The PRAIRIE PROMOTER

Igniting Relationships with the Land

Spring 2026

A Study in Prairie Sod

How ecologically diverse can a prairie planting be compared to a remnant?

Plus

Can prairie restoration save our bat community?

Appreciation and optimism for the prairie

A bobolinks journal

Good Fire
An Environmental and Cultural Practice

Article by Erin E. Belanger. Photos provided by the SMSC.

"Witnessing Indigenous people revitalize and reconnect with this practice has been one of the greatest gifts of my career."
-Ferin Davis Anderson, Manager of Natural Resources

On burn days, you may notice smoke in the sky. A sight that may be worrisome, yet wildfire is a natural process that takes place in forests and grasslands all over the world. Although commonly seen as destructive and deadly, fire is a necessary part of ecosystems; it refreshes the land and allows for new plant growth.

The Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community's (SMSC) Manager of Natural Resources Ferin Davis Anderson is responsible for stewarding and restoring natural areas in and around the reservation. "I think sometimes people don't think that our cultural experiences can be scientific, but there are great examples of how Indigenous people have traditional knowledge and are applying this knowledge in what we might consider contemporary scientific settings," explained Anderson. "We have always been observational and learned from our surroundings, others are just catching up and understanding this."

Anderson is an environmental scientist and an enrolled citizen of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa/Ojibwe/Anishinaabe/Mitchifs in North Dakota. Anderson has the unique ability to weave traditional knowledge and western science together to make more holistic management decisions for the SMSC's Natural Resources Department, including using fire as an ecological and cultural tool to achieve beneficial and healing outcomes.

Harnessing good fire or a prescribed burn, which is an intentionally lit fire, is used to replicate natural fire events. Fire helps native plants in prairies, oak savannas and wetlands stay healthy and vigorous. These plants provide excellent habitat for species, such as the meadowlark, pheasant, monarch butterfly and other wildlife. Fire is also a great tool to reduce weeds and other invasive woody species that outcompete native plants for resources.

Anderson first became interested in fire and its benefits while in college. "I was intrigued because some of my classmates were still skeptical of the benefits because of their fear and lack of understanding of the practice of prescribed burning," explained Anderson. "Since then, I have continued to learn about the ecological significance of fire and how fire played a significant role in my ancestors' lives. I was interested in sharing this with others, especially students who would likely not be exposed to good fire in their everyday lives."

In late fall and early spring, Anderson, along with several certified members of the SMSC's Natural Resources Department, work in tandem with local

partners including the Bureau of Indian Affairs, to conduct prescribed burns around the SMSC. During prescribed burns, trained burn crew members monitor weather conditions to protect air quality and road visibility to minimize potential impacts to neighboring communities. "Witnessing Indigenous people revitalize and reconnect with this practice has been one of the greatest gifts of my career," stated Anderson.

All prescribed burns are designed to meet ecological and cultural objectives and are entirely dependent upon weather conditions, such as relative humidity, temperature, and wind speed and direction. The SMSC always contacts local authorities so they are aware of the locations of the burns. Exact dates of the burns are announced on the SMSC's social media pages.

Learn more about prescribed burns by reading *Wildfire: The Culture, Science, and Future of Fire* by Ferin Davis Anderson and Stephanie Sammartino McPherson. The book examines how Indigenous people, farmers, and forestry departments use fire to manage resources and how climate change is impacting the future of fire. ■

This article was published with support from Alliant Energy. It was originally published in the winter 2025 issue of Wiċoṡkan, the Magazine of the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community.

The
PRAIRIE PROMOTER

CONTENTS
SPRING 2026, VOL 39, NO. 1

Colleen Shore, plein air painting lupines

St. Croix Valley Chapter Volunteers seed collecting. Photo byWayne Huhnke.

The Prairie Enthusiasts

Jay Arneson (left) and Joe Fusilier (right), St. Croix Valley Chapter Valley volunteers, taking down recording equipment after four nights of monitoring bat activity at Alexander Oak Savanna.

Editor's Correction:
In the article, *Rare Plant Success Stories* in the Fall 2025 issue of *The Prairie Promoter,* the editor mislabeled a photograph. A photo was listed as prairie bushclover (*Lespedeza leptostachya*), but should have been listed as round-headed bushclover (*Lespedeza capitata*). We apologize for this error!

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.

Cover Photo: *Pasque on the Barrens* taken at Rattlesnake Ridge by Sue Steinmann.

President's Message

The Inherent Challenges with Unions

Jim Rogala, President

Our country's union of States has its strengths but there are some weaknesses. How are responsibilities divided between the federal and state levels? How do we retain a happy union when states often have different visions for what the nation should be? How are federal funds used at the state level? Our country has dealt with those types of issues throughout our independence. Similarly, The Prairie Enthusiasts, the union of Chapters, must struggle with those same issues.

I first became aware of these struggles within The Prairie Enthusiasts during an evening with two fellow Board members the night before the 2006 Annual Conference. I was green back then, having just joined The Prairie Enthusiasts in 2001, and the Board of Directors in 2004. As the three of us talked long into the night (and consumed a fair amount of alcohol), I heard the more veteran Board member make the case for more rights at the state (Chapter) over federal (Central, as it was called back then). The pushback from the newer Board member was that there needs to be a strong overall vision for the union as a whole (all Chapters) and centralized services. We resolved nothing that night, but it was good to air our thoughts.

One idea that came to mind back then, and continues to come to my mind since, is that people are comfortable with how they are first exposed to something. In this case, the veteran Board member had been around since near the beginning of the incorporation of The Prairie Enthusiasts. Things were simpler then, with just three Chapters that pretty much ran their own show. In our infancy, we were also pretty loose on how the show was run. There were no Land Trust Alliance standards to meet, and we were small enough to make it work successfully. The second Board member didn't know those times at all and saw the potential perils in not having a strong central organization operating under practices of a strong land trust.

Fast forward to today, we are still navigating how best to collaborate. We know the importance of our grassroots on-the-ground network of volunteers at the Chapter level. Chapter volunteers can focus on protecting and stewarding habitats in their region. They can create educational and outreach events based on what they know their community is interested in. And they can better connect with current and potential members. That is an incredible strength of our organization.

All that work is propped up by the Chapter Support team. That team concentrates on the overall health of the organization and providing support for Chapters. They handle insurance, land trust accreditation requirements, land protection projects, donation processing, accounting, our website and much more of the not-so-glamorous part of our work. Having that team allows Chapters to focus on our mission programs, and it allows Chapters with a small member base to have the same opportunities of larger metro-area Chapters. That means rare habitat throughout the Upper Midwest has an equal opportunity to be protected and/or restored.

Within the nonprofit sector, there's really nothing quite like The Prairie Enthusiasts. Our structure provides us with opportunities and challenges. But if we all focus on our mission of protecting and stewarding fire-dependent ecosystems in the Upper Midwest, we can create a bigger and long-lasting impact together. ■

Old-growth white oak with ground fire light reflecting off the branches as the sun was setting. Photo by Andy Sleger.

Acting Executive Director's Message

Communication is Connection

Jessica Bizub, Acting Executive Director

The soft percussion of wind through grasses. The drone of cicadasas rising and falling. Spring birds singing to find a mate. No matter the season, the prairie is always communicating with us.

A few years ago, I completed a soundscape project at Mounds View Grassland where I captured recordings about 4-6 weeks apart. In winter, it was of course, quieter, but my audio recorder was always close to the ground, and there was a surprising abundance of sound—small critters scurrying around and dried plants scraping against the snow and ice. Winter is often associated with silence and dormancy. And, though true to an extent, there's still a bustle of activity during these cold months.

Like the prairie, our organization may seem quieter too. It's true there are fewer work parties and events scheduled, but our organization is no less active during this time. The end of the year is filled with gearing up for our annual conference, financial processing and budgeting, gift processing and preparing for the year ahead. But like the prairie, if you don't have a metaphorical microphone, how would you know of this bustle of activity?

When I was a volunteer, I saw only a small slice of what happens throughout the organization. I was focused on what I had a passion for, which was hands-on land stewardship. Later, when I became the Glacial Prairie Chapter Chair, I learned more about what our members wanted to hear about. They wanted communication about when work parties are planned, what was happening on the prairie, and if there were any upcoming educational opportunities. Later still, when I moved into the Glacial Prairie Chapter Board Representative, I was in a connector-communicator role, ensuring people had the info they needed when they needed it and helping everyone become more aware of the bigger organizational picture. Throughout these roles, I found myself wanting to hear more from other Chapters and Chapter Support. I wanted to know what projects were being worked on, the status of those projects and what I could do to support that work.

I am not alone in my experiences as a volunteer, wanting to hear more from the organization. Through our member survey and personal conversations, we have put the microphone to our Prairie Enthusiasts community and heard that desire reflected. That's why this year, one of our priorities is that we provide more frequent and more transparent communications throughout all reaches of our organization. We'll be developing more resources for Chapters about the roles of Chapter Support, Chapters, the Board of Directors and Committees on key work like land protection, fundraising, etc. In Chapter Support, we're looking to better assist Chapters with outreach and operating procedures. For Chapter Support Staff, we're looking to improve our process coordination and provide more communication to Chapters about what we're currently working on. And for our members, we're looking to increase our communications and transparency with you, so you can have a better sense of what your support is accomplishing and what our upcoming priorities are.

This year, we're focused on communication because it is what connects us with one another and our mission. Our organization is complex, but through connection, we can make a more resilient whole. It is my hope that throughout the year, you'll not only be able to hear the blackbird's loud call, but also the vole beneath the snow. ■

Pattern in the snow from grass and wind. Photo by Jonathan Rigden.

In 2026, Find Your Place and Celebrate!

Article and Photos by Jonathan Rigden

Sometimes thinking about the past and the natural world can be disheartening. When thoughts percolate about the state of nature in North America before European settlement with its old-growth forests and vast prairies rich with wildlife and rivers that ran fast and clean, an intense feeling of distress can occur. These thoughts can become overwhelming and even produce rage as we witness the decline of monarch butterflies, the steep drop in bird populations, bats fighting for survival and our postage stamp prairies being engulfed by trees and brush. When we witness these changes occurring at a place we know and love, a feeling of profound sadness can emerge—the ache of solastalgia.

Solastalgia is a relatively new term that combines the concepts of solace and pain. It describes the distress felt when one's place of solace, or comfort, is threatened. A place where you seek peace, sometimes the place you call home, is disappearing. Those with a medical background are well-acquainted with words ending in -algia denoting pain, such as fibromyalgia, arthralgia or neuralgia. Solastalgia conveys a longing mixed with suffering. producing an intense melancholy about a treasured place that is fading away. A homesickness felt at home.

Nostalgia has a slightly different meaning. It comes from the Greek nostos or "homecoming" and again -algia, and can suggest a wistful or sentimental longing for a place, often associated with a sense of happiness or comfort. It can motivate someone to put in long hours to return to or preserve a cherished past while

From near to far, Birch Point, Zoerb, Lookout, and Vista Prairies in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

creating social bonds fostering connection and optimism. On the other hand, nostalgia can paint idealized pictures in our minds leading to despair and a longing for days of old that will never be with us again. It can create unrealistic, rosy images with feelings of regret which can paralyze us by focusing on going back rather than forward. Some refer to this as "nostalgic depression" or even "toxic nostalgia." The feeling of nostalgia is often called bittersweet for its combination of positive and negative emotions.

Topophilia is an abiding love for a place despite changes that are occurring. It is derived from the Greek "topo" meaning "place" and "philia" meaning "love," or having an emotional bond and affection for a specific place. Any location can inspire topophilia, but it is more common for those places that are unusual and disappearing. This feeling is often born from childhood experiences but can be captured at any age by immersing oneself deeply in a place. Like a remnant prairie.

For someone new on a prairie, topophilia can start by seeing a few plants that are among the first to emerge in the spring like pasqueflower, hoary puccoon, jeweled shooting star or bird's foot violet.

Think of these early risers as a string quartet introducing a full symphony to come—Dvořák's No 12, Op 96, "American" followed by Beethoven's Symphony No 9, "Ode to Joy." Stunning displays of life appearing subtly in the spring then exploding through the year from one movement to the next. A feast before the eyes. Then, for full immersion, close your eyes and be free from vision. Hear the birds chatter and the leaves on a bur oak talking to the wind. Feel the breeze in your hair while you pick up the invigorating scent of mountain mint or a whiff of vanilla coming from nearby lady's tresses buried in the grasses. Taste the lemon-sour flavor of a leaf or two of sorrel. Fall in love with the place. Drift into a dream where prairies are thriving across the landscape.

Then, as you dream, think of ecophilia, a combination where topophilia becomes the whole of Earth and biophilia the love of the entire tapestry of life. A way of thinking about and living in harmony with nature through a kinship that allows both humans and the natural world to thrive and become one.

In 2026, recognize that "algia" is important, but don't let it dominate—leave some room for "philia." Find your place and celebrate! At Friends of the Blufflands, guided by the expertise of The Prairie Enthusiasts and a valuable collaboration with the Coulee Region Chapter, we have embraced prairie restoration as a big part of our celebration. Get involved and begin 2026 with enthusiastic topophilia for our prairies! ■

*From top to bottom: hoary puccoon (*Lithospermum canescens*), Pasqueflower (*Anemone patens*), bird's foot violet (*Viola pedata*), and jeweled shooting star (*Dodecatheon amethystinum*).*

Management Toolbox

By Jim Rogala, President

The purpose of this regular section of *The Prairie Promoter* is to keep proper management methods fresh in your mind. These short articles will sometimes reference past or future articles that contain details on the selected topic. Others will just be some food for thought. We try to schedule the articles to coincide with when planning for the practice occurs. We encourage others to write or provide ideas for articles. You can send those ideas to me at JRogala@ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org.

Know Your Shrubs!

Prescribed burning is an essential part of remnant prairie restoration, but established woody vegetation is seldom killed with fire. As a result, killing unwanted woody species is a critical part of restoring most degraded remnants. Successfully managing trees and shrubs involves many considerations to ensure collateral damage is not done to nontarget species from herbicide application.

A sometimes-overlooked consideration is identifying desired species before killing the targeted unwanted ones. This issue came up a couple of times on a late fall workday on Marowski Bluff Prairie. The targeted species were mostly young buckthorn, which had mostly already dropped their leaves. Intermixed with the target species were a significant amount of leadplant, so a careful inspection was needed before cutting and treating the stems. As we continued to work, I encountered some flagging on a shrub and recalled Justin Nooker mentioning he flagged a prairie red-root (inland New Jersey tea; *Ceanothus herbaceous*). I was able to identify several other prairie red-root plants in that area that might have otherwise been inadvertently cut and treated if that one wasn't flagged. Later in the year, a similar issue occurred related to the presence of sand cherry on other remnants. It is possible that those were accidentally cut and treated if they were present.

For the average volunteer, distinguishing between native and nonnative woody species can be challenging, particularly when leaves are absent. Even for native species like hazelnut, ninebark, serviceberry and dogwood that can be denser than desired, eradication is seldom the goal. Other shrubs like leadplant, prairie willow, sand cherry, and the aforementioned New Jersey tea are considered a part of the prairie plant community and often are not abundant enough that they need to be targeted. When native shrubs are intermingled with targeted nonnatives like buckthorn, honeysuckle and autumn and Russian olive, it is critical to be able to identify the various shrub species and only cut and treat the targeted species.

The species mentioned above are the common shrubs on prairies,

A mix of six species of shrubs; three natives and three nonnatives. Can you identify them all? Photo by Jim Rogala.

but there are additional shade-tolerant species in other fire-dependent ecosystems. The common nonnatives are listed above, but other native species such as eastern leatherwood, nannyberry, and American witch-hazel can be common in areas of shade. On acidic sites, blueberries, huckleberries, and chokeberries might be present. Again, most of those are desired native species and need to be avoided when killing nonnative shrubs. The same consideration should be applied when working in open wetland areas that have their own unique set of native shrubs such as alders.

I've mentioned quite a few shrubs above, but there is a much longer list of native and nonnative shrubs. One good source for a more complete list of shrubs and characteristics for identification of them is the website Minnesota Wildflowers: MinnesotaWildflowers.Info. Another good resource is Welby Smith's *Trees and Shrubs of Minnesota*. During the growing season, characteristics of leaves, flowers and fruit can be helpful. Twigs, bark and buds become more important features to look for when growing season structures are missing. If volunteers are not able to confidently identify target shrub species, then flagging nontarget species should be done prior to working in an area.

We typically think of our toolbox in terms of equipment, herbicide or methods, but successfully managing target species without killing native species requires identification skills, especially during leaf-off periods. So, add field guides to your toolbox and get to know your shrubs before you mistakenly kill desirable native shrub species during your assault on unwanted shrubs. ■

Pascha

Poem and Photo by Alex Singer

Toxic
self-sowing.
Less phoenix than
survivor and harbinger on this rocky windswept world.

Monitoring Bat Activity Following Prairie Savanna Restoration

Article and Photos by Robert J. Marquis, St. Croix Valley Chapter

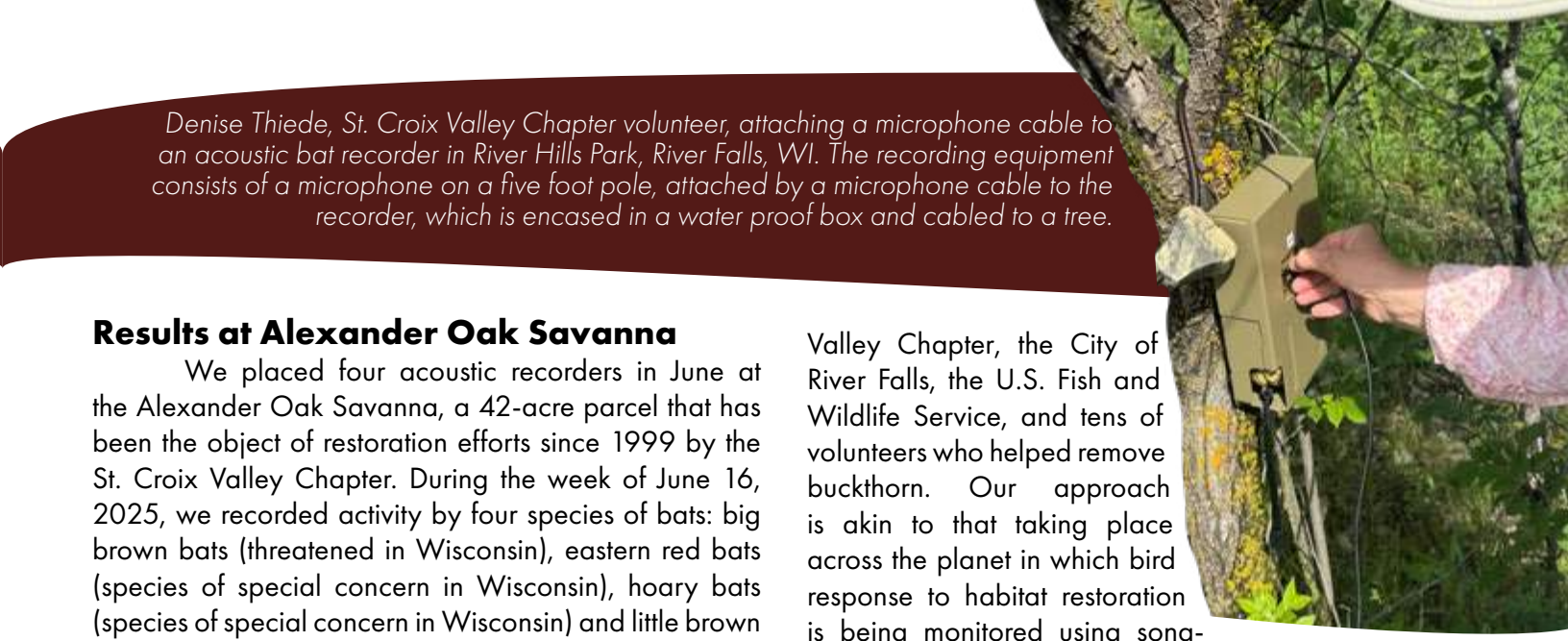
Bats Are In Trouble

Bats provide many important ecosystem services, including the control of crop insect pests.[1] They may consume insects equal to 9-12% of their body mass in a single evening of foraging.[2] Bat populations, however, have been declining due to habitat destruction, pesticides, collisions with windmills and, most recently and most precipitously, due to the white-nose syndrome. In response to increasing number of crop pest insects following predator release, farmers in the eastern U.S. have increased their use of pesticides. This has resulted in an average 7.9% increase in human infant mortality in counties that have experienced bat die-offs.[3]

We Collected Baseline Data in 2025

Bats use echolocation to find food, especially flying insects, and to avoid collisions with foliage and woody vegetation. There is mounting evidence that invasion of natural habitat by woody plant species can decrease activity of bats. If the invasive plants are tall and dense enough, the habitat can become too "cluttered" for bats to navigate, forcing them forage elsewhere. In June and August, 2025, with the help of fellow Prairie Enthusiasts Denise Thiede, Joe Fusilier, Jay Arneson and Peter Leete, I used bat acoustic recording equipment to monitor activity of bats in Alexander Oak Savanna and in restoration plots along the Kinnickinnic River in River Hills Park in River Falls, WI. The goal was to collect baseline data on bat activity and species composition to understand how habitat restoration influences these important components of terrestrial ecosystems.

Left: Volunteer Joe Fusilier placing a bat acoustic recorder on a tree to monitor bat activity at Alexander Oak Savanna, June 2025. Above: Microphone deployed on a five foot pole along the Kinnickinnic River in River Hills Park to record echolocation activity of bats in response to habitat restoration, August, 2025.



Denise Thiede, St. Croix Valley Chapter volunteer, attaching a microphone cable to an acoustic bat recorder in River Hills Park, River Falls, WI. The recording equipment consists of a microphone on a five foot pole, attached by a microphone cable to the recorder, which is encased in a water proof box and cabled to a tree.

Results at Alexander Oak Savanna

We placed four acoustic recorders in June at the Alexander Oak Savanna, a 42-acre parcel that has been the object of restoration efforts since 1999 by the St. Croix Valley Chapter. During the week of June 16, 2025, we recorded activity by four species of bats: big brown bats (threatened in Wisconsin), eastern red bats (species of special concern in Wisconsin), hoary bats (species of special concern in Wisconsin) and little brown bats (threatened in Wisconsin).

See those bats here:

Results at River Hills Park

In August of 2025, we placed acoustic recorders in four plots along the Kinnickinnic River in River Hills Park that had been cleared of "old growth" buckthorn (*Rhamnus carthartica*) and four neighboring control plots highly congested with buckthorn. Buckthorn had invaded the riverside approximately 50 years ago. Many of the buckthorn plants removed were 25-30 feet tall. We tested the hypothesis that buckthorn plants were tall enough and dense enough to reduce the ability of bats to navigate and to find food. This research appears to be the first experimental study to test the impact of invasive plant species removal on bat activity. In addition, there appear to be no previous surveys of bat activity along the entire Kinnickinnic River (C. Trosen, pers. comm.).

Our initial data from the Kinnickinnic River plots show that all four species of bats found at Alexander Oak Savanna also occur along the river, but in addition, silver-haired bats were recorded in riverside plots. More importantly, our initial results show that bat activity was 2-5 times higher in plots from which buckthorn was removed compared to neighboring plots with intact buckthorn canopies. We will repeat surveys during the summer of 2026, with the goal of sampling throughout the summer and in an increased number of paired plots.

Bats Respond Positively to Restoration

This research is sponsored by the St. Croix Valley Chapter, the City of River Falls, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and tens of volunteers who helped remove buckthorn. Our approach is akin to that taking place across the planet in which bird response to habitat restoration is being monitored using song-recording equipment.

Read more about that research here:

Bats are a less obvious component of the natural landscape compared to birds, because bats are active when most humans are sleeping and make sounds mostly inaudible to us. However, bats are certainly no less important in their contribution to ecosystem services compared to birds; some studies show bats actually consume significantly more insects from leaf surfaces than do insectivorous birds at the same location.[4,5] Our preliminary results suggest that efforts to restore prairies and savanna habitat in the Wisconsin-Minnesota region may increase bat activity and the ecosystem services that they provide.

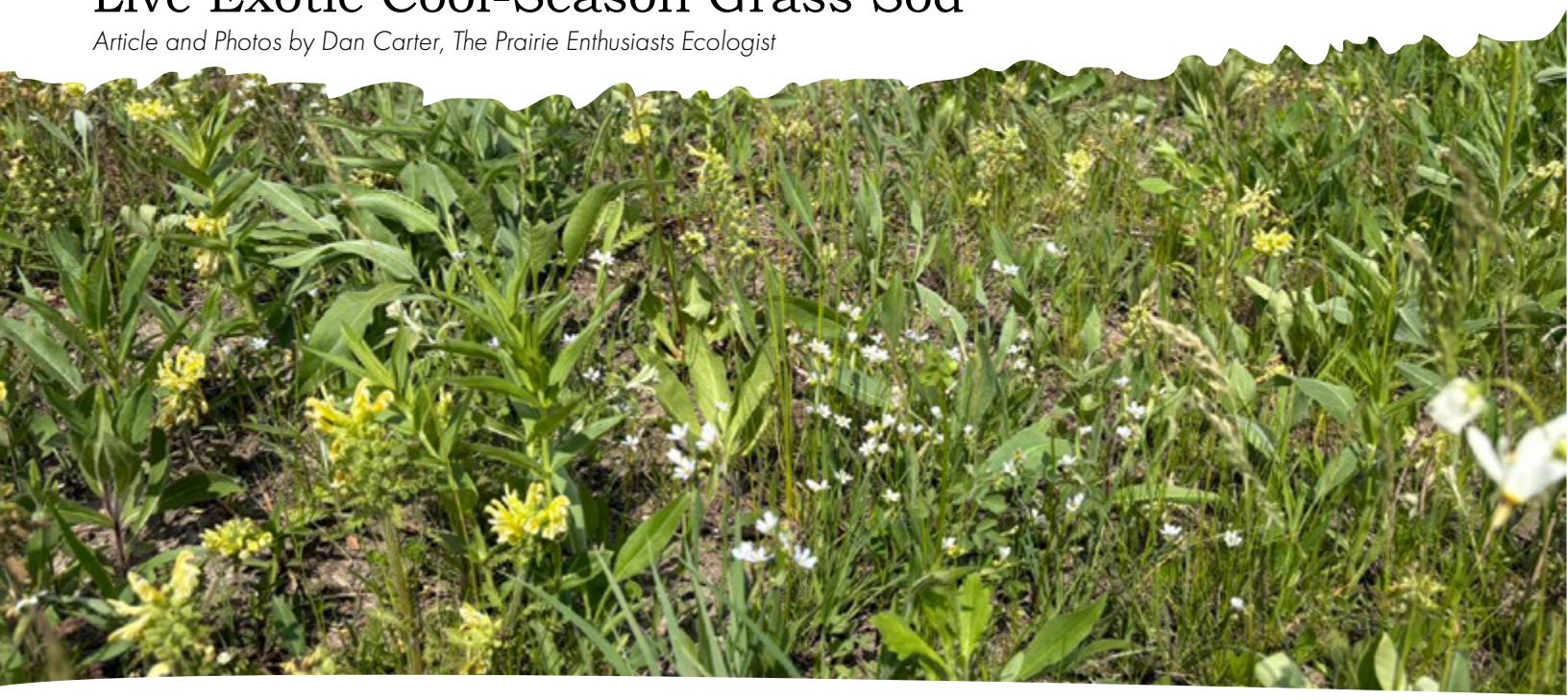
Thanks to Many Who Helped

We thank the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, St. Croix Wetland Management District, for the loan of their equipment; Veronica Bauer, Jill Utrup, Chris Trosen, and Alex Bouthilet for training, logistics, equipment loan, and recording analyses; Evanne Hunt for support and leadership; the City of River Falls, WI, for logistical and financial support; John Lampe for pointing out the New York Times article; and the many volunteers who helped clear buckthorn from experimental plots. ■

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

Reason for Optimism
Long-Term Results from Planting Prairie into Live Exotic Cool-Season Grass Sod

Article and Photos by Dan Carter, The Prairie Enthusiasts Ecologist



Left: View of a prairie planting in its 13th growing season.

A few years back I wrote about the potential of old pastures and mature old fields dominated by cool season grass, many of which still support important populations of native prairie and savanna species. This is often very good reason on its own to forego broadcast spray of broad-spectrum herbicide, cultivation or other start-from-scratch techniques to re-establish prairie or savanna in those contexts. Another reason is that the alternative—treating a nonnative, cool-season-dominated sod as though it were prairie or savanna by restoring fire and facilitating dispersal of appropriate plant species back—can be wildly successful. The best examples of this that I know are the restoration of savanna pasture Sugar River Savanna and prairie plantings into mature smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*) Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) plantings at the Mounds View Grassland. While these successes are visually obvious to visitors of those sites, data is needed to help us communicate success and advocate for the associated methods.

In the summer 2025 issue of *The Prairie Promoter,* I wrote about assessing ecological integrity using mean C, which is the mean of coefficients of conservatism assigned to the flora based on how faithful or "conservative" they are to old-growth natural communities (remnants). Coefficients range from zero (no fidelity to old-growth) to ten (very high fidelity to old-growth). According to Swink and Wilhelm (1994), areas with mean C values of 3.5 or greater are generally of at least marginal natural area quality, areas with mean C values of 4.5 or greater are almost certainly remnants with natural area potential, and only rarely do reconstruction projects achieve a mean C higher than 3.5. That still may be true, though I think more efforts are doing better. Please refer to the previous article for more discussion of ecological integrity and the ecological meaning of coefficients.

Last year, I resolved to study the plainly successful prairie plantings into live brome and other exotic cool-season sods at Mounds View Grassland and characterize them in terms of mean C, which is meaningful in and of itself. An additional advantage to studying prairie plantings at Mounds View Grassland is the presence of remnant prairies on the same immediate landscape, so remnant prairies' mean C values were also assessed for reference and compared to those of the prairie plantings. The data I collected will be used to develop a presentation and a manuscript for submission to a regional or restoration-focused journal. Here I share some of the preliminary findings.

Methods

I sampled eight relatively mature upland prairie plantings at Mounds View Grassland, a preserve in eastern Iowa County, Wisconsin owned by The Prairie Enthusiasts. Plantings were generally dry-mesic to borderline mesic. The youngest planting was in its 11th growing season. The oldest was in its 26th growing season. To prepare for each planting, existing sods of cool-season grass were burned for one to three consecutive years in advance of initial seeding to remove thatch and lessen cool-season grass vigor. Most of these cool-season sods had been present for decades and were originally established as smooth brome CRP plantings on land that was previously cultivated. Most prairie plantings received initial broadcast seeding for one or two years with follow-up seeding in lesser amounts subsequently. Seed was broadcast in fall, except for some early-ripening species which were broadcast in summer. Plantings received annual or near-annual early spring burning after seeding (including the spring immediately following fall seeding) for a decade or more. These burns were early enough to avoid killing germinating prairie plants and negative impacts to important prairie cool-season species (March or the first half of April, depending on the conditions).

I identified two ten-meter sampling transect locations in each planting prior to field work using aerial photography. Transect locations were selected such that they were dispersed within the planting area, and all portions of transects were at least three meters from edges. Transects were also positioned parallel to slopes to maximize gradients associated with slope positions and underlying soils, bedrock and moisture. I wanted to capture as much of the variation within planted prairie units as possible. Along each transect I sampled 10 one-quarter meter square sampling areas (quadrats), which were placed randomly on the left or right side of the transect and randomly along the first or second half meter within each of the ten one-meter intervals of the transect.

View of transect and quadrat in prairie planting in its 11th growing season.

Thus, within each remnant I assessed mean C from a total of twenty subsamples (ten each along two transects). In addition, eight prairie remnants on the same landscape were sampled in the same way, with the exception that a few transects were repositioned to be in burned portions of otherwise unburned remnants. These remnants do generally tend drier than the plantings, because they are located on parts of the landscape that weren't arable, ranging from dry to borderline mesic at toe-of-slope positions. All field work was conducted between May 15 and May 27, 2025. With two exceptions (one remnant and one planting), all sampling areas had burned since the 2024 growing season.

Each prairie planting and remnant mean C value was calculated by taking the average of all twenty individual subsample quadrat mean C values. This procedure produces mean C weighted by the frequency of species in the quadrat subsamples; species that occurred in many subsample quadrats had more influence, and those that occurred in only one or a few subsamples had proportionately less. This is of greater interest than mean C calculated from the total list of species in a given planting or remnant, because it distinguishes and assigns higher mean C to areas that have conservative species represented frequently at small scales throughout compared to areas where conservative species are detected at the scale of all sampling within a prairie planting (here the five square meters of total area among quadrats in a unit) or remnant but are sparse such that they are only infrequently detected in subsamples.

Findings

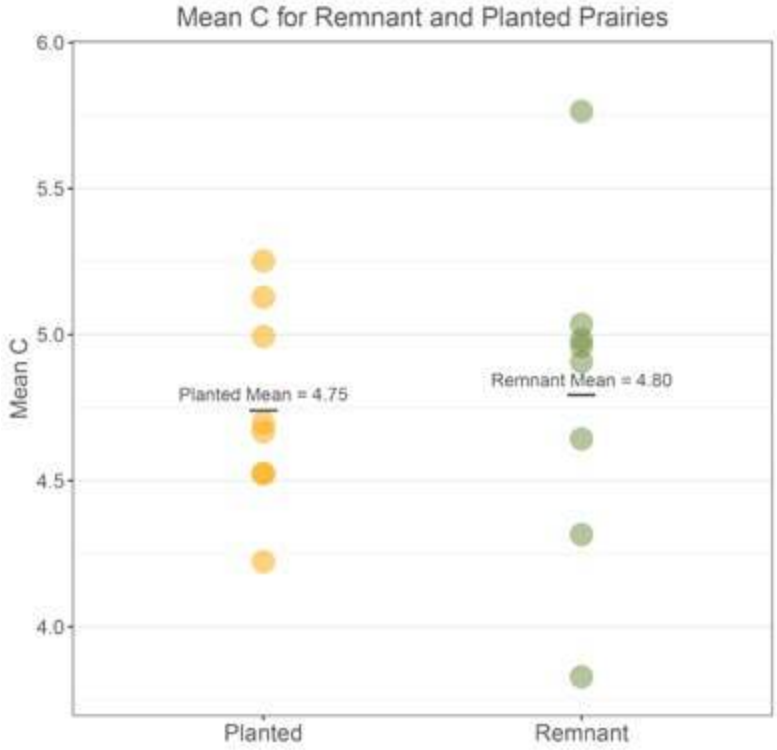
View of transect through remnant prairie.

The photos featured are from the plantings and remnants that I sampled. The results were not surprising given how visually impressive the plantings are. Prairie planting mean C values were similar to and fell within the range of mean C values observed on nearby remnants. Many species normally only encountered in remnant, old-growth prairies like hoary puccoon (*Lithospermum canescens*), wood lily (*Lilium philadelphicum*), porcupine grass (*Hesperostipa spartea*), Leiberg's panic grass (*Dichanthelium leibergii*), false toadflax (*Comandra umbellata*) and prairie violet (*Viola pedatifida*) were encountered in at least one planted prairie. The blog post associated with this article provides a list of all 136 plant species encountered in plantings and remnants during sampling and the number of remnants and plantings they were detected in. Keep in mind that this list does not capture all species present a planted or remnant prairie unit; it captures species abundant and distributed enough to be detected within the five square meters of total sampling in each unit, or sparse species that I was just lucky to detect. Most species that were detected even once would have been apparent to a knowledgeable observer strolling through a unit.

Frequency-weighted mean C among the eight prairie plantings sampled averaged 4.75, which indicates recovery of ecological integrity on par with many remnant natural areas. Values for individual plantings ranged from 4.22 to 5.25. Mean C among the remnants averaged 4.80 and ranged from 3.83 to 5.76. There was not evidence for a statistical difference in mean C between the plantings and the remnants (Wilcoxon test of median difference due to small sample and non-normal data, $W = 33$, $p = 0.96$; inference from T-test of mean difference is the same). The data is plotted in the left page graph. It should be noted that there are nonetheless differences between the planted and remnant prairies. For example, Richardson's sedge (*Carex richardsonii*), Mead's sedge (*Carex meadii*), yellow stargrass (*Hypoxis hirsuta*), violet wood sorrel, (*Oxalis violacea*) and Great Plains lady's tresses orchid (*Spiranthes magnicamporum*) were only observed in remnants. Some of this may be attributed to these species not being included in planting seed mixes or included in only very small amounts. The absence of some of the more xeric species may be attributed to differences in conditions between remnant and planted prairies. In particular, the driest parts of the remnant prairies are drier than most or any parts of the planted prairies.

The success of these plantings can be attributed to several factors, including the following:

- Seeding was diverse, including many conservative species associated with old-growth and species that flower early in the season and are often omitted from plantings (e.g., wood betony, *Pedicularis canadensis*; prairie blue-eyed grass, *Sisyrinchium campestre*; false toadflax, *Comandra umbellata*; etc.).
- A vigorous growth of annual and biennial weeds was not released from the seed bank, because broadcast non-selective herbicide spray and cultivation for site preparation were avoided and nonnative, cool-season grasses provided a sort of cover crop as well as immediate fuel for burning.
- It's possible that soils and associated microbial communities in established nonnative, cool-season grass sods had recovered to a degree prior to planting. This needs research.
- The existence of remnant prairies nearby on the landscape allowed for recolonization of the plantings by specialist insects and also potentially some plants and microbes (bacteria and fungi).
- Wood betony (*Pedicularis canadensis*) has been used to prevent



Plot showing frequency-weighted mean C for eight planted prairies and eight remnant prairies with respective mean values (black line segments) respectively for all planted and all remnant prairies. Frequency-weighted Mean C for each point is calculated as the average of mean C values from the 20 ¼ meter-squared subsamples in each unit. Mean C values for respective planting and remnant groups are annotated to the plot and calculated as the average of all mean C values of their respective points (individual plantings or remnant prairies). Differential shading indicates point overlap.

over-dominance by tall, warm-season grasses and is abundant in the planted prairies.

- Very importantly, annual or near annual early spring (mostly dormant) fire created and maintained a thatch-free environment for prairie seeds to germinate and establish and in turn disperse more seeds. Frequent fire can also reduce nitrogen availability by volatilizing nitrogen out of the system and producing charcoal that binds some of what is not volatilized; most conservative species have an advantage under conditions of low nutrient availability due to greater efficiency and/or retention of nutrients, and a greater propensity for mutualisms like mycorrhizal associations that can alleviate nutrient limitations. Thus, fire has favored elements of the developing prairie community over time and disfavored relatively opportunistic, weedy species. This is an important factor regardless of method of site preparation. Very frequent dormant season burning is the common denominator of the most successful reconstruction and restoration projects I have encountered.

I did calculate overall mean C for each unit using the mean of coefficients of all species detected among all twenty subsamples. Values calculated at this somewhat larger scale were modestly greater for all plantings and six out of eight remnants (Mean C = 5.15 for plantings and 4.91 for remnants). There are two possible explanations, which are not mutually exclusive. One is that conservative species are still under-represented at small scales due to sparseness or patchiness, implying that plantings may continue to coalesce and stitch back together as plants spread vegetatively or by seed. Likewise, remnants may continue to recover from past land use and fire exclusion with stewardship. The other is that individual conservative species may be more localized within units due to relative specialization along environmental gradients compared to less conservative species, which would result in more conservative species being detected at larger scales. Non-native species like smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*) and less conservative native species were often sparsely present across many or all subsamples in a unit, and at least some conservative species within units were only detected in positions at either end of or in the middle along transects which were laid out across physical gradients from relative upslope to downslope positions.

While the planted prairies are still subtly different from remnant prairies, insofar as "native systems are defined substantially by their conservative biota," (Swink and Wilhelm, 1994), these plantings appear well on their way to recovery. With time, restoration of stabilizing dormant season fire, and efforts to compensate for limiting natural dispersal into sites (and more than a little weed pulling, cutting brush, etc.), it seems almost as though these ecosystems want to reconstitute themselves. This gives me great optimism for these sites and others like them where constant and thoughtful stewards are at work giving them a chance. ■

Read the summer 2025 issue of *The Prairie Promoter* that Dan referenced

April Showers Bring May Flowers

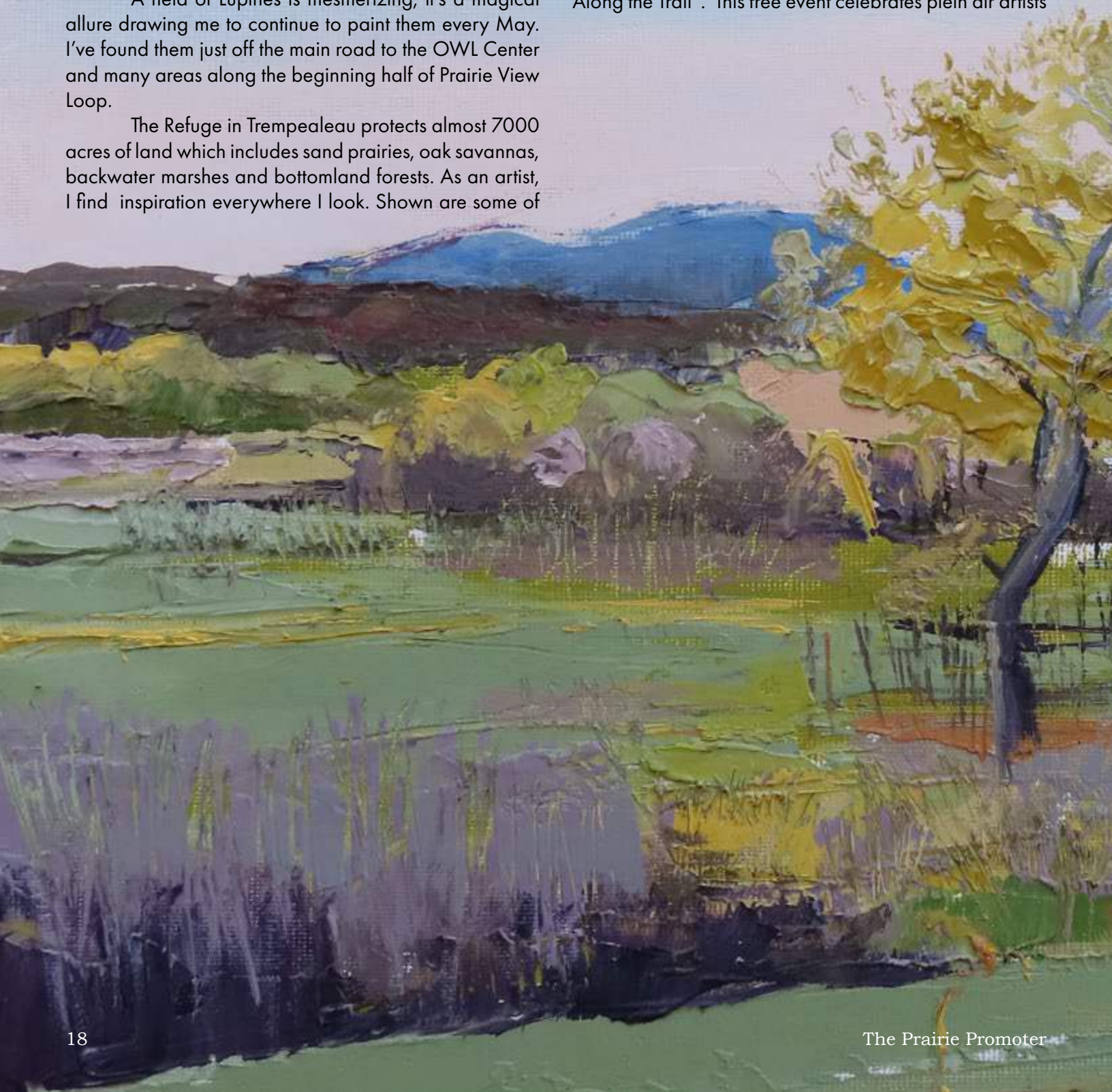
Article and Artwork by Colleen Shore

Each spring I look forward to visiting the prairies at the Trempealeau National Wildlife Refuge just to paint the Wild Lupines. Nature's combinations are applauded, with vibrant blue flowers transitioning into violets, pinks and white. Plus the bloom spikes towering above the whirl of palmate leaves produces complex shapes and shadows.

A field of Lupines is mesmerizing, it's a magical allure drawing me to continue to paint them every May. I've found them just off the main road to the OWL Center and many areas along the beginning half of Prairie View Loop.

The Refuge in Trempealeau protects almost 7000 acres of land which includes sand prairies, oak savannas, backwater marshes and bottomland forests. As an artist, I find inspiration everywhere I look. Shown are some of my oil paintings depicting the prairies at the refuge. I've always enjoyed painting there and encourage you to stop out for their artists event the first Saturday in June each year. Or maybe you are a creative soul and want to spend your morning sketching or painting with us.

When planning your visit to the Trempealeau National WildLife Refuge be sure to check out "Artists Along the Trail". This free event celebrates plein air artists



creating in the Refuge on Saturday, June 6 from 7am-11 am. Visitors will find artists set up along the various trails and overlooks. At 11:30 everyone is invited to gather at the OWL Center and enjoy a complimentary lunch, meet the artists and view the morning's creations. Thanks to the Friends of Trempealeau Refuge and Michael Owecke Memorial Fund, the Artists Along the Trail is celebrating its fourth year with 20 plus artists from the area. ■

"Lupines Along the Trail"

"Solitude on the Prairie"

Scan to see more of Colleen's artwork.

"Across the Prairie-Painting" oil painting at the Trempealeau National WildLife Refuge.

Bobbi's Migration Journal:
A Look at the Southern Driftless Grasslands Through the Eyes of a Bobolink

Article by Jenni Foshey and Andy Bingle

Originally published in the summer 2025 issue of Wisconsin People & Ideas the magazine for members and friends of the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters.

Day 1: Preparing for Migration and Dreaming of the Southern Driftless

It's mid April, about that time of year for me to document my upcoming migration. The days are getting shorter here in the Pampas of Argentina, and I can feel the urge to migrate North. I've been feasting on insects and seeds, putting on half of my body weight in reserves. Soon I'll join my flock, heading north to our home in Wisconsin's Southern Driftless region. It's in this unique place where we grassland birds have found expansive habitat suitable for our nesting needs.

After eight months away, I can't wait to see the deep greens of the grasses, the light blue of the sky, and the bright yellow, red, and purple forbs that accent the landscape. I can already hear the subtle sound of grass blowing in the wind and the songs of the many birds that reside in this region. But I am not there yet—it is still thousands of wing-beats away.

Male bobolink, like Bobbi's parner, Tux. Photo taken at Mounds View Grassland by Eric Preston.

Day 15: Migrating north through uncertainty

It's almost May and we've been flying for two weeks, covering thousands of kilometers. Though, as Bobolinks, we have one of the longest migrations of any North American songbird, the thought of reaching the Southern Driftless region keeps me going. We have been flying there for as long as any of us can remember. Like many other grassland birds, we nest on the ground, so we are particular about the height and density of the grasses where we choose to build our nests. We prefer medium-height grasses with no trees around, as trees can house and hide predators of our eggs and chicks. We can usually find these nesting spots in prairies, hay and small grain fields, and well-managed pastures.

Unfortunately, these grasslands we depend on are diminishing rapidly, causing a decline in various bird species. The other day, my tuxedoed Bobolink partner, Tux, cautioned that of all groups of birds, the grassland groups are experiencing the quickest rate of decline—about two percent annually. Because of this, Bobolinks are considered a "tipping point species," meaning we are showing an accelerated rate of decline. I knew our numbers were dwindling, but I hadn't realized we were among the most at risk.

They say the biggest reason for our decline is habitat loss. Historically, the Southern Driftless region was rich in prairies and open oak savannas. But over the years, our family has seen these open oak savannas and prairies turning into row cropped agricultural fields crisscrossed by roads and dotted with human houses. Another issue affecting our grasslands is encroachment from invasive woody brush and trees. In the past, these were kept in check by fires, which used to occur every three to five years in the region. Over the last 100 years, however, fire has been suppressed to protect human structures, and this has allowed invasives to spread throughout the grasslands. As a result, it has been increasingly difficult for us to find a favorable place to nest.

We have plenty of time to reflect during our journey north, and each year I find myself thinking of all the uncertainties we experience year after year. I hope this year we find an adequate spot to raise our chicks.

Day 30: Finding a home among the wildflowers

It's May 15, and we've made it! The Southern Driftless is always a welcome and beautiful sight to see after such a long journey. It feels great to fly once again amongst my favorite purple hues of the spiderwort, wild lupine, and pasque flower. Upon arrival, Tux and I choose a cozy niche of the grassland to call home for the season. The humans call it the Schurch-Thomson Prairie, and it's owned and cared-for by a group called The Prairie Enthusiasts. Although there is row-cropped agriculture nearby, this prairie has everything we look for in a home: medium-height grasses, a treeless open landscape, and little woody vegetation. Another interesting observation is that humans enjoy visiting Schurch-Thomson Prairie, just like we Bobolinks do! Today they were walking on the trails and taking photos of wildflowers, butterflies, and, of course, us birds.

I found some perfectly dense grass to build my nest in an open field. It should take me about two days to build my comfortable, two-inch nest of grasses and sedges. In the meantime, Tux has been keeping an eye on our surroundings while gathering food. As I watch him fly, I can't help but think that his plumage looks like a black-and-white patterned tuxedo, with a striking yellowish hood.

Later today, I am going to catch up with my friend Sandi, an Upland Sandpiper I met last year while exploring the nearby Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area. During the breeding season, Sandi lives at Barneveld Prairie, which is only a few wingbeats away to the northwest. Her home is owned and managed by The Nature Conservancy. She, too, is busy finding a good place in the grasslands to nest and will migrate back to Argentina with us Bobolinks at the end of the summer.

Day 45: Nesting and listening to the land

It's the end of May now, and while discreetly incubating my five purple-speckled eggs, I've had the advantage of overhearing human conversation about the work being done to protect habitats like mine. I now understand that conserving the grasslands of this region is no small feat. One of the challenges to achieving landscape-scale grassland conservation is the land being fragmented. Ninety-five percent of the land in the Southern Driftless region is privately owned, and most of it is divided into small parcels ranging from twenty to 300 acres. Managing land takes a coordinated effort from everyone—conservation organizations, governmental organizations, private sector contractors, and private landowners—to help protect these vital grassland ecosystems.

Apparently, there has been an array of conservation partnerships in the region over the past few decades. The

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources and the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin have identified the Southern Driftless as an ecologically important region to conserve. Groups like the Blue Mounds Area Project, Pheasants Forever, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and various county conservation departments are helping to connect landowners with resources to manage their land.

Organizations like The Prairie Enthusiasts and The Nature Conservancy are also playing their part by owning and managing some of the parcels that have vital grasslands on them, and land trusts like the Driftless Area Land Conservancy are working with landowners who want to protect their properties forever through land easements. There are even special avian focused groups, such as the Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance, the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Partnership, and the American Bird Conservancy, that are looking out for birds like Sandi, Tux, and me.

Hearing about all of this work, I feel grateful for all of these groups and individuals who have contributed to the achievements thus far. However, I recognize that there is still more work to be done to make sure the eggs I am incubating today will have grasslands to return to in the future.

Day 60: A new generation

Good news! It's June 14, and my five eggs have hatched! Tux and I have been busy caring for our young. Even though Tux provides food for other nests in addition to mine, our chicks are putting on weight and are looking healthier every day. In a week and a half or so, they will have fledged and will be ready for flying lessons, my favorite part of raising our chicks. I already talked with a couple of other Bobolinks teaching their young to fly, some of which chose to nest on private lands this year.

Through conversation with my fellow Bobolinks, I am identifying more and more private landowners who are recognizing the importance of grasslands and are deciding to take steps to restore their land on their own. Some humans have beautiful grasslands which they use to produce hay for rotational grazing, and they are making sure not to disturb our nests from May 15 to July 1. We are very appreciative of these new bird-friendly haying and grazing practices. I hope this trend continues to grow, as it might help Bobolinks move away from being a "tipping point species."

The other day, as our first egg was hatching, we overheard humans from a group called Pheasants Forever talking about how they are training landowners to administer prescribed fires on their own property through a series of workshops and teachable burns. They mentioned that using prescribed fire may turn the brushy sections of their land into the open prairies they once were. Maybe someday, one of those private landowners' restored grasslands will be the place one of my chicks chooses to nest when they reach my age. That's a nice thought.

Day 110: Preparing for Argentina with hope for the future

It's early August and all of our chicks can fly, meaning it's time to set our sights on Argentina. The Southern Driftless region has been a great home for us, but the cycle of migration continues. As we get ready to leave this special place, I reflect on what I have learned this year through listening to Tux, my other grassland friends, and respective humans as they passed the nest. It's clear that continued pressures from land-use change, lack of resources for land management, and the fragmentation of land parcels have made it difficult to achieve landscape-scale grassland conservation needed to protect grassland bird populations. But there are multiple efforts from different groups of people and private landowners who are working on our behalf to help restore this land to the open oak savannas and grasslands that once spanned the landscape here.

For these efforts, my friends and I are truly grateful. I'm hopeful that efforts like these will continue so my young, and their young, will be able to find safe places to nest in the future. But for now, it is time again to warm up these muscles and prepare for our long journey south.

See you next year, Wisconsin!

The Schurch-Thomson Prairie near Barneveld, Wisconsin, provides habitat for hundreds of rare and endangered species, including grassland birds like bobolinks. Photo by Joshua Mayer.

Book Review

Chasing Wildflowers: An Adventurous Guide to Finding Minnesota's Native Flowers in Their Unique Habitats

Written By Phyllis Root, Photography by Kelly Povo
Reviewed by Reid Bartholomew, Mission Advancement Coordinator

Years ago, Phyllis Root and Kelly Povo began a journey to find native wildflowers in their home state of Minnesota. Neither of them are biologists or botanists by training; they were simply motivated by their fascination with the natural world and its beauty to explore the abundance of life around them. Since then, they've become prominent voices in Minnesota, encouraging others to learn about the wonders of native flowers through audio postcards on Minnesota Public Radio, their blog Flowerchasers.com, and their first book, *Searching for Minnesota's Native Wildflowers*.

Their newest book together, *Chasing Wildflowers* is a collection of their adventures in tracking down the native flowers throughout years of hiking through fens, prairies, and woodlands—a culmination of what must have doubtless been countless trips. The book organizes itself by habitat type, displaying the wildflowers that readers may find at each one. Each section begins with an introduction to the ecosystem to familiarize readers with a basic description of its composition and history. These are accompanied by a short narrative description of one of Root and Povo's trips to that particular ecosystem, which brings the following floral entries a sense of immediacy.

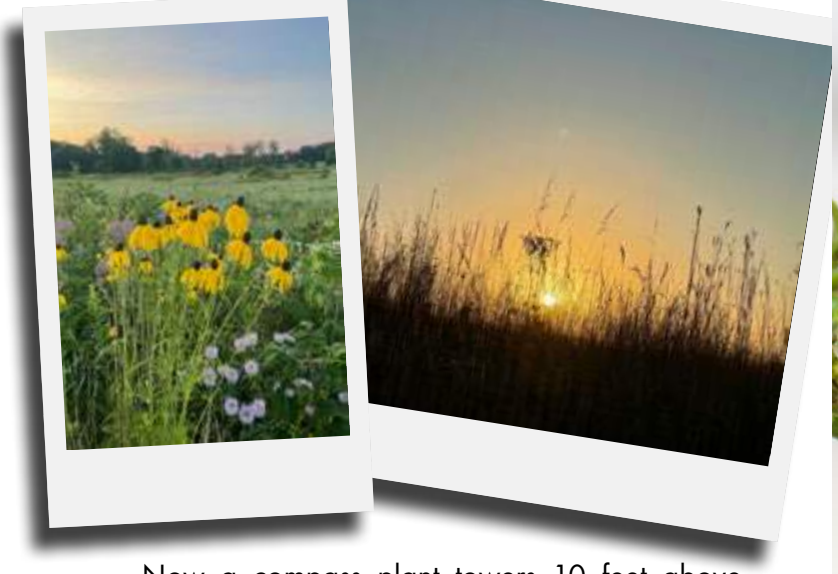
Root's prose is full of an earnest wonder. The book is filled with her loving description of plants that convey their unique characteristics in an approachable style. Her writing is clear, evocative without being overly adorned, and genial in a way that frequently brought a soft smile to my face. Alongside Root's descriptions and narratives on every page is Povo's photography, which captures the myriad wildflowers of Minnesota at the height of their bloom. Povo has mastered the glamor shot of wildflowers, creating eye-catching portraits of these plants that are often small, delicate and easy to miss. With their work combined, it feels as if they're able to tease out the unique personality of each plant.

I'm still relatively new to both the Upper Midwest and my ecological education, having only moved to Wisconsin in 2024 and begun proactively studying plants and ecosystems shortly before that. I was pleased to see how much flora I recognized in the prairie ecosystems covered in the book; my short time as a Prairie Enthusiast has taught me much. However, one of the things that struck me upon moving to the Midwest was the diversity of ecosystems present, and this book has provided me with a wide array of flora for me to keep an eye out for as I continue to explore my new home and familiarize myself with all of its different ecological neighborhoods. For those similarly at the earlier stages of their journey with ecology, *Chasing Wildflowers* is an exciting way to broaden your understanding of the beauty to be found in Minnesota, but even those with a robust knowledge of plant life will enjoy seeing incredible specimens rendered in such artful detail.

Long after I closed the cover on the gorgeous images and descriptions, what stays with me most is the shape of a certain spirit that is now so familiar to me from my interactions with Prairie Enthusiasts. In their travels around the state, stopping at roadside ditches filled with wildflowers, I hear echoes of the stories I've been told about some of the earliest members of the Prairie Enthusiasts who drove down Wisconsin farm roads searching for remnant prairies. In their blog posts and radio appearances, I see the same fervor that overflows from our own community sharing knowledge in workshops, field trips and the pages of this very publication. The care and passion that Root and Povo have put into this book are exactly what inspires me every day about Prairie Enthusiasts, and they remind me that there are so many of us devoted to the care of the native ecology in our own backyards. ■

Wealth of the Prairies

By David Kelly, Prairie Bluff Chapter Member



A prairie is a sensory feast. It envelops you and transports you to another time. The brilliant colors, sounds and life entice you to dive in, feel it all wash over you. But a prairie is more than just a pretty face.

There are many prairies in my life. There's Wisdom Prairie near Middleton. There's Curtis Prairie and Greene Prairie in the UW Arboretum. There are also the prairies at Pheasant Branch Conservancy. When I visit these prairies, or any other, I feel a connection to the past.

Prairies clean our water and prevent floods. They pull carbon from the sky, cooling our world. Prairies also protect the pollinators, which sustain our crops.

Imagine infinite grasslands, soaked in sun, rolling green seas alive with endless wind. Wisconsin once held millions of prairie acres, gifts from ancient glaciers, fertile, chocked with life and carpeted with flaming flowers. For millennia, Indigenous people called them home. They stewarded the prairies, keeping them wild and productive. Settlers followed in the 1800s, bringing their journals and plows. Their journals told of oceans of grass. Their plows tore those oceans apart. In the blink of an eye, most of our prairies vanished.

The profound value of today's prairies is measured by their scarcity.

It's sunrise on the prairie. The awakening sun lifts the mist like the curtain on a stage. Today's show is a mix of colors and shapes, which blend and swirl like watercolor. Birds serenade, an intensifying crescendo—the dawn chorus. Millions of plants exude perfumes, hanging thick in sultry air. A shifting breeze mixes olfactory recipes, which I will hold forever.

Come along with me.

Let our knees sink in fecund soil and sunshine warm on our shoulders. Collect a handful of rich humus buried beneath the decay of prairies past. Smell earthy richness. Feel sandpaper grit, rolling pebbles and decomposing life. Watch soil writhe with miniscule insects. Imagine infinite creatures, invisible. Billions in a teaspoonful doing most of the prairie's work.

Most prairie life exists underneath. Immense tangles of roots burrow deeply, sustaining life above. Roots and plants form pathways of reciprocity, nourishment pulled from soil below, bestowed from the sun above. A world underfoot mirrors the world above.

Photosynthesis—plants make energy from water and light.

Now a compass plant towers 10 feet above ground and as many feet below. Enormous, deeply cut leaves follow the sun. Brilliant yellow flowers feed a buzz of bees. A bumblebee drones on, draped in golden dust. Pollen for the next flower.

Gaze upon ancient oaks, witnesses to prairies long since vanished. Massive columns bear ponderous limbs, arthritic and warped by time. They stretch gnarly arms to the sun and hold its light. They provide refuge. Dark and cool.

From a single tree, a profusion of avian life explodes from invisibility, clamoring upwards to a waiting sky. Why so many? Birds know an oak is a high-rise apartment for caterpillars. These will feed impatient chicks waiting in hidden nests.

Now cross into tall grass. Here we're alone with the prairie, walled in by towering grasses. It's a living tunnel of big bluestem and Indian grass interrupted here and there by goldenrod, thistle and leadplant. This is the insect's realm. Grasshoppers burst like popcorn on a hot skillet while miniature butterflies dance in a turning kaleidoscope. Submerged in life, we are transported to a time of infinite prairies. A time before us.

Prairie life is a circle: sun to soil, soil to sun, nurturing all.

A plane roars overhead. The present reaches in and yanks us back. A final glimpse to witness but a hint of all a prairie is, which in turn is just a hint of all it once was.

Today's prairies are fragments, shattered pieces of a lost whole. Once they were tiny refugees secreting in crannies of old fields or along old railroads. Now, they've been restored to grandeur as labors of love. Some are tiny, postage-stamp oases excised from grassy lawns. These life-sustaining islands help keep us all cool, watered, and fed. They nurture plants in infinite varieties, feeding the chain of life.

Prairies nurture our hope for a better world. ■

The Prairie Enthusiasts

Conference Recap
Biodiversity from the Ground Up

Upate by Cassidy Coulson, Mission Advancement Assistant

Our annual virtual conference, "Biodiversity from the Ground Up," on February 18-20 broke through the chilly February weather and created a place for budding and curious Prairie Enthusiasts to explore their connections to each other and the prairie. Our keynotes and speakers explored multiple topics relating to biodiversity over our three days of learning which opened the door to many session and discussion board conversations. Attendees shared stories, photos and questions, shedding light on the many on-the-ground ways our community experiences and thinks about biodiversity.

We opened our conference with our annual Burn School, bringing around 200 people together to hear about why The Prairie Enthusiasts take part in prescribed burning and guiding people through how prescribed fire is conducted. Attendees enjoyed hearing from our opening keynotes Dave Hage and Josephine Marcotty where they discussed their recent book *Sea of Grass: The Conquest, Ruin, and Redemption of Nature on the American Prairie*. Overall, we had nearly 600 attendees who joined us to hear over 25 presentations from educators, creatives and researchers who explored topics ranging from amphibian and reptile conservation, the effects of pesticide use, pollinators, cultural burning, nature journaling, herbalism and more. To close out our conference, keynote Patricia Ononiwu Kaishian presented on "Scientific & Theoretical Lessons from Mycology" and discussed her recent book *Forest Euphoria: The Abounding Queerness of Nature*.

There were many moments of engagement during the conference that made us grateful for The Prairie Enthusiasts community, from vivid haiku submissions, our biodiversity trivia, Chapter coffee chats, morning meditation, and the lively questions in our Land Management Panel to name a few. We are thankful to all of our attendees, presenters and sponsors who made this event so inspiring. We have yet to announce our 2027 dates, but you can keep an eye out for an announcement in a future issue of *The Prairie Promoter*, our website or our eNewsletter. Thanks again, and we hope to see you at next year's conference! ■

Haiku Winner: Barb Kollath
Prairie smoke drifts low
Soft plumes against the wide sky
Holding on to spring

Header Images from left to right: Chipmunk by Catherine McKenzie, Beetle by Sarah Barron, Savanna Sparrow by Eric Preston.

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

PLATINUM

Adaptive Restoration LLC

GOLD

Bolton & Menk
Real People. Real Solutions.

Good Oak ecological services
www.goodoak.com • (608) 209-0607

SILVER

On the Yahara Writing Center

Johnson's Nursery

MNR Midwest Natural Resources

Riverside Botanicals

Quercus Land Stewardship Services

Stafford Rosenbaum LLP Attorneys

First Business Bank

Two Ferns Native Nursery

southern wisconsin BIRD ALLIANCE

nwtf.

Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community

Vortex

BRONZE

Blue Mounds Area Project
Driftless Area Land Conservancy
Wick Habitat Services LLC

2026 Photo Contest Winners

Flora Winner
"Wild Lupine (Lupinus perennis) and Golden Alexanders (Zizia aurea)" by Peter Gorman

Fauna Winner
"Bumblebee Face-Off Early September" by Kathleen Henning

Seasons Winner
"A Monarch Fuels up on Goldenrod for the Big Journey South" by Catherine McKenzie

People Winner
"Prairie Seed Collecting at The Swamplovers Preserve" by Steve Glass

Landscape Co-Winner
"Nachusa Grasslands, Ogle County, Illinois" by Sammy Dalati

Landscape Co-Winner & Overall Winner
"Night and Dawn at Hogback Prairie SNA" by RC Wieboldt

Upcoming Events

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

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

Field Trip

St. Croix Valley

Monday, April 20 – 6:00 p.m

Location: Brokken Woods

Join us to see the pompom-like flowers of the earliest sedges as well as hepaticas and help us find more species for the plant list at this site.

Oak Savanna Restoration Field Tour

Minnesota Oak Savanna

Thursday, May 7 – 6:00 p.m. to 7:15 p.m.

Location: Terrace Oaks Park, Burnsville, MN

Join City of Burnsville natural resources staff and the Minnesota Oak Savanna Chapter on this field tour of Terrace Oaks Park. Registration is free and capped at 30 attendees.

Register here:

Field Trip

Coulee Region

Sunday, May 17 – 9:00 a.m.

Location: Marowksi Bluff Prairie, Ferryville, WI

Mid-May is the ideal time to enjoy the early blooming species on bluff prairies, as well as seeing migratory birds passing through these remnant ecosystems, especially along the Mississippi River corridor.

Register here:

St. Croix Valley 30 Year Celebration

St. Croix Valley

Saturday, June 20

Location: TBD

Restoration Tour

Southwest Wisconsin

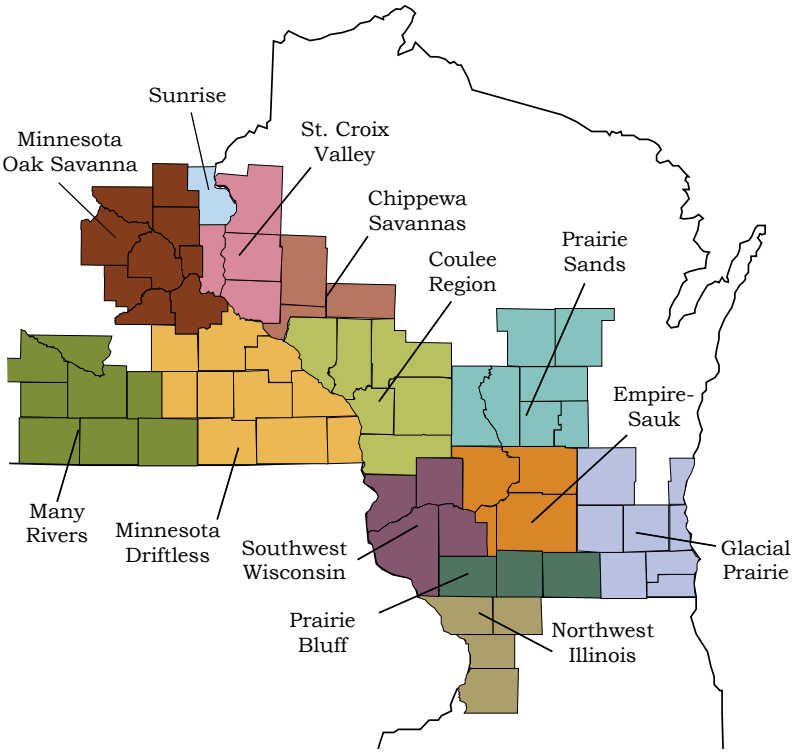
Sunday, June 21

Location: Lone Rock, WI

Below photo contributed by Rob Baller: Under guidance of Land Manager Rob Schubert and Assistant Land Manager Luke DeBiasio, a half dozen volunteers dragged volumes of red cedar and red pine on to flaming brush piles at Giordano Prairie and Oak Barrens. There was slushy snow on the ground and it drizzled all morning, nonetheless, the volunteers were excited to care for this special place. This property, protected by The Prairie Enthusiasts is not open to the public due to the presence of rare species. Volunteering at this habitat and places near you is a great way to see unique ecosystems, learn new skills, care for the land and connect with fellow Prairie Enthusiasts.

Chapter Updates

Southwest Wisconsin



Chapter Update

Update by Becky Fernette

After a busy summer, it was a relief to participate in the meditative practice of harvesting native seeds this fall. Without the buzz of chain saws and brush cutters, volunteers were able to talk with one another and build community. Bob Retko, site steward at Iris Drive, recruited the most Chapter volunteers this year (12) and a bountiful collection of seeds for dispersal this winter. Eldred and Feist Prairies benefited from the gleaning skills of volunteers, too. We thank our friends with Empire-Sauk for allowing us to use their hammer mill to clean the collected seed. We also thank the students from UW-Platteville's REC Club who aided in the westward expansion of Feist Prairie by removing invasive honeysuckle and consolidating and burning brush piles at Eldred Prairie.

A second meet-up was hosted by Marty and Mary Grell for members and friends in the Lone Rock area. Marty led 12 participants on a blustery tour of Grell Prairie, which he has been actively restoring for over 30 years. Mary welcomed the group at her B&B, Ma'on House in Richland Center, a lovely 1895 home. Mary set a high bar for future meet-ups with her sit-down luncheon featuring her delicious creamy wild rice soup. Leo Gander, our youngest member, charmed everyone with his wide-eyed expressions. The assembled folks agreed to form a "mutual aid" society to assist one another with prairie and oak savanna restoration and prescribed burns. Stay tuned for another tour of Grell Prairie next summer when it is in peak bloom, AND additional meet-ups within our Chapter borders.

UW-Platteville students who helped at Feist Prairie. Photo by George Riggin.

On November 6, Dr. Jeff Huebschman, UW-Platteville Biology Professor and longtime member of the Southwest Wisconsin Chapter shared his 25 years of bat research with an engaged audience at Southwest Tech in Fennimore. His presentation included photos of studying bats around the world, and many locales in southwest Wisconsin. Originally from Nebraska, Jeff wanted to teach at the University due to its access to bat communities on and near campus. Many students were featured in his slides; his commitment to involving undergraduates in hands-on learning has led several of them to pursue careers in conservation. Good news—the Wisconsin bat population is slowly increasing as more bats have developed immunity to white-nose syndrome, a fungus that has devastated our bat communities. Many thanks to Jeff for sharing his expertise with our community!

Speaking of events, our Events Committee has been actively coordinating workshops and tours for the

29

Volunteers enjoying a brush pile burn. Photo by Denise Labudda.

upcoming year. A special shout-out to Kay Wienke, our Chapter Board Representative, for being on the lookout for presentations by individuals and groups that we can share with our members and the greater community. She coordinated and facilitated a book talk with Gary Eldred, who spoke about his memoir, *Healing Wounds: Giving Back to Nature* at the McIntosh Memorial Library in Viroqua, WI on November 5. Gary shared anecdotes about the people and places that helped him recover from a difficult childhood with his characteristic wit and knack for storytelling. Both community members and Prairie Enthusiasts lined up to purchase the memoir and ask Gary to sign their copies. Gary's memoir can be ordered at leakycanoebooks.com.

Feist Prairie hosted the Second Annual "Burning of the Brush Piles" on Saturday, January 3. Twelve Chapter members and friends enjoyed the warmth of the fires and each other's company. Many thanks to Steve Querin-Schultz and Ross Shrago for igniting the piles and providing a dazzling natural pyrotechnics display!

2025 Scholarship Recipient

Update by Lynette Dornak

The Southwest Chapter of The Prairie Enthusiasts is pleased to announce Brady Radtke as a 2025 recipient of the Chapter's annual scholarship supporting students pursuing studies in conservation and environmental fields.

Radtke, a Mineral Point native and current Environmental Science and Conservation student at the University of Wisconsin–Platteville, was selected for his strong commitment to natural resource stewardship and his interest in advancing conservation practices that benefit both ecological and agricultural communities. His record of service—in school, local environmental efforts and community projects—reflects the values central to The Prairie Enthusiasts' mission.

This scholarship will help support Radtke as he continues his academic training and engages in conservation-focused work that strengthens the ecological health of Southwest Wisconsin.

The Prairie Enthusiasts congratulate Mr. Radtke and look forward to his continued contributions to environmental conservation. ■

Brady Radtke, recipient of Southwest Wisconsin Chapter's 2025 scholarship. Photographer unknown.

Prairie Sands

By Matt Dettlaff

Greetings from the Sand Country!

It just feels like winter is the appropriate time to review the efforts from the past year and formulate a plan for success in the new year from the comfort of a well-worn recliner while watching the snow fall outside. Even though 2025 was a relatively quiet year for the Prairie Sands Chapter, we did invest time and effort to establish some meaningful connections and opportunities for collaboration both within our group and the larger environmental community in our area. Some examples of our evaluation and building-out efforts include:

- Dr. Dan Carter spent more time than usual in the Sand Country in 2025. From evaluating a few potential land protection projects (that unfortunately did not proceed past initial evaluation) to evaluating habitat projects for Chapter Members, Dan helped us build out our ability to identify key opportunities to improve fire-dependent ecosystems in our area.
- Dan evaluated a sandstone bluff with potential to restore savanna that was lost to woody brush and tree encroachment. He provided guidance on how to literally start from the top and work downhill to recover a unique gem of a habitat.
- Dan has been invited to be a guest presenter for both a UW-Stevens Point Ecology Class and for the Fox Valley Wild Ones annual meeting on January 24. Those efforts should help to spread The Prairie Enthusiast gospel to the next generation and folks outside our usual core geographical areas.
- Our Chapter has also made meaningful connections with other environmental groups to facilitate current and future collaborations
- We helped with habitat improvement projects organized by the Greater Prairie Chicken Project at Buena Vista Wildlife Area to overseed an area that had been prescribed burned in early summer. It was heartening to find parallel projects that benefited both prairie plants and an iconic native prairie bird species.
- We collaborated with both the Wisconsin Friends of John Muir and the Ice Age Trail Alliance to facilitate sharing of information and resources for future projects.
- We continued our 2nd annual effort to host a Pollinator Picnic and this year opened the event up to the general public which netted us two new members.

Ecologist Dan Carter (right) conducts a property evaluation with a Prairie Sands Chapter member. Photo by Cheri Salzberg.

- We also participated in the Waushara Nature Fair (hosted by our own Marc and Leigh Johnson). The Fair really seemed to hit its stride in its 2nd year, generating lots of interest among the attendees to learn more about The Prairie Enthusiasts mission and active stewardship efforts.

In terms of future Chapter plans and activities, we have some interesting and meaningful projects in the queue that will allow our members to put their knowledge and abilities into action. In addition to implementing Dan Carter's habitat suggestions on our members' habitat projects for their properties, we have also engaged in a collaboration with the Wisconsin DNR to begin restoration of an oak barrens in the White River Fisheries Area. We also plan to provide more educational opportunities for Chapter members on topics such as prescribed fire and prairie plot preparation/seeding from experts in those genres. Stay tuned to The Prairie Enthusiasts' event calendar for future meetings and work party opportunities. ■

Coulee Region

Update by Jim Rogala Melinda Knutson, Jon Rigden and Kathryn Hietbrink

Connecting with Our Members

Connecting Coulee Region Chapter members strengthens our community and offers opportunities to reignite members' passion for prairies, assist with restoration projects or to give financially. Members are an essential part of our dedicated work that restores the incredible prairies that we are fortunate to have in this area. The stewardship of these lands takes expertise that is shared generously by those with years of experience and many hands to follow through on work plans to witness the results. Please join us in any of the scheduled workdays, interpretive hikes or social events to meet like-minded folks. Enjoy being out in nature or lend a hand.

This year, we shared an infographic of the Chapter's 2025 accomplishments with our members via an insert in our holiday cards. For many members who haven't been actively involved, we think the infographic effectively illustrates what the Chapter is doing. To report these numbers means that we must collect the data. To that end, we have a spreadsheet that Board members keep updated as events and outreach activities unfold throughout the year. This is some extra work, but the resulting summary is surprising, even to those of us who are actively involved in some, but not all activities. Note that the data was summarized on November 1, 2025 for the purposes of Board review and producing the insert. In the future, we will summarize in early December to capture nearly the entire calendar year.

Collaboration Update

The partnership between the Coulee Region Chapter and Friends of the Blufflands (FBL) continues to strengthen with many successful collaborative workdays completed last fall and winter. One challenge that arose is the higher insurance required by the City of La Crosse for conducting prescribed burns on city-owned land. Our Chapter has been conducting the bluff prairie burns as part of the collaboration, but The Prairie Enthusiasts insurance falls short of the new minimum coverage. This will be resolved through FBL raising funds to pay for the additional insurance coverage. A perk will be that this increased coverage will be in place for all Chapters of The Prairie Enthusiasts. Another collaborative effort in the very early planning stages involves our Chapter and FBL teaming up with the Mississippi Valley Conservancy

to hire an AmeriCorps Individual Placement Service Member for a full year starting in September 2026—stay tuned for more details.

Supporting WI and MN Prescribed Fire Councils

Through a generous donation from a Coulee Region Chapter board member, The Prairie Enthusiasts became a platinum sponsor of the 2026 Wisconsin-Minnesota Prescribed Fire Conference. The conference was on January 9 and 10 in Winona, Minnesota. Our Chapter and members of the Minnesota Driftless Chapter staffed the sponsor table. These organizations play a critical role in coordinating prescribed burning across organizations active in using this restoration tool, particularly in establishing training. ■

Minnesota Oak Savanna

Update by Greg Heberlein and Heather Holm

Chapter Update

Since the Chapter began in November 2024, we have nearly doubled our membership—now 98 members strong! In 2025, we sponsored several well-attended events in late summer and early fall, including a successful launch celebration (see the fall and winter issues of *The Prairie Promoter* for details). Slowly but surely, we are building connections with other Chapters and with skilled local practitioners, organizations and governmental agencies to determine how we might collaborate on projects that share The Prairie Enthusiasts' mission.

Burn school attendees. Photo by Heather Holm.

We convened two ongoing work groups: the Prescribed Fire and Prairie Management Work Group and the Remnant Mapping Work Group.

On November 8-9, we held our first Prescribed Burn School Training session at Lebanon Hills Regional Park. Chapter leaders are grateful to Dakota County Natural Resources staff who partnered with us to sponsor the event and provide the venue, inaugurating the park system's brand-new greenhouse for cultivating prairie plants. Twenty participants eager to build skills in ecological land management and fire ecology, including five Dakota County staff members, were joined by local landowners and restoration practitioners interested in using fire to maintain and restore fire-dependent native landscapes. Instructor Stephen Winter provided a full day of classroom learning, as well as hands-on discussion and tool use the following day.

Over the two-day session, we learned about prairie ecosystems and fire ecology. The role fire plays and its benefit in maintaining healthy, resilient landscapes were emphasized along with the fundamentals of fire behavior, burn techniques and the importance of careful planning. Participants also gained insight into: 1) developing burn plans; 2) understanding safety protocols and the chain of command; and 3) properly using equipment and tools essential for conducting prescribed burns.

The training was met with strong interest and enthusiasm. Clearly, there is a growing demand for prescribed fire education in Minnesota. The Chapter intends to offer additional prescribed burn school training sessions in the future, to support landowners and practitioners in safely and effectively employing fire as a management tool.

The Prescribed Fire and Prairie Management Work Group now has thirteen active participants and is moving forward on a number of fronts: identifying those in our Chapter area qualified to conduct additional Burn Schools and/or serve as Burn Bosses; identifying opportunities for Burn School grads to serve their "apprenticeships;" and exploring ways our Chapter can work with landowners, other organizations and local governments on prescribed burning.

While progressing a bit more slowly, the Remnant Mapping Work Group has established a goal of identifying the remnants of fire dependent prairie, oak savanna and oak woodland that remain in our Chapter area and exploring opportunities for members to help in their restoration and management. Some highly skilled and seasoned individuals have stepped forward to help us with this effort.

Other activities our Chapter will explore in the coming year include:

- a possible Book Discussion group
- site visits to the established plant propagation facility at the Three Rivers Park District and Dakota County's new native plant greenhouse in the spring
- Dan Carter has scheduled a visit to our Chapter this summer for an event (details yet to be worked out).
- another seed collection event next fall with Three Rivers Park District
- implementing a plan for more outreach and member recruitment
- identifying at least one site in the Chapter area that members can play an active role in stewarding.

It has been an exciting year—some good momentum is building. It is wonderful to see members stepping forward, sharing their enthusiasm and expertise. We invite all members, both within our Chapter, and in the broader Prairie Enthusiasts Community to keep sharing your ideas and experience with us—we are learning as we go! ■

Empire-Sauk

Annual Picnic Includes Hauser Road Prairie Hike

Update by Willis Brown

In July, about 30 Prairie Enthusiasts gathered at the Waunakee Village Park for the Empire-Sauk Annual Summer Picnic. After a potluck supper, there was a brief business meeting where Willis Brown and Amy Dubriel were re-elected as Chapter Chair and Secretary, respectively. Following the meeting, Randy Hoffman, acting site steward, led a tour of Hauser Road Prairie. A great deal of work has been accomplished since The Prairie Enthusiasts acquired the property in 2014. So far, 148 prairie plant species have been identified at the prairie, and it is a great spot for Pasqueflowers in early spring. Randy told the group that, on summer evenings, fireflies are abundant. There is still much to be done at Hauser Road Prairie, and volunteers are welcome. If interested, please contact Randy Hoffman at greatnaturewi@gmail.com.

Capturing Wildlife at Moely Prairie Through the Wisconsin Snapshot Program

Update and Photos by Amy Chamberlin

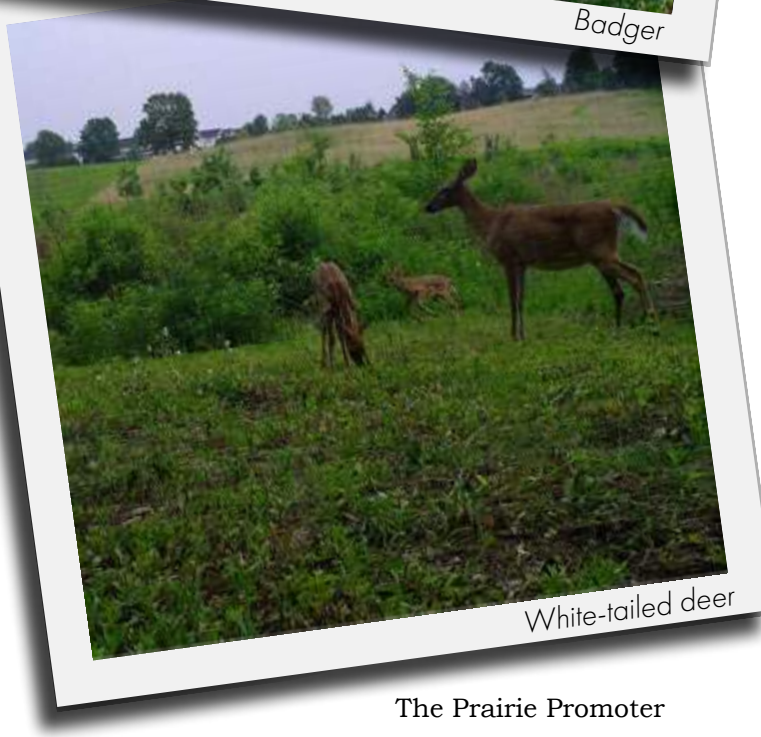
Moely Prairie is quietly bustling with life—even when no one is there to see it. Thanks to the Wisconsin DNR Snapshot Program, we are gaining a remarkable window into the hidden activity of wildlife that calls this landscape home or passes through it. By participating in this statewide community science initiative, Moely Prairie is contributing valuable data while also deepening our understanding of the prairie ecosystem right here in Sauk County.

The Wisconsin Snapshot Program uses motion-activated trail cameras placed across the state to document wildlife presence, abundance and behavior. These cameras operate year-round, capturing images that are later reviewed by volunteers and researchers. The information gathered helps Wisconsin DNR staff better understand animal populations, habitat use and movement patterns over time—insight that is increasingly important as landscapes and climates change.

At Moely Prairie, our Snapshot camera has already recorded an impressive diversity of species. We have documented red fox, skunks, opossums and raccoons, all of which are frequent prairie visitors. Even


Coyote


Badger


White-tailed deer

Red fox

Grey fox

Racoon family

more exciting has been the repeated appearance of pairs of gray fox and coyotes. Gray fox are especially noteworthy: Moely Prairie is one of the few locations in Sauk County where gray fox have been officially recorded in the program. Their presence highlights the importance of prairie and savanna-like habitats that provide the cover and resources these elusive animals need.

Perhaps the biggest thrill came this past summer, when our camera captured a badger sighting. Badgers are iconic prairie animals but are not commonly seen due to their solitary and nocturnal habits. Moely Prairie's sandy soils are ideal for burrowing species, and throughout the property there is clear evidence of dens and burrows woven into the landscape. Prairies have proven to be excellent homes for animals that rely on digging for shelter, hunting and raising young, making this sighting especially meaningful.

Another ongoing delight has been watching white-tailed deer raise their young. For the last couple of years, our camera has captured images of twin fawns, offering a heartwarming glimpse into the seasonal rhythms of the prairie. These moments remind us that even familiar species have stories unfolding beyond human view.

Whether these animals permanently reside at Moely Prairie or are simply passing through, the Snapshot Program allows us to learn what happens on the land when we're not present. It connects people to wildlife in a tangible way and turns curiosity into meaningful conservation knowledge.

If you're interested in becoming part of this effort and helping the Wisconsin DNR better understand wildlife across the state, you can learn more about the Snapshot Program and how to get involved by visiting the Wisconsin DNR website. ■

Learn more about the Snapshot Program
HERE

St. Croix Valley

Update by Evanne Hunt

30 Years Strong: Celebrating Three Decades Since Our Chapter Began!

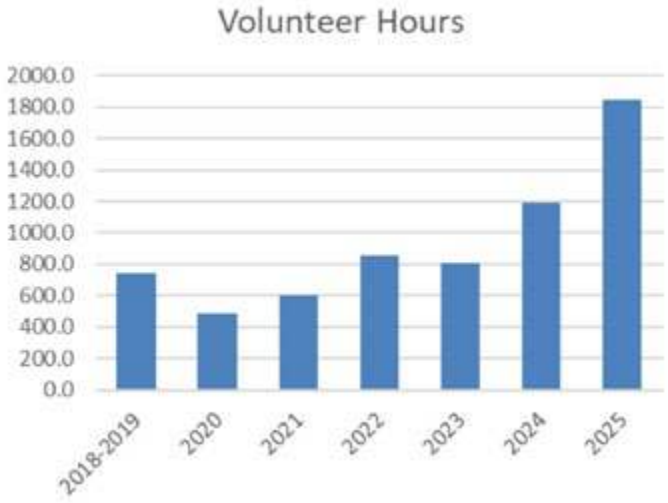
2026 marks our Chapter's 30th anniversary. We will be celebrating our work and our people in a big way!

Our Education Team is planning speakers, field trips and social events for the spring, summer and fall. As details are available, they will be posted to the Chapter Event webpage.

IN THE BEGINNING: The first meeting to gauge interest was held on April 10, 1996, at the Menomonie public library. The organizer, Harvey Halvorsen, agreed to be our Chapter Chair, a position he held for the next three years. We blossomed into a fully-fledged Chapter consisting of six Wisconsin counties and eventually added the first Minnesota county—Washington. The first meeting drew 54 people eager to learn about the new group; 20 people submitted their membership dues that evening!

Nine of those members are still members of the St. Croix Valley Chapter. Others moved to the Chippewa Savanna Chapter or have sadly passed. We will be celebrating these early members this year. We will also thank everyone who has joined since then and have contributed untold volunteer hours to make our Chapter the juggernaut it is today!

St. Croix Valley Chapter burn volunteer, Thorin Gustafson. Photo by Evanne Hunt.



Fall Burn Season a Success

Our burn crew completed seven prescribed burns this fall. All of these burns were on private land. While our prairie and savanna remnants always take priority, we burn private land for four reasons:

- Give our crew more experience.
- Encourage members to mitigate the cost of the burn by volunteering at work parties, etc.
- Raise money for Chapter expenses.
- Show the public that prescribed fire is important because it mimics natural fire cycles, creating healthier, more resilient landscapes for animals and plants.

Celebrating the Heart of Our Community: Thank You, Volunteers!

We had a great year preserving and maintaining our native prairie and savanna remnants!

We saw a 54% increase in the number of hours donated to our precious sites! This was accomplished by 166 individual volunteers supporting us, representing a 69% increase in bodies!

Student Scholarship Fund

It is never too late to contribute to the Chapter scholarship fund. The Chapter donates $1,000 each year to help a sophomore, junior or senior student enrolled in Conservation and Environmental Planning with preference given to those with a Restoration Management emphasis.

Giving a student a scholarship is a valuable investment in their future, our Chapter and society at large. If you would like to participate, click Donate on The Prairie Enthusiasts' website. In the comment section, specify "SCV scholarship fund." ■

Share your stories, research, poems, art and photos.

Become a contributor for The Prairie Promoter.

This publication is created by Prairie Enthusiasts for Prairie Enthusiasts. By becoming a contributor of *The Prairie Promoter*, you are inspiring others to care for rare fire-dependent ecosystems. Consider sharing your love of prairie today!

Submission Guidelines:

- Articles should be between 500 and 1,800 words (poems excluded)
- Photos should be high-resolution print quality and should be shared as attachments (not embedded in a text document). Each photo should have a descriptive caption and photographer credit. Please name the photo file with the photographer's name and the first few words of the caption.
- Submissions can be sent to Cassidy Coulson at CCoulson@ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org
- Please note that unfortunately, we can't include all submission in *The Prairie Promoter.* We try to share submissions on the blog or social media if the submission is mission-aligned and we cannot fit it into this publication.

Next submission deadlines:

Summer Issue: Thursday, April 23
Fall Issue: Tuesday, July 21

Prairie Enthusiasts Remembered

James Sime

January 19, 1932 - January 22, 2026

Remembered by Becky Fernette

On January 22, 2026, the prairies of Southwest Wisconsin wept for the loss of their dear friend, Jim Sime. Long before joining The Prairie Enthusiasts, Jim purchased land with prairie remnants to protect them from development. With his wife Rose, Jim conserved multiple parcels (600 acres) in the Driftless region through controlled burns, seed collection, brush cutting and meticulous documentation of plants and animals. In 2025, Jim and Rose donated the Boscobel Balds and Big Rock to separate land trusts, ensuring the wilderness they had spent four decades protecting would be forever preserved. Their generosity and lifelong dedication to conservation stands as an inspiring example of the positive impact individuals can have on the land and on each other.

A memorial service celebrating Jim's life will be held in April, with details to be announced.

To honor Jim's legacy, a fund will be established through The Prairie Enthusiasts–Southwest Wisconsin Chapter. Donations may be made on our website; please designate that you want your donation to be directed to the "Jim Sime Memorial Fund." ■

Russell Hefty

April 30, 1958 -

June 26, 2025

Remembered by Topf Wells, Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance advocacy committee member and Mark Martin and Susan Foote-Martin, Goose Pond Sanctuary resident managers

Purple Martins, Cherokee Marsh, the Sugar River and many other creatures and habitats and those of us who cherish wild creatures and wild places will miss his persistent, thoughtful advocacy.

When Mark and Susan Foote-Martin moved into the Resident Manager roles at Goose Pond Sanctuary in 1979, Russ was volunteering and helping Ruth and Oliver Wynn, the former land managers, plant prairie plants and remove invasive species. He went on to work with Mark and Sue on prairie restoration

Russ worked for the City of Madison's Parks Department in the Conservation Parks Division. If you have a favorite wild spot in a large Madison Park, Russ probably helped to preserve and improve it. He loved Cherokee Marsh. Many folks now think of it as a lake but it's marsh that was changed and degraded by the Tenney Park Lock and Dam, which raised the water levels of Lake Mendota and Cherokee Marsh substantially. In Russ's view, that led to erosion and the loss of native vegetation and stability. His efforts to protect and restore Cherokee illustrate one of the problems of modern conservation. It's almost impossible or impractical to undo some damage. I was on a committee that conducted a substantial analysis and review of lake levels in the Yahara Lakes and we spent a lot of time on the Tenney Dam. We encountered high feelings, passion, anger, enthusiasm, and stubbornness. The dam is still there and may well last as long as Madison does. Of all the folks who participated in those discussions, Russ was among the most thorough, careful, clear, persistent, and respectful. To improve water quality and provide wildland habitat in the open water at Cherokee Marsh, Russ successfully introduced American lotus. Cherokee should always have a champion as dedicated and able as Russ.

He loved and cared for birds, especially Purple Martins, one of SoWBA's favorites. He built and distributed lovely Purple Martin houses. He also experimented with nest box designs and Purple Martins around Madison and Bellville are probably soaring and feeding on dragonflies as I write this and some have their homes in Russ's nest boxes.

He also helped locate Purple Martin colonies, especially in Amish communities southwest of Madison. He also helped others establish colonies. When Mark and Susan Foote-Martin erected a Purple Martin gourd rack at their cabin last year he mentioned that a "Songbird Magnet Bird Caller" should be acquired to play the "dawn song" to attract martins. He then mentioned that he purchased 10 callers a few years ago and was selling them at cost to Purple Martin prospective landlords. The call songs worked beautifully and Mark and Susan have three Purple Martins families using their gourds this year.

Russ wanted to know the history of natural resources. I think he thought one could not protect, preserve and restore a natural resource without knowing what it had been. We shared an interest in the Sugar River and Russ amazed me with his historical research, dating back to the original survey records, into the Sugar as it existed from the settlement of Dane County.

He volunteered his time and labor to improve many natural areas. He lavished lots of care on some lovely public land on Mt. Vernon Creek, one of many examples of his personal commitment.

Russ loved the outdoors from early in his life and knew early on that he wanted to work as a conservationist. When we lose someone as dedicated and thoughtful as Russ, we can wonder who'll take up his mission? Land trusts like SoWBA, local governments like Madison, and the WDNR have some great young folks working as interns on our lands and waters. Some of those have Russ's passion, drive, and values. Let's make sure they have the opportunities Russ had. ■

Photo of purple martin by Alan Schmierer (Flickr).
Photo of Russ by unknown photographer.

Prairie Enthusiasts Remembered

Memorial gifts dedicated between October 11, 2025 and January 13, 2026

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:

Dawn Smith Avery
Remembered by Glenn Smith

Char Bock
Remembered by Dawn Piech

Bill Brandt
Remembered by George Brandt

Major James Butler
Remembered by
Harvey Halvorsen & Ruth Hilfiker

Ruthann Clay
Remembered by Phillip Duffy

Susan Connell-Magee
Remembered by
Kevin & Deborah Magee

Gary Evers
Remembered by Sue Evers

Kay Fandel
Remembered by Mr. Rising

Janice Froelich
Remembered by Robert Novy

Bob Greenler
Remembered by John Barkei

Anna Motivans
Remembered by
Carol Engstrom
Karene Motivans
Albert Motivans
Jim & Diane Rogala
Renate Sakins
Douglas [*Last Name Not Provided*]

Marian Buck Murray
Remembered by Bethany Alwa

Dan & Heather Neuroth
Remembered by
Michael & Debra Reinsbach

Pumpkin the Cat
Remembered by Heidi Levy

Peg Rasch
Remembered by Dave Stute

Marsha Gilman Rea
Remembered by
Rebecca Gilman & Charles Harmon
Laura & Billy Perry

Keith Relyea
Remembered by Jeannie Kant

Rusty Schultz
Remembered by Matt Switzler

Natalie Smead
Remembered by Edwin Fritz-Smead

Neal Smith
Remembered by Diane Smith

Melissa Sparrow-Lien
Remembered by Amanda McCarthy

Alan F. Stiefel
Remembered by Tim Yanacheck

Mike Syverson
Remembered by Karen Syverson

John & Olive Thomson
Remembered by Heather & Hans Rinke

Peggy Traver
Remembered by
Evanne Hunt & Greg Korman
Jim & Diane Rogala
Jon Traver

Dr. Vijay
Remembered by Shraddha Tilloo

Jim Vondaharr
Remembered by
Jennifer [*Last Name Not Provided*]

Russel Wagner
Remembered by
Beverly & James Holler

Bill Weege
Remembered by
David & Paula Kraemer

The Prairie Enthusiasts
P.O. Box 824
Viroqua, WI 54665
(608) 676-0985
ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org

ThePrairieEnthusiasts

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Rockford, IL
Permit No. 858

If you would like to receive an online-only version of *The Prairie Promoter*, send us an email, and we'll update you're mailing preferences.
Info@ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org

Use the enclosed envelope to renew your support with a gift of any amount today, or make a secure gift online at
ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org/Donate

Welcome, New Members!

October 11, 2025 to January 13, 2026

Coulee Region
Emma Aleckson
Jared Arzaga
Carolyn Dvorak
Marilyn Fernandes
Liz Franklin
Lane Hansen
Cyndy Hubbard
Ryan Kocian
Roberta Maass
Margaret Mills
Jessica Nelson
Carol Nikolaus
Rebecca Seibel

Empire-Sauk
Bethany Alwa
Teresa Anacker
Gail Louise Auerbach
Caitlin Blue
Joseph Bock
James Bourbeau
Joanne Brown
Kurt Brown
Joan Bruggink
Phillip Duffy
Francine Hartman
Kim Hogan
George Kintzer
Robert Koehler
Eugene Kroupa
James Lanier
Willi Lehner
Karen Lenoch
Heidi Levy
Rich Maciejewski
Trevor McKown
Timothy Moermond
Ron Monson
Karene Motivans
Teresa Mulrooney
Marcy Olson
Amy Osinga
Kassie Patchak
Dawn Piech
Linda Pruss & Melissa Meredith
Nicholas Rhodehamel
Jeffrey Russell
Bryce Schmidt
James Siebers
Gail Smith
William Stebbin
Ellie Sovcik
Pam Sprecher-Galka
Justin Trewartha
John Wagner
Sue Welch
Stephen Wolk

Glacial Prairie
Ellen Blank
Jim Bullock
Michael Ferentz
Rebecca & John Hamilton
Karen & Tanner Lang
Robert & Charlotte Miller

Many Rivers
Anneva Garner
Terry Salerno
Jody & Kevin Swanson

Minnesota Driftless
Neil Bechtold
Nancy Berlin
Colleen Braun
David Brockway
James Fowler
Jonathan Hedin
Scott Helstad
Kiki St. Louis
Christine Maghrak

Minnesota Oak Savanna
Laura J. J. Baxley
Kathryn Berven
David & Susan Betzler
Alex Carroll
Hanna Daud
Matthew Dees
Alexandra Devick
Carol Engstrom
Joan Erickson
Susan Flygare
Raoul Frank
Edwin Fritz-Smead
Michael Gallagher
Patricia Graham
Deborah Hannasch
Jim Hinman
Kurt Kimber
Vicki Langemo
Anne McCormick
Trilva Melbo
Ann Merrill
Susan Moore
Jeff Nixa
Meta Swanson
Nate Thornton
Rebecca Wallin
David Washburn

Northwest Illinois
Juliet Moderow
Colleen Wilson

Prairie Bluff
Brianna Larson
Jack Rodeghier

Southwest Wisconsin
Robert Buskirk
Jennifer Day-Nelson
Patricia Micetic
Kathy & Graham Morrison
Miles Narveson
Jamee Stanley
Barb & Dean Tucker
Sue & Larry Waefler

St. Croix Valley
Ann Dieperink
Chuck Knapp
Doug Lassen
Amanda McCarthy
Kim Schneider
Careme Starr
Randy Tweden
Scott Wells

Sunrise
Dann & Jean Adair
Jessica Eastman
Chelsea Hanson
Dawn Johnson
Duane & Debby Lee

Unaffiliated
Suzanne Coleman
Joseph R. Conrad
Pamela Darrow
Laura DeKeyrel
Neil Dewan
Carolyn Eberle
Chris Frethem
Matthew Hamilton
Thomas Hulvershorn
James Irlbeck
Fredda Isaacson
Marjorie Kyllo
Robert McFarland
Larry Moss
Albert Motivans
Holly Palmersten
Laura & Billy Perry
Renate Sakins
Jack Shouba
Natasha Stroebl
Ann Toftness