

WISCONSIN PRAIRIE ENTHUSIASTS

JANUARY 1988

VOL. 1, NO. 1

WPE FORMALIZES

The non-profit incorporation of WPE is in the final stages. The goals of WPE are: 1) natural landscapes educations, management, purchase, and protection; 2) network-integration, communication, and co-operation and information clearinghouse; 3) short- and long-term protection and management of natural landscapes for public and wildlife values; and 5) establish an endowment to finance all of the above. The next MEETING is WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 13 at the VFW HALL in MONROE, WI. Election of officers will take place.

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM

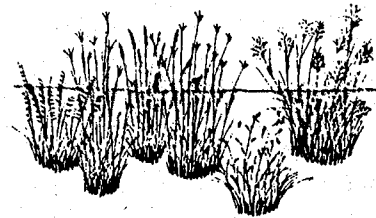
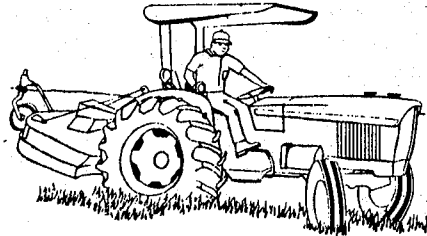
by Fred Faessler

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is a new and innovative program set up by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The purposes of the CRP are to reduce planted crop acreages to help reduce surpluses, and to reduce erosion. Only highly erodible land is eligible in CRP lands. This is a 10 year program. A farmer bids on how much rent he wants each year to set-aside the land from crop production.

The goal is to set-aside 40-45 million acres nation-wide. Up to now there have been five signup periods which enrolled about 23 million acres; the next signup is in February 1988.

The crop land has to be planted to a permanent vegetation cover. Four types of planting are approved under the program; cool-season (non-native) grasses, a wildlife cover, trees, and warm-season (prairie) grass mix. The warm-season grasses are switchgrass, Indian grass, and big bluestem grass in 3 different mixes. Here is an opportunity not only to set-aside land for wildlife but to use the native prairie grasses which provide much higher quality habitat than the other options. Because very few Wisconsin landowners are familiar with the prairie grasses, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is planning

to supply land owners with these native grasses at little or no charge. If you know of anyone that may be interested in the CRP, please encourage them to participate in this wonderful opportunity.



WHY ARE AREAS BURNED?

by Marie Brown

The question is asked often. The answer is not always available. Most people burn an area to get rid of weeds, others, like WPE, burn to get rid of ground litter (dead plant material) so that native plant species can grow on their own without competition from the weeds. Spring burning causes the soil to be blackened, warmed, faster germination of seeds occurs in the soil, and a greater flower display and seed production occurs during the year.

The seeds that are deep in the soil can germinate because the short roots of the weeds are eliminated by fire. Native prairie plants can have roots up to 30 feet long, while introduced weedy plants have roots to 1 foot deep. Once the weedy plants are cut short by fire, the native plants can once again grow and proliferate. The seed bank lives for years waiting until the seeds can germinate once again.

Many of the effects of agriculture and grazing in areas that still contain native prairie and wetland plants can be restored once the proper management is started. It will take years before a native prairie or savanna area is restored, but by starting, particularly, with the reintroduction of carefully prescribed burning, many of our native plants can return.

ALBANY WETLAND AFTER THE FIRE

by Steve Apfelbaum

As reported earlier, WPE burned nearly 70 acres of a wetland in Spring 1987. In July, Merritt Milks and myself hiked through the Bloomer Wetland located North of Albany, WI on Green County E. The results of the burn were remarkable and many wonderful surprises were found. The most noteworthy surprise was finding one individual of the Federally threatened, white fringed prairie orchid (Habenaria leucophaea), in a diverse mesic prairie remnant. It also contained numerous gentians. Another surprise occurred in the historic burr oak savanna along the East edge of the wetland where hundreds of starry campion plants flowered; prior to the burn

only a few plants had been found. A regional rare plant called stone seed (Onosmodium hispidissimum) also emerged from the woodland soil. The burn was effective at controlling introduced reed canary grass in some locations and definitely set back trees and shrubs as well. Overall the property clearly contains mesic and wet prairie remnants of natural area quality and of significance. We do believe that with continued burning the wetland will continue to improve. One evening two weeks after the spring burn, sand hill cranes were observed feeding on the fire blackened landscape. They apparently also recognized the vast improvement; they have undoubtedly not used this wetland for many years. With fire management we will guarantee their continued use of this wonderful wetland in Green county.

AVON BLUFF AFTER THE FIRE

by Steve Apfelbaum

Two burns, both conducted in Spring 1987, substantially changed the face of Avon Bluff Prairie. The earliest burns successfully killed 60-70% of all eastern red cedar trees. European brome grass was virtually eliminated from several areas which we believe coincided with areas with heaviest fuel loads. Prairie plants have flourished this year. Wild indigo bore prolific seed; violet flowered oxalis was incredibly abundant.

We have hand picked and pulled the undesirable weeds, yellow and white sweet clovers, during one visit to the prairie. The rare Hills Thistle responded by increased population after fire; in mid-summer 1987 several dozen new plants were located.

NACHUSA GRASSLANDS DAY

by Steve Apfelbaum

Over 500 prairie enthusiasts spent a wonderful afternoon on 8 August at the splendid 485 acre Nachusa Grassland, a recent acquisition of the Illinois office of the Nature Conservancy located about an hour southeast of Monroe, WI. This area contains prairie, savanna, clear streams, and rock outcrops.

Speakers at a dinner picnic included Dr. Robert Betz, a renown prairie ecologist, persons from the Conservancy, who officially welcomed the crowds, and the mayor of Dixon, IL, who explained the history of the Nachusa area.

The event focused on informing visitors about the Nachusa Grassland. Numerous hikes, lead by some of the regions notable ecologists, introduced the varied insects, plants, small mammals, birds, and restoration goals at Nachusa. This will probably become an annual event worth attending; perhaps the WPE should consider sponsoring similar get togethers.

If you would like to visit, directions to Nachusa Grassland are available from John Ochsner or Fred Faessler.

RESTORING NACHUSA GRASSLANDS

by Robert Baller and Steve Apfelbaum

On Saturday, November 14, several dozen volunteers from northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin gathered to reseed part of the Nachusa Grasslands. The work was done on 40 acres of retired cornfield, located within the prairie preserve. Volunteers, including high school students all the way from Chicago, walked transects across the freshly plowed cornfield, dispersing the seeds of more than 50 species. The seed mix, collected by volunteers in Illinois and prepared by Applied Ecological Services, Inc. was valued at more than \$2000.00. This may be one of the first projects in the Midwest where farmland, located within a prairie preserve, is restored back to prairie by many devoted hands of volunteers. We commend all involved in this wonderful project. Anyone

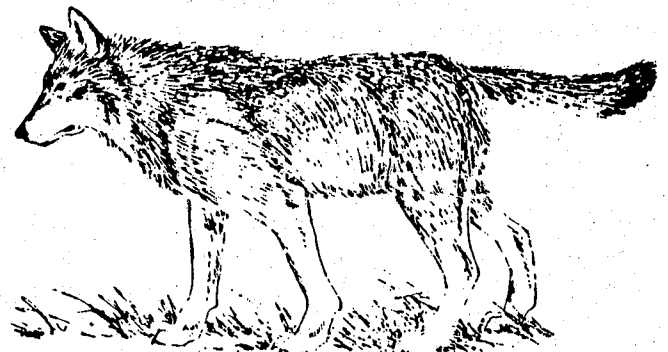
desiring information or wanting to learn about how to get involved at Nachusa can find out how from Steve Packard, Illinois Nature Conservancy, Chicago, IL 312/346-8166.

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED PLANTS FOUND by Marie Brown

Robert (Rob) Baller, a new member of WPE, was cited in The Niche (Newsletter of the Wisconsin Bureau of Endangered Resources) for having located a small population of Federally threatened Prairie Bush Clover (Lespedeza leptostachya) north of Beloit. In this dry prairie was also found a colony of Wisconsin endangered wild petunia (Ruellia humilis).

The prairie bush clover is a perennial with a blooming period from mid-July to September. The seeds mature within a month and are dispersed by small birds and mammals after they are eaten. This species was thought to be extinct in Wisconsin until a DNR botanist Bill Tans found a small colony in southern Rock County in 1969. There are now only 31 sites in 21 counties known throughout the U.S., there were originally 41 sites in the Midwest.

Rob, a recent graduate of Stevens Point, has joined the staff at Applied Ecological Services, Inc. as a wildlife biologist. He is involved in the seed harvesting and in searching new areas for inventory. He is very knowledgeable about plant species and invites questions from all concerning our native plant heritage.



Timber wolf

ILLUSTRATION BY [unreadable]

ROCK COUNTY CONSERVATIONISTS

by Robert Baller

Rock County has formed a new group: The Rock County Conservationists (RCC). Their goal is to provide a forum of exchange for ideas and interests in all aspects of environmental concern. Also on their list of activities are the cataloging, protection, and stewardship of natural areas; public education in natural history and ecology; field trips; outings; and a cooperative effort to reach all other such groups.

Several field trips to view endangered plant species proved a great success this summer, and more are planned. A general meeting was held on October 22. RCC hosted a guest speaker ecologist and developed plans for future activities, such as a rare wildflower workshop, and a treasure hunt for endangered species. Already the RCC has located 4 hot spots of native prairie in Rock County, including 4 populations of endangered species. We need your support to protect these areas! A newsletter is coming your way soon.

Please join us. Contact:

Richard Newsome 608/365-3391 work or 365-2609 home;

Robert Baller 608/897-8547 work or 362-4669 home.

ROCK COUNTY CONSERVATIONISTS

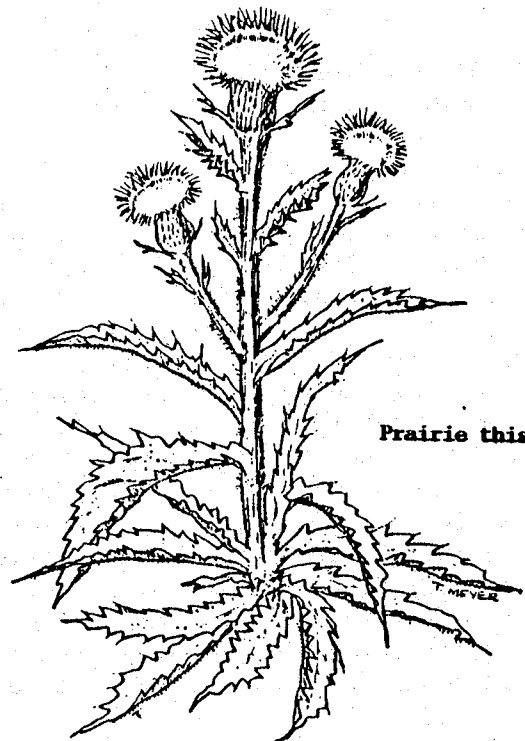
by Robert Baller

The new Rock County Conservationists group is searching for a logo design. The group has decided on the Woodcock as their trademark. The woodcock is a gamebird of the savannas and grasslands, (the original vegetation of Rock County) and also was a favorite bird of Aldo Leopold, whose 100th birthday anniversary coincides with the formation of the Rock County Conservationists. Anyone who would like to submit a possible design should contact Richard Newsome (608)365-3391 at Beloit College or Robert Baller (608)362-4669 (home) or (608)897-8547 (work).

PRAIRIE RESTORATION CLASS AT BTC

by Robert Baller

Blackhawk Technical College is offering a new class on Prairie Restoration starting Feb. 27. The class will last 3 hours each Saturday morning for 4 weeks. This class will provide an overview of prairie ecology, cornfield-to-prairie establishment, prairie wildflower gardening, and, weather permitting, a prescribed burn. This class is ideal for farmers who are subscribing to the Conservation Reserve Program, and who are interested in establishing native grasses and/or prairie for wildlife cover. Anyone interested please contact Blackhawk Technical College, North Center, 1740 Highway 14 W, Janesville, WI 53545, (608)756-4464. Also, a springtime prairie flower identification class is in the works.



Prairie thistle

PRESCRIBED BURNING WORKSHOP

by Fred Faessler

A two-day workshop designed to teach the science and techniques of prescribed burning for natural area managers, volunteers, and land stewards will be taught by Dr. Andrea Koonce, from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Fire Science Center on the 19th and 20th of March 1988. The workshop will be held at the Central Campus of Blackhawk Technical College near Janesville, Wisconsin.

The first day will emphasize fire management goals and strategies, design of burn plans, safety, fire behavior, and fire ecology. Weather permitting, participants will use equipment and methods of fire management during a field practicum in late afternoon on the 19th. A major prescribed burn to provide additional field experience is planned on the 20th.

Costs of the workshop will be \$25.00 prepaid, or \$30.00 at the door. The class is patterned after workshops previously sponsored by the Wisconsin Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, and is designed to provide a good basic experience and confidence in use of fire for natural area management.

For further information and to enroll please call or write: FRED FAESSLER, WISCONSIN PRAIRIE ENTHUSIASTS, N673 MILL ROAD, JUDA, WI 53550. 608/897-8547 (work) or 608/325-9473 (home).



INFORMATION NEEDED

by Marie Brown

Articles are needed for future editions of the newsletter. Our readership is throughout the midwestern area and is curious about the projects and ideas that you have. Please share with us what your group is doing to help save and preserve the native landscape. If your group is inventorying areas, let us know what species you have found. If your group is involved in fall or spring burning, let us know what the results are. Is there an area that you are particularly interested in that needs management, let us know.

Do you know of groups that need more information on what prairies are, would like a workshop on plant identification, would like a slide show, or other information? Let us know.

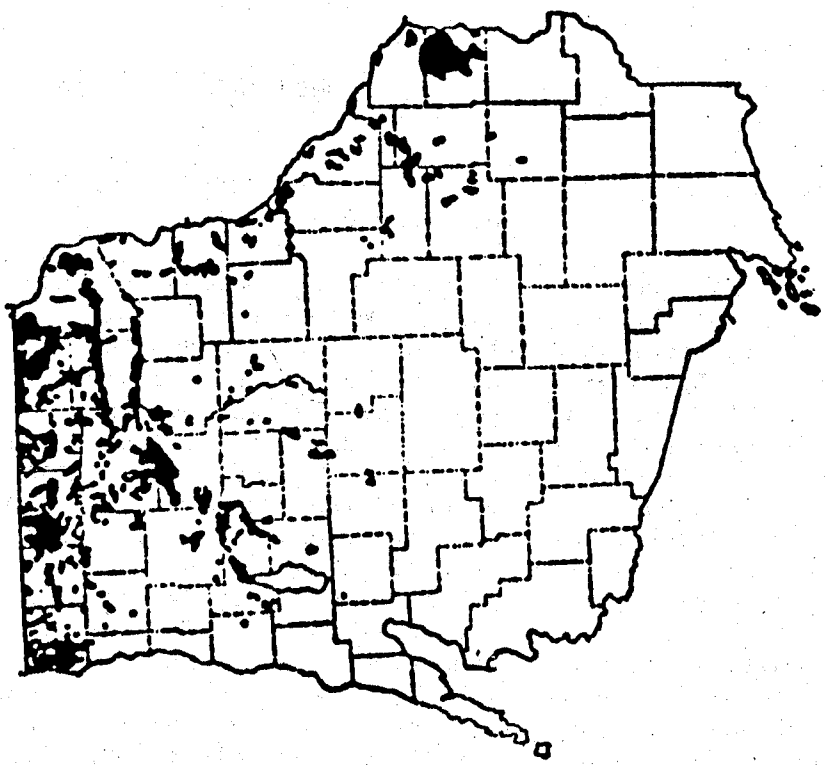
Now that the weather is cold and snow is on the ground, let's think about what we want to do this coming spring and summer. What areas do you plan on investigating a little more thoroughly to see what plants are there? (This is also good therapy to chase away cabin fever.) What areas of interest would you like to see in the newsletter, can you put together the article for it or help?

Your comments and opinions are appreciated to help reach the readership on the importance of finding and preserving our native landscape. If we do not do this, the future generation may never know the joy of finding the first pasque flower showing its pale lavender to white head through the snow or grass not yet green, or a hill side covered with prairie smoke in bloom.

The next newsletter edition dead line is March 1st. Please send ideas, comments, opinions, and articles to Marie Brown, Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts Newsletter, N673 Mill Road, Juda, WI 53550.

Wisconsin lies on the northeastern boundary of the "Great American Grassland." The prairies of Wisconsin include some of the most interesting and least known of our native landscapes. Wisconsin prairies are located within a triangle cornered by Racine County on the east, Grant County on the west, and Polk County on the north. They occupied the greatest area in the southwestern corner of the state. Many of the larger and more important prairies received distinctive names: Rock Prairie in Rock County, Arlington Prairie in Dane County and Star Prairie in St. Croix County.

Wisconsin Prairies



Original Wisconsin prairies.

Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts
N673 Mill Road
Juda WI 53550



GARY & GAIL ADAMS
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MEETING January 13 7:30pm VFW, Monroe, WI