surveys and lead bird hikes. We're grateful that he's always willing to help when he can, and that he brings his knowledge and enthusiasm for birds to our events.



Glacial Prairie Chapter

NANCY GLOE

Submitted by Kat O'Connell Valuch

Nancy Gloe is everywhere. She is leading SNA workdays and attending our other workdays. She put in over 70 hours at the Mukwonago River Oak Barrens in 2024—planting plugs, cutting and pulling brush, collecting seeds, staging and burning brush piles, helping with prescribed burns.

Nancy is a great volunteer because she is consistent, seeks to better understand why we're doing things and asks critical questions, is welcoming and helpful to newer volunteers, and she just works really hard. It can be difficult to peel Nancy away from tasks at the end of a workday. At the Mukwonago River Oak Barrens, she was my only regular volunteer for a while, but she has been very important in helping to engage new volunteers as they show up, and I credit her with helping develop a consistent and solid volunteer group.



Many Rivers Chapter

JIM "FLAPPER" LYNCH

Submitted by Addeline Theis Paradis

Jim Lynch (fondly known as "Flapper") is a great volunteer. He is our communication expert. He puts out all of our email notifications for upcoming events, burns or anything that needs attention. He adds photos and does a great job designing posters for events. Best of all, he gets the information out promptly and sends additional reminders, which has increased our members' participation. He has done this for over eight years and has had to learn new emailing systems as The Prairie Enthusiasts changed their formats, but has always done so with patience.





Minnesota Driftless Chapter

PETER HARTMAN

Submitted by Gabe Ericksen

Peter Hartman has been a steadfast volunteer within our Chapter for a number of years. After serving some time as Chapter Treasurer, he continues to offer guidance and support to our elected board. This year, Peter has taken on the additional role of Coordinator between our Chapter, the City of Winona and Winona State University. His efforts to foster collaboration on the Garvin Heights Park prairie and oak woodland habitats have catalyzed a great deal of volunteerism and energy within the Winona community. As a retired soil scientist for the NRCS, Peter can still sometimes be found probing the ground for clues about its composition and history. He's certainly not one who is afraid to get his hands dirty! Thanks for all of your enthusiasm and generosity within our chapter, Peter!

Northwest Illinois Chapter

LAURA DUFFORD

Submitted by Jay Rutherford

Laura served as a member of the chapter's steering committee, assisting with everything from CRP contracts to helping to coordinate and host field trips. As a survey team member she participated in documenting a variety of spring and summer species at Hanley Savanna. Laura spent hours collecting, sorting, and mixing native seed for the Northwest Illinois Chapter's latest restoration planting. She acted as our Chapter's volunteer liaison, providing lunch to hardworking volunteers at the Chapter's annual 'Thank You' gathering to conclude the harvest season.

Laura possesses a truly generous and giving spirit! She remains dedicated and willing to tackle multiple responsibilities—all with good humor and a kind heart. In her 30+ years of volunteering for our Chapter she has stepped forward to assume leadership roles, assisted with many types of field work, including a host of seed program tasks, plus engaged in outreach to both Chapter members and new friends. Nature is her inspiration—as she says, "Being out on the prairie is important to my soul."



Prairie Sands Chapter

MARC JOHNSON

Submitted by Matt Dettlaff

In addition to volunteering to be our Chapter Treasurer, Marc is a stalwart participant in our work days. He also volunteers on Jeb Barzen's burn crews around our area. Thank you for all that you do, Marc!



Southwest Wisconsin Chapter

BOB RETKO

Submitted by Becky Fernette and Kay Wienke

Bob spent his career (49 years) near Milwaukee working on and managing a 40-acre property with outdoor sculptures, lawn and prairie areas. Currently, Bob is the Site Steward for Iris Drive and has worked closely with Gary Eldred to make sure the transition from Gary to Bob has gone smoothly. He has spent time cutting brush in a savanna area there, burning brush piles and facilitating a prairie burn on the west unit there this spring. He is also an active member of the Chapter Land Management Committee. Thank you for all of your work, Bob!



A lifetime of Dedication to the Land

Ken Wade and Pat Trochlell

By Scott Fulton

For both Ken Wade and Pat Trochlell, a deep relationship with nature began in early childhood. Both grew up in relatively urban areas—Ken on the west side of Madison and Pat in the Chicago area, but both had nearby access to woods, streams and fields, and spent every minute they could outside. For Pat especially, this was a long-standing family affair—both parents and sets of grandparents were all outdoors people, and this love of nature was clearly passed on to Pat.

Ken has had a life-long interest in science and fell in love with biology and ecology in high school. At UW-Madison, he first obtained a degree in secondary education and taught chemistry and physics for a year, but he returned to school as a special student in geology. A research project on the impact of mining on water inspired him to go to Colorado State for an MS degree in geology, intending to work as a mining field geologist. Eventually, however, he was offered a job in the regulation of mining and waste management at the Wisconsin DNR.

Although much of his career work there was on issues connected to ground and surface waters, he became intrigued with native habitats when he worked on a project looking at the impact of a proposed landfill on a nearby oak savanna natural area with many endangered species.

Pat took a more direct path to her career. She followed her brother to UW-Stevens Point, obtained a BS in wildlife management and biology with a minor in soil science. In addition, several of her early mentors sparked and encouraged a passionate, lifelong interest in plants. Following college, she wanted very much to combine these interests, and tried several early jobs with different agencies, including a stint at a private fish farm. She ended up joining the Wisconsin DNR and found her true calling as a wetland ecologist. Throughout her 30+ year career with Wisconsin DNR, her work included wetland regulations, restoration and mitigation projects, testifying in court, and she helped with many educational programs. One of her proudest career achievements was developing



Ken Wade and Pat Trochlell, long-time land stewards and volunteers with The Prairie Enthusiasts. Photo by Scott Fulton.

the first-in-the-nation state wetland water quality standard. Even after retirement, wetlands remain a passion for her, and she continues her work as a consultant and volunteer with various groups (including The Prairie Enthusiasts, the Wisconsin Wetlands Association, The Nature Conservancy and other environmental organizations) doing stewardship work, botanical surveys and education. Karen Agee, the former Empire-Sauk Chapter Chair, inspired her to co-lead the creation of a Wisconsin Master Naturalist program at the Empire-Sauk Chapter, which in turn has led to a much greater involvement with The Prairie Enthusiasts itself.

Ken's life took a major turn in the mid-1980's, when he and a friend, Tom Wise, together rented a small A-frame house on top of a hill looking directly at Blue Mounds State Park just a few miles to the south. Tom (a long-time staff member of The Nature Conservancy) is a well-known early evangelist for restoration

and protection of fire-dependent ecosystems. The house was right in the middle of one of the earliest identified remnant oak savannas in Wisconsin (a site that in 2013 became Parrish Oak Savanna, a site protected by The Prairie Enthusiasts), and Tom taught Ken a great deal about the importance of these rare natural communities.

A few years later, a large property at the base of the hill became available for sale, and Tom and Ken explored it with great interest, quickly realizing its amazing ecological diversity and potential for restoration. Ken purchased the property in 1991, and Tom introduced him to Rich Henderson, a long-time Prairie Enthusiast. Ken and Rich toured the property with Ken photographing significant plants and recording the discussions, then used this information to develop the "Pleasure Valley Watershed and Natural Area Protection Plan" and enlist support for the plan from Town of Vermont, Dane County, neighbors and conservation organizations. Tom helped Ken conduct the first prescribed burn on the property in 1991, and in 1993 Ken began living in a trailer on the site while building a house there.

Ken and Pat met each other in passing at the Wisconsin DNR, and one day Ken enthusiastically invited Pat to come see the interesting wetlands on his new property. She was impressed at what she saw, including a very rare intact fen with virtually no invasive species. However, she also realized as the day went on that this was really more of a date than a site visit. One thing led to another, and Pat and Ken were married in 2001. Thus began their partnership in caring for this amazing piece of land.

Restoration and management were the first order of business, and while Pat and Ken both worked tirelessly, they realized immediately that they needed a great deal of

help. Volunteers from the Empire-Sauk Chapter were critical, especially in starting a program of regular prescribed burns, which are particularly challenging on the heavily wooded and hilly site. The passion, knowledge, and dedication of the volunteers they met through The Prairie Enthusiasts were a tremendous inspiration, especially when they were getting started.

Pat and Ken are also very serious about land protection. Their property (now called the Pleasure Valley Conservancy) was protected by two easements with The Prairie Enthusiasts in 2005 and 2012. They were instrumental in working with the Parrish family to protect Parrish Oak Savanna for generations to come. Pat and Ken have also helped the organization in making several smaller additions to Parrish Oak Savanna and worked with a neighbor to protect an additional 150+ acres easement. To date, over 350 acres of connected land at the site is protected by The Prairie Enthusiasts through either easement or fee title, and Ken and Pat are currently in discussions with another neighbor to add an additional large parcel. They have also worked with Dane County Parks to protect

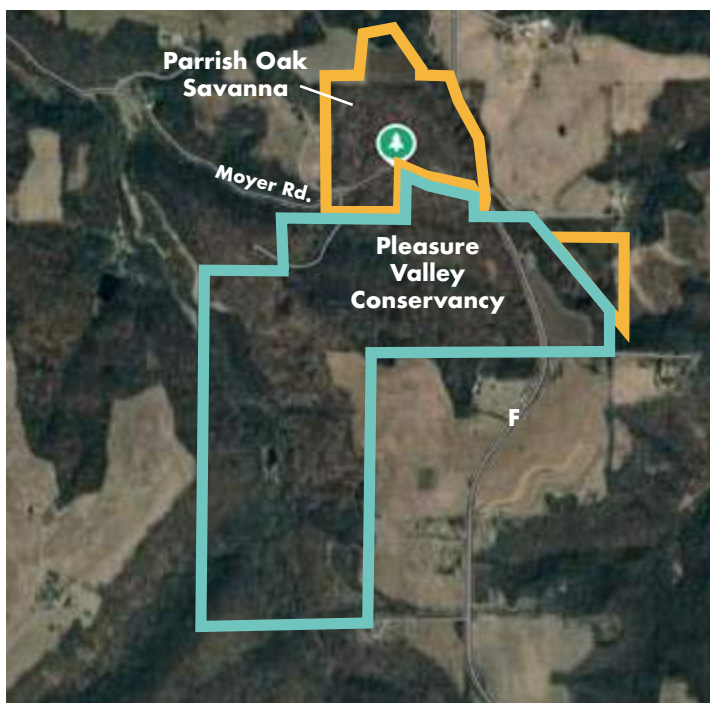
land, so that today there is a nearly 5-mile-long corridor of conserved land running from Brigham County Park and Blue Mounds State Park north to the Parrish Oak Savanna. This has truly been a work of long-term vision and persistence!

Currently, Pat and Ken are in discussions with The Prairie Enthusiasts on the long-term plan for their property. They both consider the partnership to be essential, as they believe the know-how and capacity to conduct land management in perpetuity is just as important as legal protection to preserve what they have worked so hard to bring about. Both credit Rich Henderson with providing the ongoing inspiration and deep knowledge needed for their work. Many questions remain, including what to do with the house, and how to most appropriately blend public and private use of this land while still preserving the conservation values. However, both feel very confident The Prairie Enthusiasts will be able to ensure the property is properly cared for well into the future.

Both Ken and Pat are passionate about what they have learned through this lifetime of work. For Ken, a huge lesson has been the importance of working with many other people to both restore and protect this precious and amazing site. The work has become all-consuming for him, and he had no idea when he started just how fulfilling this would really be.

Pat has been deeply impressed with how the land has responded to the work, as well as how much diversity is found in this one site, which includes outstanding examples of most of the habitats found in the region. She feels a deep obligation to care for this particular place and all the beings who live there, arising from a profound sense of personal relationship.

Their work together at this special place has given both Pat and Ken the deep sense that if we care for the land, the land will care for us.



Grassroots Community



1703 CONTRIBUTING
MEMBERS

Summer Gathering hosted by the
Empire-Sauk Chapter held at
Mounds View Grassland.
Photo by Rob Baller.



Left: Northwest Illinois Chapter field trip to Ayers Sand Prairie. Photo by Unknown Photographer.
Right: St. Croix Valley member Cheyanne Carlin answers questions at Earth Fest. Photo by Evanne Hunt.



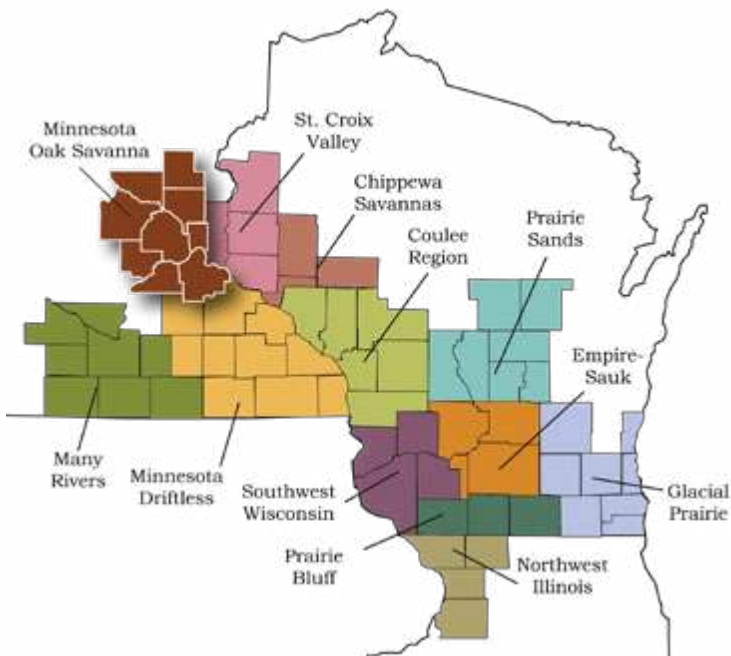
341 **NEW**
MEMBERS

*Left: Sauk Prairie High School students monitoring monarch butterflies at Moely Prairie.
Photo by Amy Chamberlin.*

*Below: St. Croix Valley Chapter's "Plant a Prairie Workshop" attendees. This workshop was supported by the St. Croix Valley Community Foundation
Photo by Robert Marquis.*

NEW CHAPTER

MINNESOTA OAK SAVANNA



109 **OUTREACH**
EVENTS

500+ **ANNUAL CONFERENCE**
ATTENDEES

*Glacial Prairie Chapter members touring Waukesha Field Station at UW-Milwaukee.
Photo by Helen Holtz.*



Stewardship



683 VOLUNTEERS



Top Left: Glacial Prairie Chapter volunteers cutting brush at Mukwonago River Oak Barrens. Photo by Dan Carter.

Top Right: Prairie Sands Chapter volunteer at a prescribed burn. Photo by Marc Johnson.

Middle: Minnesota Driftless Chapter volunteers cutting brush. Photo by Stephen Winter.

Bottom: St. Croix Valley Chapter volunteers after a prescribed burn at Blueberry Hill SNA. Photo by Robert Marquis.





300+

WORK PARTIES

Top Left: Coulee Region Chapter volunteers removing brush at a landowner's prairie. Photo by Mary Beth.

Middle Left: Southwest Wisconsin Chapter volunteer Carol Bendorf pulling brush. Photo by Becky Fernette.

Middle Right: Northwest Illinois Chapter volunteers collecting compass plant. Photo by Pam Richards.

Bottom: The Prairie Enthusiasts Ecologist Dan Carter examining sun sedge and other species. Photo by Gary Birch.



70



ADVISORY VISITS WITH LANDOWNERS AND SITE STEWARDS

Protection



Bluebird at Agaski Bluff. Photo by Eric Preston.

Compass plant (*Silphium laciniatum*) at Erbe Grassland.
Photo by Jenny Shanks



Clockwise at Agaski Bluff:
Putty root orchid by Eric Preston

American lady caterpillar by Eric Preston.

Great plains lady's tresses (*Spiranthes magnicamporum*) by Eric Preston.

Bottom at Erbe Grassland:
Woodland sunflower by Joshua Mayer.

Monarch on common milkweed by Ron Lutz II.





4227

TOTAL ACRES PROTECTED & STEWARDED

115

ACRES NEWLY PROTECTED



AGASKI BLUFFS ADDITION TO SWENSON BLUFFS

38 ACRES



This property protected in December of 2024 features spectacular views and is home to some of the state's rarest plants and animals. It's located in the Driftless Region and features dry bluffs, and striking rock outcroppings with remnants of original prairie, 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.



UREN TRUST ADDITION TO ERBE GRASSLAND

77 ACRES



Greer Deneen's family was thrilled to work alongside The Prairie Enthusiasts to add their property to Erbe Grassland. Not only was the property protected in March 2025, but thanks to our 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. Today, Prairie Enthusiasts are working to restore habitat on this new addition, which will provide the 100+ species already found at Erbe Grassland room to grow.

Grasshopper sparrow at Erbe Grassland by Joshua Mayer. Prairie thistle at Erbe Grassland by Joshua Mayer. Agaski Bluff by Eric Preston. Erbe Grassland view by Ron Lutz II. Pale false foxglove (Agalinis skinneriana) at Agaski Bluff by Eric Preston.

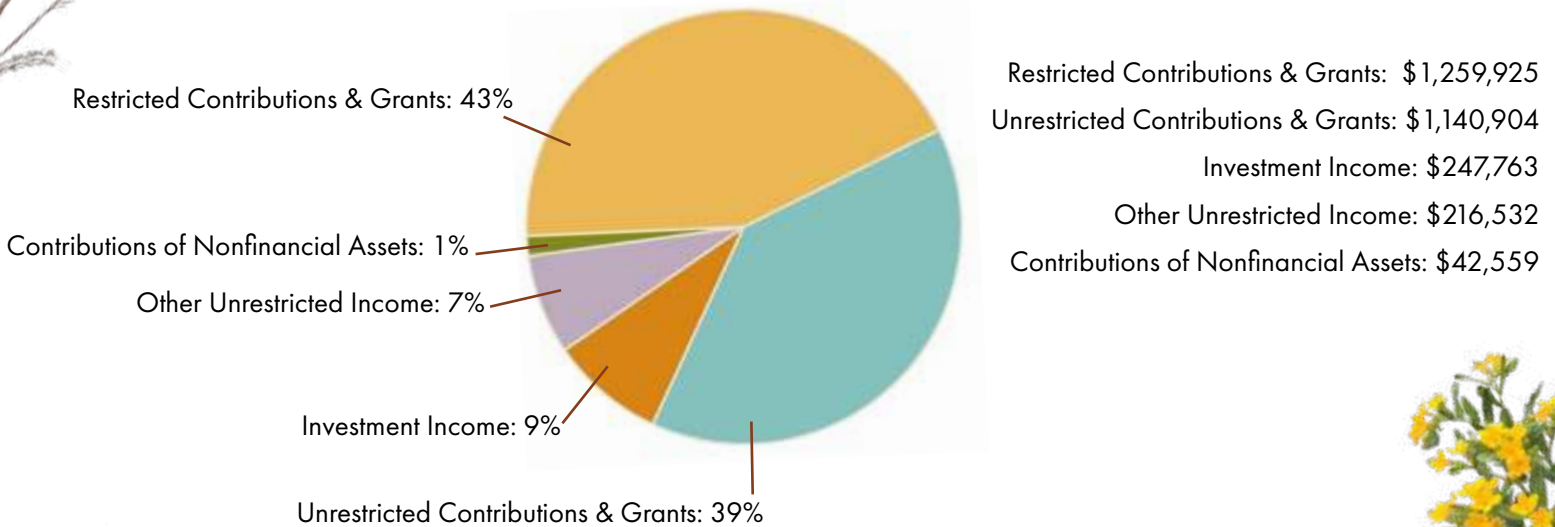


Financials

April 1, 2024-March 31, 2025

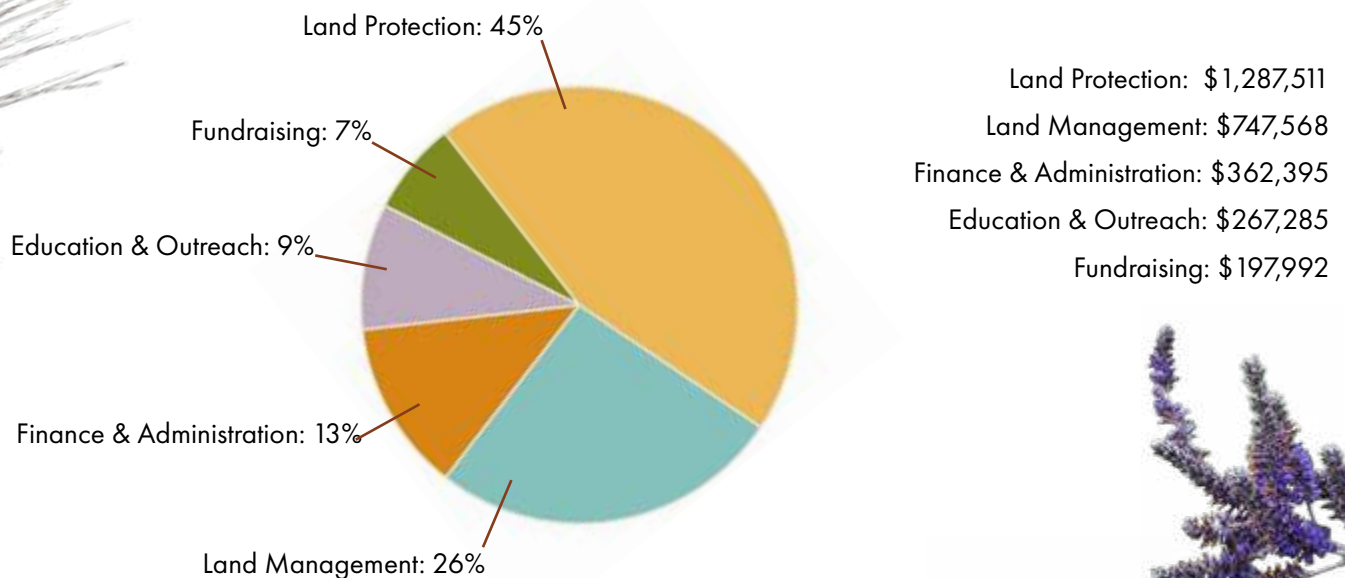
Revenue and Other Support

TOTAL: \$2,907,683



Expenses and Acquisitions

TOTAL: \$2,862,751



Notes:

1. Includes both The Prairie Enthusiasts, Inc. and the Prairie Enthusiasts Trust
2. Financial statements audited by CLA (CliftonLarsonAllen LLP)
3. Land Management amounts includes \$116,643 of capital equipment purchases included in Equipment Assets on the statement of financial position.
4. Land Protection includes \$1,154,625 of capital land purchases included in land on the statement of financial position.

Assets

Current Assets:

Cash & Equivalents: \$405,170

Grants Receivables: \$49,870

Other: \$143,498

Total: \$598,538

Property & Equipment:

Land & Improvements: \$13,689,679

Equipment: \$365,241

Depreciation: (\$310,682)

Investments & Restricted Cash: \$4,853,401

TOTAL ASSETS: \$19,196,177

Liabilities & Net Assets

Liabilities:

Accounts Payable: \$75,498

Deferred Revenue: \$11,016

Accrued Salaries & Expenses: \$67,008

Total: \$153,522

Net Assets:

Without Donor Restrictions: \$880,119

With Donor Restrictions: \$18,162,536

Total: \$19,042,655

TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS: \$19,196,177

Photos from Top Left to Right:

Red-headed woodpecker by Eric Preston.

Monarch butterfly by Eric Preston.

Little bluestem (Schizachyrium scoparium) by Dan Barron.

Coreopsis (Coreopsis palmata) by Jim Rogala.

Porcupine grass (Hesperostipa spartea) by Dan Barron.

Hoary puccoon (Lithospermum canescens) by Jim Rogala.

Cylindric blazing star (Liatris cylindracea) by Jim Rogala.

Lead plant (Amorpha canescens) by Jim Rogala.

Milk snake by Ken Wade.

How You Can Get Involved



At The Prairie Enthusiasts, we believe in the concept of reciprocity. We appreciate all that our local habitats give us, and we feel a sense of obligation to give back to the land. Fire-dependent ecosystems like prairies and oak savannas evolved alongside humans, and those habitats continue to require the stewardship of people today. Find your place in the prairie by considering what you can do to help your local habitats.

**Get involved by emailing
Info@ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org, or
connect directly with your Chapter
by visiting our website.**

**Prescribed Burning
Brush & Tree Cutting
Seed Collecting
Leadership Positions
Site Monitoring
Making Parsnip Predators and Makutus
Seed Orchard Management
Outreach & Events
Biological Surveys & Citizen Science
Photography
Writing
Office Tasks**



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**SAVE
THE DATE!**

Biodiversity from the Ground Up

2026 Virtual Conference
**February
18-20**