The PRAIRIE PROMOTER

Igniting Relationships with the Land

Summer 2026

A Year Of Progress

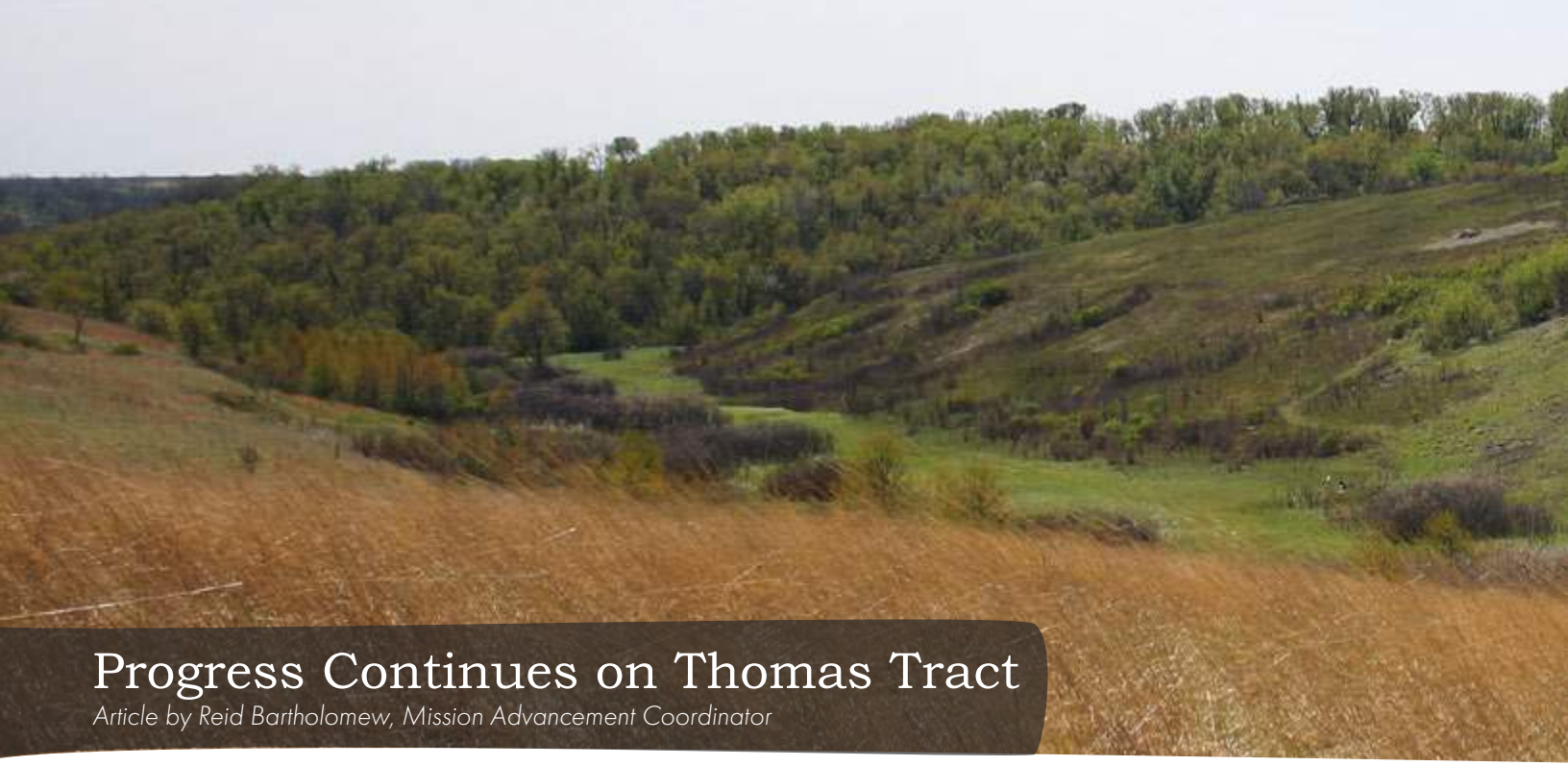
A community of staff, volunteers and contractors come together to save an imperiled habitat

Plus

An Interview with Our New Executive Director

The Rattlesnake Rescuer

Making the Most of Rare Seeds



Progress Continues on Thomas Tract

Article by Reid Bartholomew, Mission Advancement Coordinator

Along Highway 18, just west of Barneveld, the Thomas Tract stretches out across a long draw, where the land pitches and folds into itself. Covering 190 acres in a mix of native grassland and agricultural land, it sits between the Military Ridge State Trail to the north and The Nature Conservancy's Barneveld Prairie to the south, creating a large block of contiguous habitat for rare prairie plants and grassland birds to flourish.

In 1860, the Thomas family arrived from Wales in southwestern Wisconsin and settled among the rolling hills, beginning a multi-generational history of tending to the land as farmers. Stonemasons by trade, they built a stone barn from local materials, completing it in 1880. Nearly 150 years later, the barn is still standing, listed in both the Wisconsin and National Register of Historic places and watched over by the great grandson of the people who built it with their own hands, Doug Thomas.

Doug was born and raised on the same plot of land, spending his youth and sweat tending to it. And he still lives there. As part of The Prairie Enthusiasts purchase agreement, he has a few acres set aside for him as a lifetime easement. He was gracious enough to show me around the property and share what the land means to him and his family.

As we walked through the barn, it was clear to see how deeply Doug cherishes this place and how proud he is of his family's legacy there. He pointed out the joints in the wooden beams on the barn that were constructed without nails, showing off the craftsmanship that has lasted for over a century. We stepped outside to gaze over the valley which had once been pastureland, and he reminisces about venturing down into the fields amid the frigid Wisconsin winters to wrangle the cattle back up the hill. He recalls that there was always plenty to keep him busy growing up: "My dad and his brother worked like a dog from sunup to sunset, and I did too—we did our chores before we

Above: The Thomas family historic barn. Photo by Reid Bartholomew.
Right: Grasshopper sparrow by Eric Preston.

Visit this historic place yourself!

Address:
3975 County Hwy T
Barneveld, WI 53507

Above: The expansive view of Thomas Tract by Reid Bartholomew.
Left: Red-winged black bird by Eric Preston.

went to school, and then we'd come home and do chores again. It was work, work, work," he tells me with a smile. At 75, he maintains the strong work ethic that he was raised with, baling hay throughout the summer, "For me, that's relaxation."

Doug had a front-row seat as the land around him began to change over the years. Subdivisions went up with large houses on land that his neighbors once farmed. Trees began to rise across the landscape that had been clear only a generation before. A golf course was constructed just over the hill to the east. As the last of his family still living on the land, he knew that he wanted to honor the deep connection that his family had built with the place: "My father and his brother, they never wanted this to be developed."

Protecting the land was a team effort that took place over time. With the Thomas family land located in the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area, it's in one of the highest-priority regions for conservation statewide where multiple state and non-profit actors have worked alongside one another for decades. The Nature Conservancy initially purchased 79 acres from the Thomas family back in 1997 directly south of the Thomas Tract, and Driftless Area Land Conservancy had worked with Doug to place a conservation and historic preservation easement on these 190 acres in 2005 to ensure that the barn and the land would be protected in perpetuity. Finally, in 2014, The Prairie Enthusiasts and The Nature Conservancy worked in collaboration to purchase the property, and the remainder of the Thomas' family's land was protected in one form or another.

Since then, the Empire-Sauk Chapter has been stewarding the site, taking their time slowly restoring portions of the site. For Andy Sleger, Land Manager for the Empire-Sauk Chapter and Site Steward for the Thomas Tract, the first step has been to control the invasive species that are abundant on parts of the site, including Burnet saxifrage, sweet clover and spotted knapweed. He's proud of the progress that's been made in the past few years and shared his excitement over the way that native species such as needle grass have responded with the reduction in invasive species pressure. With consistent fire being returned to the site, Andy can see the native species that have survived beginning to flourish once again. Doug, for his part, is relieved to see that the legacy of his family's care for the land will continue on: "It's the best feeling knowing that it will stay the same, knowing that somebody can't build a house over this." ■

The
PRAIRIE PROMOTER

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Impressive progress is being made at Giordano Oak Barrens and Sand Prairie. Photo by unknown photographer.

Helen Hotz holding a garter snake at Mukwonago River Oak Barrens. Photo by Ryan Vodnik.

The Prairie Enthusiasts

St. Croix Valley Chapter sedge trip. Photo by Heidi Kassenborg.

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: 2026 Photo contest winner: "*Night and Dawn at Hogback Prairie SNA*" by RC Wieboldt, Empire-Sauk Member.

President's Message
Prairie Human Communities

Jim Rogala, President

When we describe biotic communities of prairies and other fire-dependent ecosystems, we tend to focus on plant communities, but plants are just one of the components that make up a prairie. Most of us also think of more charismatic communities like birds and butterflies. Some have an interest in reptiles or small mammals, while others get excited about lesser-known invertebrates like leafhoppers. Microbial and fungal communities on prairies are starting to get more attention. Oddly enough, we don't often think of humans as being part of the prairie ecosystem, yet Indigenous Peoples had a clear role in prairie function for thousands of years through the use of fire. Today, humans have many types of prairie communities. I'll mention some here.

- Scientific community: We can't possibly decide what to protect and how to steward lands without some basic knowledge of how these systems work. There's a long history of acquiring knowledge that guides our work. Look for an upcoming article in *The Prairie Promoter* highlighting the many contributions by science in the past. Current researchers continue to enhance our understanding of prairie science; there is much to learn!
- Volunteer community: Much of how we interact with each other and with prairies is as volunteers. The obvious direct interaction as a community is performing land management activities such as burning and battling woody and nonnative invasives. Less direct communities like leadership roles on boards and committees also serve our mission.
- Financial giving community: Like all land trusts, The Prairie Enthusiasts rely on donors to fund the work we do. That work includes supporting our volunteer work, land acquisition, land management expenses, staff salaries to keep growing and running smoothly and all the miscellaneous costs of doing business (e.g., insurance that covers our burns and restoration work).
- Cultural community: Humans are driven by emotions. Arts and culture fuel our passions, and we share that with others in our community. While it might seem odd to think this, the cultural community might be the most important type of prairie human community. Without it, volunteers would not be inspired, donors not compelled to give and the science behind what we do would be unneeded.

Humanity has caused the destruction of many of these habits, but humans are also an essential part of the prairie ecosystem. We interact directly and indirectly with the land through many types of human communities, all of which are critical to ensuring perpetuation and recovery of remnant fire-dependent ecosystems. What prairie human communities do you belong to? ■

*Hand pollinating eastern prairie white fringed orchid (*Platanthera leucophaea*). Photo by Steve Glass.*

Executive Director's Message

The Journey Ahead

Jessica Bizub,Executive Director interviewed by Sarah Barron, Mission Advancement Manager

After being appointed Acting Executive Director in October, our Board of Directors formally welcomed Jessica Bizub into the Executive Director position starting April 1. I've worked alongside Jessica for the better part of a year now and knew her as a volunteer prior to that. She has a love of the outdoors and is often hiking, biking and kayaking. Since moving to Viroqua, she's getting connected with the local community. We sat down together on a warm April day to hear more about how she got involved with The Prairie Enthusiasts, her thoughts about The Prairie Enthusiasts' direction and how others can get involved.

Barron: What was nature to you when you were growing up? What did your time outside look like?

Bizub: I grew up in Mukwonago, Wisconsin, and I was outdoors as much as possible. That region has been heavily developed, but there was a wooded area that went along our neighborhood. My friends and I would build forts, play paintball and generally just explore. One of the things I most remember was a place where there was occasionally water—what I now know as an ephemeral pond—and I enjoyed the frogs and other creatures that found their home there.

It wasn't until I was an adult that I learned that the Southern Kettle Moraine, where Mukwonago is located, is an incredibly biodiverse area. Growing up, I just wanted to be outside, and I thought everywhere had this mixture of rocky, open prairie and woodland areas. I didn't realize until much later that this place is a global hotspot and is really special.

Barron: When you were growing up, did you have people around you that were interested or knowledgeable about nature?

Bizub: Not much, no. My mom gardens, and my family did camp, so they had an appreciation for the outdoors. But it really took me connecting with The Prairie Enthusiasts to learn about nature.

Nature has always interested me, but my career took me down a different path. I got into program evaluation, which was mainly related to the education and health care fields. I did some evaluation of programs at nature centers, but that was about all I could do related to nature.

Then, the pandemic hit. At that time, I was most comfortable socializing outdoors, visiting friends outside and exploring habitats on my own. When I stumbled upon the Spring Green Preserve and all of its prickly pear cactus, it blew my mind. I was shocked that we had a native cactus and it made me realize just how little I know about Wisconsin's native habitats. That's what ultimately inspired me to take the Master Naturalist class.

It was happenstance that I got involved with The Prairie Enthusiasts, because they were offering a class that worked best with my schedule. Through that class, that's when I learned what a prairie actually is. My elementary school was called "Prairie View," so up until that point, I thought prairie was just a fallow farm field like what was next to my school.

The Master Naturalist Training that The Prairie Enthusiasts hosted really changed not just what I knew of nature, but my direction in life. That training was hosted at Schurch-Thomson Prairie and lasted from summer through early fall. Prairies change so much during that time, and that's when my fascination with these ecosystems really got going. The different blooms I saw, different birds I heard and scents changing, it was captivating. Every visit to the prairie was unique. I still wasn't able to identify many plants, but my curiosity was spiked, and I was ambitious to learn more.

Barron: Sometimes I hear that people think learning about prairies can be intimidating, that people need a botany degree to enjoy these habitats. What type of people do you think would be interested in prairies and learning more about them?

Bizub: If you ever looked at a plant, insect or bird and wondered what it is, I think you're a good candidate for this! [laughs] There are times I can feel intimidated by this prairie community because there are so many highly-knowledgeable people, and sometimes they like to get into the weeds, like what's the difference between these two very closely-related sedges. But overall, our community is so welcoming. I've never felt like I've asked a silly question. Prairie Enthusiasts want to share their knowledge and are excited when they encounter people interested in learning more. Just go to a field trip or a work party, and if you want to learn something about nature

along the way, you most certainly will from someone in this group.

Barron: Starting your learning journey with prairies, what was most interesting to you about fire-dependent habitats?

Bizub: If you look at just a small patch of high-quality habitat, you're going to see an abundance of life. And the more you look, the more you see. It's so interesting—the plants, the soil, moss, fungi and insects. You can really see a lot of biodiversity in such a small spot. I think that's super fun!

Also the open space these habitats provide is really unique. So much of our natural environment has been degraded by invasive brush like buckthorn, but on the prairie you can really get a view with distance. I enjoy that.

Many of us don't have a lived memory of high-quality habitats; we didn't grow up with remnant habitats, or, if we did, we didn't have a knowledgeable person to teach us about them. Once you see a remnant prairie and really recognize what you're looking at, it's impossible not to appreciate it, especially when you look around and see how many of our natural places are overrun with invasives. Once you see a truly thriving habitat, you can't unsee all the damage that's been done elsewhere, which reinforces that appreciation for these rare places. And, if you appreciate it, you're naturally going to want to care for these ecosystems. If we want more people to start caring for prairies, we need to get people to experience the prairie themselves.

Barron: An interesting thing about fire-dependent habitats is that they need people to care for them, which is a core element of what The Prairie Enthusiasts does. As you got more involved with this community, what surprised you about your fellow Prairie Enthusiasts?

Bizub: It was clear to me from the start that Prairie Enthusiasts are incredibly passionate about what they're doing. And that alone is really infectious and fun to be around. The other surprise is that people are dedicated to taking the long view—this work is going to take time. It's refreshing to be around people who are dedicated to putting in so much work without knowing if they'll see the full return of their efforts within their lifetime. Restoration takes decades or hundreds of years of consistent stewardship. That kind of long-term dedication flies in the face of our current social environment of instant gratification: that feeling that if it doesn't happen right now, it somehow doesn't matter. This work is the complete opposite of that and it's super refreshing.

Barron: The Prairie Enthusiasts has changed a lot over the years. What can you say about what the future holds?

Bizub: When I look at our organization, I see a long-standing base of dedicated volunteers who are really driving our management and outreach efforts. As we head into the future, we may not be able to rely as much on that base of volunteers as we have. People generally are finding they have busier schedules with work, family and so on, meaning they have less time to volunteer. And, people overall aren't as engaged in their local communities. Maybe they're worried that getting involved will mean they have to make some long-lasting commitment or be involved as long as their predecessor has. So, we're definitely not losing our grassroots structure—that's part of our identity and invaluable—but, we're also going to look at how we can evolve in targeted areas to set us up for a strong future.

We're just starting to embark on a 3-year strategic plan, looking at what structures support our long-term growth, meaning staffing, our Board and Chapters, policies and procedures—the unseen but necessary roots that support our more visible work. We're also focusing on financial resilience to withstand the myriad challenges as well as drive membership and volunteer growth. And we're going to maintain our focus on our mission: expanding prescribed fire capacity, providing more educational opportunities, and advancing our protection and stewardship program.

Barron: What would you say to someone who discovers The Prairie Enthusiasts, likes our mission, but is on the fence about getting involved?

Bizub: Just try it out! That's the track I took. I don't think of myself as a big "joiner" and am an introvert actually. But after connecting with the Empire-Sauk Chapter members during my Master Naturalist Training, I wanted to see what my home Glacial Prairie Chapter was like. It was a little intimidating to go to an event; I didn't know anyone there, but I thought a seed collecting work party was the best introduction to the group. And it absolutely was! It was essentially a hike where I got to learn about plants and feel really good doing it. Not only that, but the volunteers there were so welcoming and helpful. I just kept going to events after that. So, I'd say to anyone on the fence, just remember you're not signing up for some long-term commitment. Just try one event and see if you like it, because I have a feeling you will. ■

Management Toolbox

Article and Photos by Dan Carter, Ecologist

Top Left: Dusting glove over chemical resistant glove.
Top Middle: Dusting glove saturated around the thumb and first two fingers.
Top Right: Treatment of glossy buckthorn stem.
Bottom: Glossy buckthorn after treatment.

Wicking Glove Basal Bark Treatment

Many variables factor into the decision to mechanically pull, cut and treat stumps, apply basal bark treatment or use other approaches to remove invasive brush. The species and time of year are major factors. We often use basal bark treatment on invasive brush and small trees with smooth bark, and we avoid cutting and treating stumps during the period in spring when sap is flowing. Glossy buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*), one of our most abundant targets, has a broad sap flow season and smooth bark, so when we can't pull it, we often use basal bark treatment.

One of the problems with basal bark treatments that are applied by spray onto trunks is overspray; sometimes herbicide misses its target or excess runs down the trunk onto the soil. We want to avoid overspray, because we often work in sensitive areas. Readers should keep in mind that there is also evidence of off-target impacts via root exudation or release that occurs during decomposition (e.g., Graziano et al. 2022, in *Weed Science*), so test your treatment in a small area, and always monitor treatment effects. Other approaches should be used in areas of higher quality, remnant vegetation if possible. Off-target damage is most likely to occur when many stems are treated in a small area.

To avoid overspray, we use a wicking glove or "glove of death" approach. This involves wearing chemical resistant gloves of adequate thickness (≥14 mils for Garlon® 4) that extend at least mid-way up the forearm on both hands, and a dusting glove over the chemical resistant glove on one hand (I prefer my non-dominant hand). I also wear a thinner, nitrile glove under the dusting and thicker chemical resistant gloves in case the outer glove develops a hole, but that is unlikely if rough or thorny species are avoided. A spray bottle or pump sprayer can be used to saturate the dusting glove around the thumb and first two fingers with herbicide (often 20% solution of triclopyr ester herbicide in basal oil). Then I grasp each stem and apply herbicide 360 degrees around its base. How far upward depends on stem diameter. I treat the lower 18 inches of stems above 1.5 inches in diameter and the lower foot on smaller stems. I only treat a few inches of very small stems. All stems on multi-stemmed shrubs or small trees should be treated. Apply herbicide generously—not so much that it runs off, but a bit more than it takes to simply stain the bark. Basal oil often contains a dye, or a dye may be added, but the oil itself will generally stain the bark and give it a darker appearance. This requires re-charging the glove with herbicide frequently.

When treated during the growing season, targets typically die within two to five weeks. They may leaf out after winter treatments and subsequently die. Other considerations that apply to basal treatments include:

- Work during cool weather to minimize volatilization, which can affect very nearby vegetation and isn't healthy for the applicator. I work on cool days or during the cool of morning when the temperature is below 70°F (often 30-60°F) and direct sunshine is not warming surfaces. Volatilization risk is greatest during and immediately after application.
- Work during dry weather. I don't apply herbicide if there is a chance of rain within 72 hours. I try to apply herbicide when I have high confidence that it will be dry for four days, especially in areas with surrounding sensitive vegetation. This needs study, but the longer the dry period after application, the better.
- Don't mix herbicide with diesel fuel. Product labels may allow it, but diesel is volatile and more toxic than basal oils designed for use with herbicides.
- Wicking gloves may be re-used, but chemical resistant gloves should be discarded if not continuing treatment the same day. Chemicals slowly work their way through most chemical resistant gloves, regardless of thickness.
- Strictly adhere to herbicide labels. ■

Rattlesnake Rescuer
Member Profile: Stephen Winter

Article by Melinda Knutson, Coulee Region Chapter Chair

Stephen Winter wears many hats, most of them related to conservation. Steve is an active member of the Minnesota Driftless Chapter of The Prairie Enthusiasts; he served on the Chapter Board for several years. He now serves on Chapter committees and manages the Chapter Facebook page. Steve lives in Winona, Minnesota. During the day, he's a Refuge Biologist for the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, which covers 261 river miles from Wabasha, Minnesota to Rock Island, Illinios. When he's not busy with work or volunteering with his Chapter, he enjoys a most unusual hobby —rescuing rattlesnakes.

Stephen Winter removing a snake from St. Mary's University. Photo by Dusty Hoffman.

Timber rattlesnakes (*Crotalus horridus*) are mainly confined to the Driftless Area in the Upper Midwest, inhabiting bluffs along the Mississippi River drainages. In Minnesota, they are only found in six southeastern counties. In the Driftless, the hill prairies or 'goat prairies,' as they are sometimes called, are an important habitat for timber rattlers and are a focus for restoration by both the Minnesota Driftless and the Coulee Region Chapters and the Minnesota and Wisconsin DNR. Management of these remnant prairies is essential for stabilizing and restoring timber rattler populations.

Occasionally, some of these snakes wander into yards, gardens, farm buildings and other areas where their human neighbors wish they wouldn't be. Unfortunately, many people's first inclination is to kill the snake. However, the species is listed as Threatened in Minnesota due to steep population declines. To avoid snake mortality and secure public safety, Minnesota has developed a Rattlesnake Responder Program consisting of trained local staff and volunteers who respond to nuisance rattlesnake calls. The County law enforcement dispatch office is the point of contact for the public.

Stephen participates in this program as a volunteer, rescuing snakes from people's properties. "People call the law enforcement dispatch office, and they send out a message to the local responders," says Steve. "With luck, one of them will respond and go out to rescue the snake. Someone is not always available, due to work or other commitments, which is too bad. I think we have at least six responders in Winona County."

Above: Timber rattlesnake held by with a hook. Photo by Stephen Winter.
Right: Timber rattlesnake found in Winona by Stephen Winter.

Knutson: How did you get interested in prairies and rattlesnakes in particular?

Winter: I grew up in Nebraska on a rural acreage. We had six acres of remnant prairie that my brother and I used to play together in. Of course, I didn't know anything about remnant prairies at the time. In college I read the classic Nebraska wildflower book by Jon Farrar and learned that many of the plants in that six-acre patch of ground were characteristic of remnant prairies. When I attended the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Kansas State University, I learned a lot about prairies through the many range ecology and range management classes I took. My time in Kansas at Konza Prairie was transformative; I now have a 'Konza world view' when it comes to understanding tallgrass prairie ecology. I studied the interaction of fire and large grazers, bison and cattle, in multiple Great Plains grasslands during my Ph.D. at Oklahoma State University, and in my subsequent post-doctoral work there. Through it all, I developed an ever-greater passion for prairies!

I've been interested in snakes for as long as I can remember; my oldest sister kept a garter snake in the garage when I was a small child, and I remember being fascinated by it. There were lots of big bull snakes on our land in Nebraska. I've interacted with many different types of snakes in several jobs, including stints in California, Texas and Kansas. Among many close calls with rattlesnakes around the country, a massive western diamondback rattlesnake (*Crotalus atrox*) in Texas particularly stands out in my mind.

Knutson: How does one rescue a snake?

Winter: We're trained to use both snake hooks and tongs, a holding bag and other tools to safely capture and hold the snakes until they can be released. Jaime Edwards, a now-retired Minnesota DNR employee, did a great job of training me to handle these rattlesnakes during relocation events. She has done so much to raise awareness about timber rattlesnakes in southeast Minnesota and the need to protect and restore their habitat here in the Driftless Area.

Knutson: Tell me about one of your rescues.

Winter: One landowner is regularly visited by timber rattlers; he told me he gets three to six snakes a year in his yard. He said he doesn't mind them if a responder is available to relocate them. The day before I arrived, a different responder had rescued one snake, but another one escaped. I captured the second snake and was ready to take it to my car by walking between his house and the neighbor's house. But he said: "Don't say anything to the neighbors. Come through the house and go through the front door to your car so they don't see it. They may be upset to know there are rattlesnakes around here and start killing any snake they see."

Knutson: What do you do with the snakes you've rescued?

Winter: We try to find suitable habitat as close as possible to the capture site, ideally no farther than ½ mile. Research shows that the snakes are very tied to their own winter dens; if they are moved too far and can't find it, they are likely to die. Because female snakes don't reproduce until they are 7-11 years old and they only reproduce every 2-3 years, the loss of even one female is significant. Females don't move very far from their winter dens. In the summer they give birth, usually at what are called birthing rocks—rock outcroppings exposed to the sun but with crevices they and their neonates (young snakes born that summer) can retreat into. These are often on the hill prairies that the conservation community works to protect and manage. The neonates follow their mother's scent trail to her winter den, thus imprinting them on that winter den, which they'll use exclusively for the rest of their lives.

Knutson: What is your advice to someone who comes upon a timber rattlesnake?

Winter: They're relatively rare; you may never see one again in your lifetime. They won't bother you unless provoked. If you are lucky enough to see one, stop and stand at a safe distance. Soak up the experience and count yourself lucky that you got to see such a wonderful creature. ■

*Above: Freshly clipped seed heads of wood betony (*Pedicularis canadensis*). We don't want to waste these!*

*Below: It may be drab, but after a burn to remove the thatch, this area dominated by Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*) and old field cinquefoil (*Potentilla simplex*) is a great place to spread some seed.*

Making the Most of Hard to Get Seeds

Article and Photos by Dan Carter, Ecologist

Each year we collect what seeds we are able, and we broadcast them where we think they are most likely to succeed. That may sound simple, but a lot goes into deciding where we put our precious seeds. What factors guide those decisions? Many of us already know that some species require wet or dry, sun or shade, or acidic or alkaline or calcium-rich soil. Goat's rue (*Tephrosia virginiana*) likes acidic, sandy soil. Tuberous Indian plantain (*Arnoglossum plantagineum*) likes calcareous soil. Other species are much less picky. For instance, false toadflax (*Comandra umbellata*) can grow in dry prairies and low prairies, in dolomite gravels and acidic oak barrens, in wide open prairies and in healthy oak woodlands. Where species grow, whether across broad gradients or very narrow ones, informs where we might consider spreading their seeds, but there are other factors to consider.

Let me take a step back to give some context. Much seed goes into prairie plantings on lands transitioning out of row-crop agriculture or into areas where existing perennial vegetation has been sprayed in order to "start from scratch." Those are outside of the scope of what follows, though I will take this opportunity to urge practitioners to critically evaluate whether or not starting from scratch is the most appropriate course of action (see Spring 2026 issue of *The Prairie Promoter* that touches on that). Here I'm focusing on the restoration of degraded, never cultivated sites or augmentation of sites that may be old fields, but now support perennial herbaceous vegetation and may or may not be receptive to our precious seeds. Below I describe what I'm looking for in my efforts to make the most of limited resources.

The locations that are the best candidates for interseeding have relatively low and sparse vegetation. Exotic cool-season grasses aren't vigorous and only flower sparsely. The underlying soil or its covering of moss may be visible from above. Native plants like strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana* or *F. vesca*), old-field cinquefoil (*Potentilla simplex*) and cat's foot (*Antenneria spp.*), or exotic plants like Deptford pink (*Dianthus armeria*) and Oxe-eye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*) may be present. Weedy annuals like foxtail (*Seteria spp.*) and common ragweed (*Ambrosia artemisiifolia*) may be present, but they grow sparsely and only shin to knee high. Queen Anne's lace (*Daucus carota*) is often present too. Together,

these clues indicate that there is room for new seedlings to grow and get adequate light. They also indicate that nutrient availability is low, which tends to favor relatively nutrient-efficient conservative species over time—the same species whose seeds are often in shortest supply. Eventually, these conservative species can shoulder out the non-native species mentioned above as well as many others.

Another thing I look for is flammability. In the woods that may mean leaf litter and some sedge cover. In the open that means grasses and sedges—usually exotic, cool season grasses like Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*). If productivity is a little greater due to greater nutrient availability or moisture, being able to burn and remove detritus prior to spreading seeds is very important to promote seed-soil contact and so seedlings can emerge unobstructed. Of course, burning can also keep other problems like woody encroachment at bay while conservative species establish. Repeated burning also promotes the condition of low nutrient availability in the long-term by repeatedly volatilizing nitrogen and producing little bits of charcoal that bind available nutrients. Establishment in just about any context just seems to be better and faster the sooner and more often dormant season burning occurs.

I consider the presence of herbaceous invasive species. I'm not worried about most upland exotic, cool season grasses or non-native plants like the ones I've already mentioned. I am concerned about species that will require chemical intervention like soapwort (*Saponaria officinalis*) and crown vetch (*Securigera varia*), especially if they are distributed throughout a site. Obviously, it's best not to seed where broadcast chemical application is already needed.

When do I plant the seeds? I generally aim to plant them more or less when nature does. For some early-ripening seeds like wood betony (*Pedicularis canadensis*) or bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) that means I plant seeds in late spring or early summer right after I collect them. I plant most seeds that ripen from mid-summer onwards in late autumn or early winter, either after a fall burn or a few months ahead of a late winter/early spring burn.

If you only have a small amount of seed for a prized species, don't spread it over a large area. Instead, concentrate the seed in patches. Many species either require or benefit from cross-pollination, so they need their nearest conspecific neighbors to be close-by in order to create adequate floral display to attract pollinators and subsequently reliably set seed and continue to increase. I go so far as to individually plant some seeds in small groupings. Depending on your capacity, it may also be worthwhile to produce plugs/transplants when seeds are in short supply.

In any case, keep records of what you planted and where. That way when something makes an appearance, sometimes after many years, you'll remember it's something you planted! In most cases, seedlings will appear the season after you plant seeds, but it may take several or more years before plants are large enough to be detected or begin to flower. ■

*One of a couple dozen prairie parsley seedlings (*Polytaenia nuttallii*) detected the spring after the planting area was burned and seeds subsequently individually poked into the soil.*

What a Difference a Year Makes!

Article by Rob Schubert, Empire-Sauk Chapter Land Manager and Site Steward

Giordano Oak Barrens and Sand Prairie was protected by The Prairie Enthusiasts in 2023. It is managed by volunteers and staff with the Empire-Sauk Chapter.

Volunteer winter work party group. Photo by Rob Shubert.

Progress at Giordano Oak Barrens and Sand Prairie has been fantastic! We've been able to affect more than 14.5 acres of intensive tree and brush removal since efforts at the 40-acre site in Columbia County began in January 2025. Not many of those can be counted as "completed acres," but we have been able to accomplish a lot of the work required to restore this site.

The effort has come from multiple sources. Empire-Sauk Chapter land management staff have been crucial. Volunteer interest and turnout have been consistently growing over the past two years, with a small but dedicated group of locals now actively involved. Engaging partners has resulted in much more progress than what otherwise could have been accomplished. And, in addition to all of this, there is some degree of luck.

The first big push came with help from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS).

Brendan Woodall, formerly of USFWS, and I developed a suitable scope of work. We were limited by which methods could be implemented on the site. We also needed to make fast progress to build success and justify project costs. We determined that using hydraulic tree shears would be the best approach; they would allow us to impact a large area, make a clear and dramatic shift in the natural community, minimize impact to sensitive features and limit the initial follow up required.

We were able to hire a contractor to remove cedar and pine on approximately eight acres using $10,000 of available funding. This work was conducted expertly by Keith Baker of WiseAxe, LLC. Using a mini excavator and hydraulic shears, Keith was able to cut off cedars and pines at ground level, thus opening the most intact sand prairie in a way that did not result in soil disturbance or cause significant resprouting of hardwood species. Trees that were too large in diameter to remove, he de-limbed and sheared where he could reach, sometimes 20 feet up the trunk, leaving the spires which now add a bit of whimsy to the site.

Keith is an amazing equipment operator, and I wish I had been able to spend more time watching him at his craft. Unfortunately, I had to head down to Missouri for a training. While I was away, Evan Nelson helped oversee the work on my behalf. This wouldn't be the last time Evan's involvement proved important.

After Keith finished his work, there were brush piles everywhere. These piles needed to be consolidated and moved. Without snow on the ground and the ability to burn, the work was even harder. Evan spent multiple days moving material with his tractor. Bo Hendrickson (formerly with USFWS) also came down and spent a day moving material with a skid steer.

Without this help, we would not have been able to get all the material moved and minimize burn scars. I'd been adding about three new plant species to the inventory list each time I visited the site. Knowing there was still a lot to be discovered and that these newly observed populations were small and scattered across the site, I needed to avoid accidentally extirpating species.

Removing cedars from the most extant prairie and sand blows was the main priority. Eliminating the threat of encroachment and intensive follow-up maintenance was another major concern.

Black locust occupied three main areas when the property was acquired. Two of the areas occupy the most degraded, lowest priority areas; the third was immediately adjacent to the sand prairie.

The clone was spreading. About 2.5 acres of black locust needed to be removed, and quickly! The area was also strategically important to be able to plan burn units and reintroduce prescribed fire to the site.

Black locust is notoriously difficult to control. It's a clonal species that spreads via roots and can persistently re-sprout following removal efforts. Effective control requires, in part, specialized herbicide, which is both expensive and very capable of causing undesirable impacts to other legume species, such as lead plant and goat's rue, especially in sandy soils.

Foliar spraying of black locust resprouts for years on end was not a viable option.

To avoid chasing black locust indefinitely, we needed to get the entire clone cut in a single dormant season. The former stand was approximately 2.5 acres. With 100 to 200 trees per acre, we were going to need to cut some trees.

Luckily for us, Evan Nelson lives just down the road. Evan owns Good Oak Ecological Services and brings the full complement of skills, equipment and knowledge it takes to implement ecological restoration and land management.

Evan brought two of his staff to join James Haas (former Chapter Crew Leader) and me, and we spent a day cutting black locust and piling and burning material. With four of us cutting trees and Evan on the tractor, we punched a big hole in the stand that day.

Most of the material that Evan and Bo moved off the sand prairie got piled and burned in the area where the black locust was being removed. Thus, we were able to achieve two tasks at once.

Shala and Rob felling pines. Photo by Luke DeBiasio.

Before by Eric Preston.

After by Eric Preston.

We did not get the entire area cut in one day. We spent several more days felling trees, joined by volunteers who helped burn material. When we couldn't burn piles due to a lack of snow, we staged cut material to be moved later.

Progress was slow without equipment. The area beneath the black locust was dense with other invasive brush like honeysuckle and buckthorn, and the densely crowded stand meant other trees like black cherry and black oak had to come out as well. And we certainly couldn't leave the mulberry and hybrid elm.

One day, after a work party, I was alone at the site. I looked up to see a stranger had walked onto the property. He had a disgusted look on his face as he surveyed the downed trees and scattered piles of crowns.

"Are you gonna burn all this up?" he asked. "Most of it," I replied.

He wanted the black locust and whatever other hardwood was there. I wanted to see the material put to good use and needed help getting everything out of my work area.

Jeff offered to use his tractor and trailer to remove the material, so we scheduled a day. I would fell the trees, and he would pull them out.

I showed up early to find a 60 hp tractor with a logging winch sitting at the gate. This was not what I was expecting. When he showed up with a super duty truck pulling a hydraulic dump trailer, I realized he was serious.

It was late winter by then, with conditions warm enough to thaw the still frozen ground in the forecast. We had one final day to get the cutting done. It was hard work, but with Jeff pulling out trees and no one in my felling zone, I was able to finish cutting the last black locust out of the stand.

With the final trees out, I surveyed the trees that had been felled, cut to length, and lined up, the trailer loaded, and staged logs ready for when the trailer returned empty.

Pleased with things, I looked around and said, "Not a bad day for two old guys."

Things took a pause for a while. In the seasonal rhythm of land management, all efforts went towards burn season.

The black locust stayed on my mind. I was expecting the worst. I started seeing it come up in other areas, but I wasn't seeing it yet at the Giordano site. I just wanted to know how bad it was going to be.

Once it did eventually come up, the deer started hammering it! I was thinking about how to get it mowed to keep it from getting too tall to foliar spray. The deer were doing this for me.

Guy (Chapter Land Management staff) and I spent a day in July spot spraying locust sprouts. All told, things were much better than expected, with re-sprouts coming entirely from remaining root stock and not from cut stumps.

When James, Luke (Chapter Assistant Land Manager) and I returned in August for a follow up application, things were looking good. Our previous application had been effective, and we treated the black locusts we missed in the densest areas and along the periphery of the clone.

Things again took a pause. The seasonal rhythm took us through seed collection and fall burning, until we again began removing trees and brush to open the lost prairie and savanna.

We had more help this time. Shala (former Chapter Land Management staff) had temporarily joined our team. Shala and I had worked together in the past doing for-profit restoration work, and she understands the production mentality that comes from doing this for a living.

We were also better organized. John Exo and Kevin McKown (Chaper members and volunteers) agreed to continue to help lead work parties. With the ability of The Prairie Enthusiasts staff to do the most difficult tree removal and holding multiple work parties a month, we

were getting a lot done.

The progress has been fantastic. As Luke said, "It seems as though every time more progress was made, another interested volunteer took notice of the work being done and wanted to help." Soon we had an almost regular crowd who would join for our workdays.

Again, we had a lot of help from Jeff and Evan. Jeff helped move and consolidate the trees we felled into burnable piles. Evan donated some of his staff's time and equipment, allowing us to finally remove the last pines and cedars from one of the sand blows. Then he spent a few more days over the weekend moving material with his tractor and burning piles to help us prep a burn unit for this fall.

At this point, we took a pause. It's important sometimes to stop and reflect, to appreciate things, to not have an adversarial relationship with the land. With goals accomplished and winter dwindling, we move into the next phase of the seasonal rhythm.

In all my years managing restoration projects, I've never had to do so much work with so few resources as I have with Giordano Oak Barrens and Sand Prairie. What we've been able to accomplish really has been remarkable. What I've described is just some of the work that has been done. There has been invasive control and other work that just doesn't fit neatly into a single chronologic narrative. There has been survey work of various taxa; herptiles, flora, insects, birds and bats. Others have volunteered time to do the annual site monitoring, take drone imagery to document progress, manage hunting permits, collect seed, mow trails and post boundary signs; the list goes on.

And that's what it takes. No individual has the skills and capacity to manage a restoration project; it takes a team. ■

Good Oak Crew cutting black locust.
Photo by Rob Schubert.

The Burns of Winter and Early Spring

Poem by Chris Gloe, Glacial Prairie Chapter Member
Photo of shooting star by Chris Benda

Part One: Snow

For the winter burns there should be snow.
The brush piles from fall cutting have got to go.

Invasives and woodies have been put in a stack.
Volunteers and crews are ready to attack.

The fire is hot but they don't care.
Get too close, you might singe your hair.

Part Two: Prairie

When the snow melts it's the Prairie's turn.
In order to thrive, the prairie must burn.
Native Americans certainly knew how.
The Prairie Enthusiasts teach it now.
Nature shows us we have a lot to learn.

The burn bosses' training really comes through.
For every fire, they know what to do.
Wielding drip torches and rakes,
The crews know the stakes.
The blackened earth helps the prairie renew. ■

Factors Affecting the Expansion of Restored Remnant Prairies

Article by Jon Rigden, Coulee Region Chapter Board Representative
Photo by Catherine McKenzie, General Member

Many remnant prairies that survive today are gradually being overtaken by trees and brush. Friends of the Blufflands, in collaboration with the Coulee Region Chapter of The Prairie Enthusiasts, has led the effort to restore several of these prairies in and around Hixon Forest. This has included hiring contractors and leading work parties to clear brush and trees from the remnant and clearing an area around the remnant into which it can expand. This cleared area is referred to as the "first buffer." When time and volunteers allow, a "second buffer" is sometimes created to keep the larger and especially berry-producing invasive brush even further away.

Each year, seeds are collected from the central prairie and dispersed into the first buffer in hopes that prairie plants will eventually grow. Initially, these newly cleared areas can look like a disaster area, with few visible prairie plants but with an explosion of weeds. It may take years before the prairie plants appear, and some highly conservative species may not emerge for a long time, if at all. What factors are at play that hinder or help expansion?

First, newly opened ground provides ideal conditions for weedy "colonizer" species. These fast-growing weeds can quickly occupy areas with bare soil now exposed to the sun and can hinder the number of prairie seeds that germinate while smothering the tiny seedlings that do. This can significantly decrease the success of expanding the prairie. Many of these colonizers are transient, such as burnweed, Queen Anne's lace, common mullein and giant foxtail, which will eventually be outcompeted by the native prairie plants. Most restorationists just ignore these transient intruders. Other species can be more of a problem, such as sweet clover and nonnative biennial and perennial thistles. Many go after these species, but not everyone. The current chatter seems to favor leaving the thistle alone, but going after sweet clover. There is broader agreement that species like reed canary grass and crown vetch should be actively eradicated.

Second, certain chemicals in the soil—known as allelopathic compounds—can suppress prairie growth. Juglone from walnut trees is a familiar example. Another is emodin, produced by buckthorn. Emodin enters the soil through roots and decomposing leaves, acting somewhat like a preemergent herbicide by inhibiting seed germination and root development of some plants. It may also disrupt beneficial mycorrhizal fungi. Although emodin is estimated to break down in about three years, this varies widely. Other invasive plants, including honeysuckle, barberry and bittersweet, also produce allelochemicals, though their impact is not well understood.

Third, the soil in newly cleared areas often contains a substantial seed bank of buckthorn and other undesirable species. Some of these seeds can remain viable for years, continuing to compete with prairie expansion. While additional off site invasive seeds may be introduced into the buffer such as by birds or other animals, this becomes less problematic once mature prairie sod establishes and regular fire is implemented.

Fourth, excess nitrogen from decades of accumulation of decaying plant matter and more recently from the decomposition of buckthorn leaves enriches

the soil in ways that favor weeds and shrubs over native prairie plants. This nutrient imbalance may also alter soil pH and microbial communities unfavorable for prairie plants. Reducing nitrogen to prairie-friendly levels can take considerable time, even with prescribed fire, which is known to remove some nitrogen with each burn.

However, fire—the fifth factor—can be difficult to implement in the early years due to insufficient fuel in newly cleared areas. This delay limits fire's initial benefits. Beyond reducing nitrogen and suppressing brush seedlings, fire may also stimulate the germination of some seeds of native plants through compounds in the smoke called karrikins. For this reason, some practitioners have started experimenting with "smoke water" to encourage the establishment of new prairie plant species.

Sixth, herbicides used during site preparation may leave residual chemicals, particularly if applied as foliar sprays. Their persistence depends on many factors such as sunlight, soil type, pH, temperature, moisture and microbial activity. Much remains unknown about the lingering effects of these chemicals, including on the soil fungi community.

Seventh, seeds dispersed on opened areas of steep bluff prairies can be washed downslope if an ill-timed heavy rain occurs. This will obviously hinder the establishment of plants on the higher slopes.

Finally, the soil fungal community plays a significant role. Most prairie plants form symbiotic relationships with arbuscular mycorrhizal fungi. In this mutual partnership, plants supply the fungi with sugars while the fungi improve nutrient and water uptake by plants. These relationships are essential for most plants with many associating with specific fungal partners. If those particular fungi are absent from a newly opened area, plant establishment can be difficult. At the same time, fungi depend on their host plants, creating a gradual, interdependent expansion—a kind of "chicken-and-egg" dynamic. Some restorationists have attempted to jump start this process by transferring soil from intact prairies to expanded areas to introduce beneficial fungi, though this is obviously not a viable option in most cases because of the damage that would be done to the intact prairie. Others have experimented with laboratory-prepared fungal inoculants, but most experts believe commercially available inoculants are not yet reliable for use on prairies.

This last issue is one that Friends of the Blufflands hopes to untangle a little through research by University of Wisconsin La Crosse student Lane Hansen. A senior planning to continue into graduate studies at the University, she is interested in fungal networks in remnant prairies. We hope that her work will help shed light on plant–fungal interactions and their dynamics during prairie expansion. ■

Alone In Her Meadow

Poem by Anna Windels, Minnesota Oak Savanna Member
Photo by Catherine McKenzie, General Member

and she dips,
nose flush
        to the tips of green
        stems
and rises with
        her hands
        blushed pink
        with slippers
as star-shaped
        asters gaze upon her

with sedges,
        rushes, grass
        beyond all
        reaching,
while stretching
brilliant hands
to grasp at the
wildest edges
        of the untamed heavens

that only she
could hold
such
bouquets,
that only skies
could be
so blue,
that only we
should be so kind to witness ■

Listening to the Land:
Reflections from a Wisconsin Prairie

Article by Gary Kurtz

Monarch butterfly getting to know a naturalist.
Photo by Steve Glass, Empire-Sauk Chapter Member

A few cumulus clouds drift lazily overhead, suspended beneath a burnished sky. Sunlight moves in slow, generous waves across the prairie—over sunflowers and cup plants, through big bluestem and prairie dock, lifting the ironweed's purple fire above the grasses. A scent of warm earth rises with the wind. Though the day is warm, a light breeze steals the sun's heat, rippling through stems and seedheads. Standing in that wind, I remember the barefoot summers of childhood, the thrill of a garter snake writhing in my hands, the tart bite of wild gooseberries on my tongue. Back then, nature wasn't a place to visit; it was the world I inhabited. At times, I let that connection slip away. But nature is always there, waiting, and easy to return to. And now, I'm returning to a prairie healthier and more whole than anything I knew growing up.

Walking through the tallgrass now, I recognize the monarchs drifting between milkweed stands, the native bees shouldering into coneflowers, the underground networks of grasses binding the land together. Sixty years ago, these species were rare where I lived—survivors clinging to the margins. Beneath my feet, today, roots plunge deeper than I am tall—holding soil in place, storing carbon, surviving fire and drought with a resilience that borders on miraculous. The prairie is not just grass. It is a living, breathing community shaped by millennia of wind, flame and the hands of those who tended it long before we arrived. What we call restoration today echoes a much older relationship.

For thousands of years, Indigenous nations such as the Ho Chunk, Menominee and Potawatomi understood these grasslands intimately. Fire was their ally, a carefully wielded tool that renewed the land, invigorated wildflowers and kept the balance between forest and open ground. These were not untouched wildernesses, even then, but intentionally managed spaces—places where people and prairie shaped one another.

That relationship changed with European settlement. Fires were extinguished. Elk and bison vanished. The open, sunlit savannas and prairies slowly surrendered to encroaching trees and the plow. What had been a mosaic of life became fragmented, nearly forgotten. Yet the memory of these landscapes persists—in remnant prairies, in recovering oak savannas, in the persistence of native plants pushing up through old fields and fencerows.

To walk a savanna today is to step into both the past and the future. Beneath the open canopy of bur

oaks, sunlight pools on culver's root and giant yellow hyssop. Red-headed woodpeckers flash between branches. Field sparrows stitch their songs through the grasses. These places remind us that conservation is more than preservation; it is an act of reverence for the intricate connections that sustain life.

But we are not always good listeners.

I often hike through places that seem wild at first glance—prairie, oak savanna, birdsong overhead. Then I enter a stand of red pines planted in perfect rows, tall and still as fence posts. There is no undergrowth. No birds. No mess. Just the silence of order. It looks like a forest, but it does not feel alive.

In our pursuit of neatness, we sometimes confuse aesthetics with ecology. We armor rivers with stone to keep them from wandering. We plant single-species forests in tidy grids. We mow our lawns into submission. What we call stability is often sterility. Dead trees are removed as eyesores, though they are nurseries for fungi, ladders for woodpeckers and shelter for owls. The mess of nature is not clutter—it is infrastructure.

Restoration does not mean walking away. It means discerning when to step back and when to step in. Sometimes the land asks for our hands—to pull garlic mustard from a prairie, to cut back buckthorn along a forest edge, to reintroduce fire where it once danced. These are not acts of domination, but of care. Letting the land speak means learning to listen with humility.

And sometimes, the land speaks loudest through the people who love it, as in the story that follows.

Richard tends two prairies in the hills of southwest Wisconsin—one a creekside remnant, the other a sunlit ridge. He has restored them both with care, season by season, fire by fire, seed by seed. But what he loves most is sharing them. Every summer, he welcomes school groups to walk the trails, to step off the path and into the waving grasses. "Let them wander," he says. "Let them listen."

He begins with an ant hill. Ends with the sky. And somewhere in between, something shifts.

The kids lean in, some curious, others wary. "The ants are working," he tells them. "All the time." He doesn't instruct the kids what to feel. He just lets them watch. Slowly, the fidgeting stops.

The phones stay in pockets. They begin to see. Then he asks the kids to close their eyes.

At first, there's giggling. A few peeks. But then the prairie takes over. The wind moves through the big bluestem like a whisper. Bees drone from coneflower to coneflower. A red-winged blackbird calls from the cattails. The buzz isn't just insects—it's life, layered and humming.

Juvenile song sparrow by Peter Gorman.

One summer, a teacher encouraged her students to lie back in the grass and watch the clouds. Later, she mailed Richard their reflections. One child wrote, "I didn't know the sky could be so big." Another: "I heard the grass talking." Those pages now sit in a folder in his desk drawer, alongside seed catalogs and old field notes. They are part of his prairie now, as much as the milkweed and the monarchs.

Richard thinks about those kids when he walks the trails alone. "I wonder if they remember," he says. The ant hill. The buzz. That moment when a breeze moved through the grass and they went still. He hopes they carry a bit of prairie with them—not just as a memory, but as a way of seeing.

Because as we restore prairies, the prairies restore us. As I stand again in the tallgrass, the wind moves through the stems like breath. The prairie welcomes, as it always has. It reminds me that restoration is not only ecological work, but emotional work—an invitation to belong, to pay attention, to remember that we are part of a story much older than ourselves. Nature does not call us back. It has never let us go. It simply waits, offering its wind and its warmth. ■

Where Prairie Birds Still Sing

Five Encounters with Grassland Birds

Poems by Jack Sytsma, Clayton Bickley and Jacob Riggs

I walk prairies the way some people walk libraries—slowly, quietly, listening for voices I do not yet understand. Over time, birds have become my teachers. Not through facts or names, but through presence: a song held in wind, a silhouette against sky, a sound so small it almost disappears. These poems are not portraits of species so much as records of encounters—moments when a bird and a human occupied the same fragile patch of world and noticed each other.

Upland Sandpiper

You stand as if you own the sky,
long-legged, spare, and razor-thin,
a question drawn across the light,
a shape the wind has settled in.

I hear you first, a distant thread
pulled tight across the open land,
as though the prairie's holding breath
to prove it still knows how to stand.

You make the field feel old and wide,
older than fences, roads, or names,
and in your quiet, I step aside
from thinking I am central flame.

Some beauty asks for nothing more
than space enough to not be claimed—
to live, like you, beyond the urge
to have its wildness tamed.

Greater Prairie Chicken

Before the sun remembers how
to lift itself from folded night,
you boom and turn and bow
inside the thinning edge of light.

The orange swell along your throat
fills up with breath, being bold,
a sound too heavy for a note,
too strange for silence to hold.

I think about the almost-lost,
the nearly gone, the barely saved,
the fragile line our choices crossed
before your dance was once more made.

You dance not for our watching eyes,
not for our meaning, nor our praise—
you dance because the future tries,
and trying is a form of faith.

Photo credits:
Upland sandpiper by Eric Preston. Greater prairie chicken by Jack Sytsma. Dickcissel by Jacob Riggs. Grasshopper sparrow by Eric Preston. Eastern meadowlark by Clayton Bickley.

Dickcissel

You say your name the way you breathe,
at steady intervals, and then,
as if the act of staying seen
depends on saying it again.

No flourish, no dramatic plea,
no grand performance, disguised,
just one sound, repeatedly
released into the open skies.

I think of all the times I chose
a quieter shape, kept myself small,
mistaking silence for what shows,
hearing you loud and standing tall.

You teach me something far more plain:
that worth is not a thing to earn—
you speak because you still remain,
and still being here, I learn.

Grasshopper Sparrow

Your song is barely even sound,
a stitched-together thread of air,
so small it almost isn't found,
so soft I doubt it's really there.

The first time, I dismiss the noise.
The second time, I tilt my head.
The third time, I begin to know
how much of life goes unsaid.

You do not need a stage or crowd,
no bright announcement, no demand—
you choose to live, and live allowed,
inside the quiet you command.

You teach me this: the world is thick
with lives that do not need to shine,
and listening itself is work—
a discipline of the divine.

Eastern Meadowlark

You stand where open grasses rise,
a yellow blaze the field has made,
bright-chested under widening skies,
unhidden in the shifting shade.

The first time, I just pass you by.
The second time, I slow and see.
The third, I meet your level eye
and feel what it is not to flee.

You do not shrink against the grass,
or dull yourself to match the dark;
you let the weather move and pass,
and keep your small, deliberate spark.

You teach me this: to stand in view,
not asking pardon for the light;
to let the world look back at you,
and not step softly out of sight.

Closing Reflection

None of these birds know they are rare. None of them know they are symbols. They wake, they move, they search and sing—in doing so they keep a thin green thread of continuity unbroken. Paying attention feels, increasingly, like a form of responsibility. Not the loud kind. It's the quiet kind—the kind that begins with listening. ■

Through the Lens:
Capturing Mukwonago River Oak Barrens

Article by Helen Holtz, Glacial Prairie Chapter Member

Mukwonago River Oak Barrens is a site owned by The Prairie Enthusiasts and managed by the Glacial Prairie Chapter.

Helen Holtz with eastern musk turtle at Mukwonago River Oak Barrens. Photo by Ryan Vodnik.

You may have seen my name in photo credits, or maybe caught me on the other side of the camera, occasionally documenting some less-than-glamorous, slightly sweaty moments of hard work. I hope those images have offered a small window into what I have been lucky enough to witness and be a part of. I am by no means a professional photographer, this has simply become my way of paying attention. A way of being present with the land, with the people and with the stories unfolding all around us. When I take a photo, I am not just capturing a moment, I am sharing an invitation. Look closer. Stay a little longer. See what is worth caring for.

I take photos to help people understand. A single image can hold so much. A prairie flower just beginning to open. A monarch drifting past milkweed. Volunteers working quietly with purpose. These moments tell the story of the Mukwonago River Oak Barrens in a way words sometimes cannot. They show that every plant, every animal and every small action matters in shaping the health of this special place.

I take photos to give credit. Restoration work is hard, time-consuming and often goes unnoticed. Through these images, I try to honor the people who show up and make a difference. The hands in the soil. The focus and care in each task. The commitment to something bigger than themselves. These photos are a way of saying this matters, and so do the people doing it.

I take photos to build connection. An image can spark curiosity. It can start a conversation or draw someone in who may never have the chance to set foot on this protected piece of land. My hope is that when people see these moments, they feel something. A sense that even from a distance, they can care about this place, support it and carry that awareness into how they see and value the natural world around them.

I take photos to show what is possible. Change does not always happen quickly, but it does happen. A landscape can recover when we choose to care. Life returns, often in small yet remarkable ways. Each bloom, each insect, each bird and wildlife finally able to call this place home is a sign of that. These images are a record of that progress and a reminder that this work leads somewhere real and meaningful.

Through the lens, Mukwonago River Oak Barrens becomes more than a place on a map. It becomes a living story of resilience, care and community. Every photo is a chance to reflect that story back to others. To honor the land, to recognize the people who care for it and to invite others to be part of it.

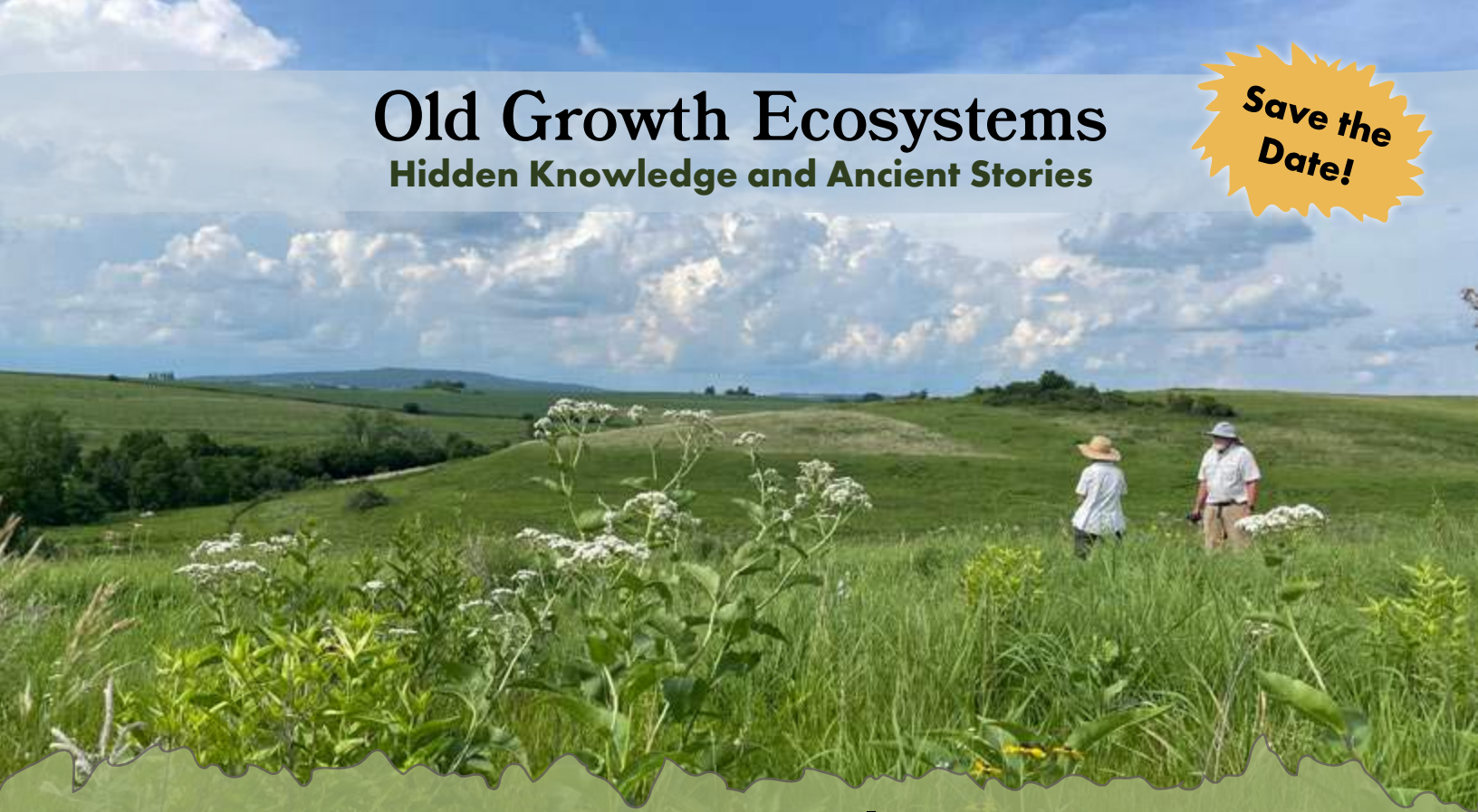
Photography lets us see what words alone cannot—the beauty of a fragile ecosystem; the steady work of restoration; the return of life, one season at a time. It reminds us that this is an ongoing effort, that every contribution matters, and that together we are shaping something lasting. ■

*Flowering spurge (*Euphorbia corollata*) by Helen Holtz.*

Old Growth Ecosystems

Hidden Knowledge and Ancient Stories

Save the Date!



2027 Virtual Conference | February 17-19

Calling All Educators!

Are you interested in sharing your knowledge of fire-dependent ecosystems? Do you have experience in developing educational programs and materials? **We need your help!**

As one of our strategic goals for this year, we're looking into developing more educational materials, and bolster our Education Committee. This committee is responsible for deciding the priority of educational projects and reviews educational material that staff create.

If you have any interest in lending your time and talents to the Education Committee and/or in the development of creating materials and programs, please send an email to Education Committee Staff Support, Sarah Barron at SBarron@ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org.

Support for The Prairie Enthusiasts comes from Adaptive Restoration

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Volunteers starting new plants. Photo by Kathleen Henning.

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**

Restoration Tour

Southwest Wisconsin

Sunday, June 21 – 1:30 p.m

Location: Lone Rock, WI

See what years of restoration can look like by joining the Chapter for a tour of landowner Marty Grell's private prairie.

Field Trip

Many Rivers

Monday, July 13 – 6:00 p.m

Location: Gustavus Adolphus College Arboretum

Gather with fellow Prairie Enthusiasts for the next event in the Chapter's monthly field trip series.

Prairie Walk

Northwest Illinois

Saturday, August 8 – 10:00 a.m to Noon

Location: Hanley Savanna

Join the Chapter for an insect and "whatever else we see" tour through Hanley Savanna. Bev Paulan, who has led us on some fun insect walks in the past will be leading us again.

30th Anniversary Prairie Insect Walk

St. Croix Valley

Saturday, August 8 – 10:00 a.m to Noon

Location: TBD

Celebrate the Chapter's 30th anniversary by joining fellow Prairie Enthusiasts for an insect-prairie walk.

Chapter Updates

St. Croix Valley

Update by Evanne Hunt

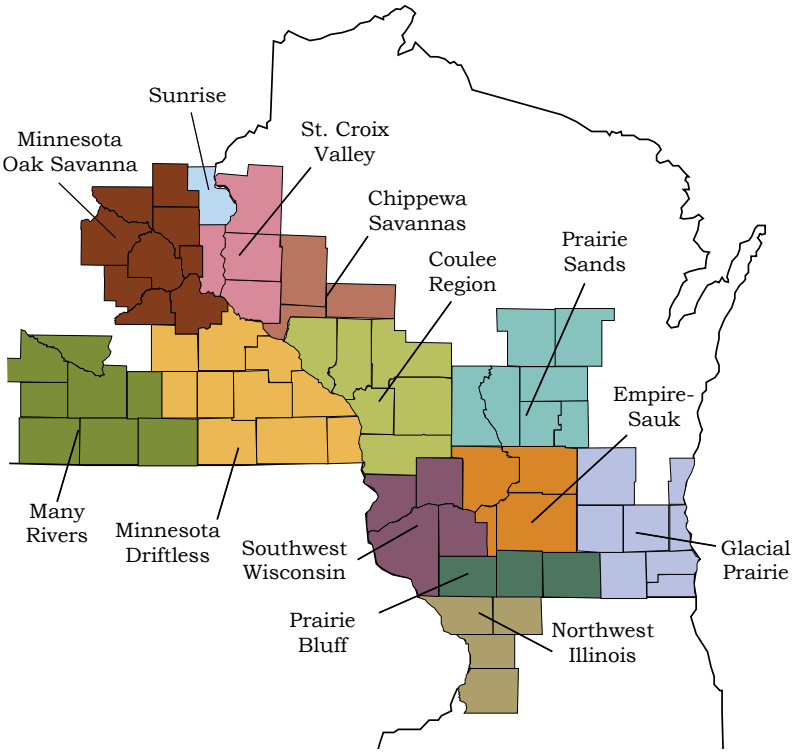
Successful Burn Season

Thanks to a great group of volunteers, we completed 15 prescribed burns this spring. We can't list all 46 people in this newsletter, but please know you are appreciated! We could not meet our mission to manage the precious prairie and savannas without your contribution. A special shout out to our burn bosses: Bill Ramsden, Harvey Halvorsen and Alex Bouthilet.

Summer and Fall Events

This spring we learned how to transplant sedges, toured a prairie that followed the Henderson prairie reconstruction method of overseeding and burning and went on several insect hikes. We also installed a kiosk at Alexander Oak Savanna.

This fall we will host Dan Carter for his presentation on how to recognize, restore and care for oak woodlands. As details are available on this presentation and other events, they will be posted to the event webpage. ■



Northwest Illinois

Chapter Update

Update by Laura Dufford

We're excited that a good burn was conducted on Aster Prairie at Hanley Savanna this spring. It had been a number or years—too many!—since this section of Hanley was burned, so we're looking forward to seeing what the outcomes will be this growing season.

After more than two decades and over 1000 acres planted, the Chapter is in the process of transferring its native seed program to long-time restoration partner, the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation (JDCF). The Chapter plans to focus on expanded stewardship activities at Elmoville Prairie and Hanley Savanna and looks forward to continued cooperation with JDCF and the Illinois DNR in making this happen. We plan to continue our tours of Hanley Savanna and other area prairies in the future and will hopefully continue our bumblebee, bird and butterfly surveys going forward. There are other opportunities for citizen science projects on our prairies. If you are interested in participating in something of this sort, please contact Laura Dufford (lauradufford@gmail.com). ■

Hawkins cemetery St. Croix Valley prescribed burn volunteers. Photo by Evanne Hunt.

Minnesota Oak Savanna

Update by Greg Heberlein, Regina M Flanagan, Alex Carroll, Heather Holm, Anthony Pini. Photos by Regina Flanagan.

Chapter members examine native prairie and woodland plant plugs at the new Dakota County propagation facility at Lebanon Hills Park, Eagan MN.

Chapter Update

The period between our last Chapter update and this one is reminiscent of this line from a hymn I recently heard: "In the cold and snow of winter there's a spring that waits to be, unrevealed until its season..." On the surface it has been a dormant season—our Chapter has not held tours, work parties or gatherings for our members during this stretch. Yet much has been happening "beneath the soil." We are slowly feeling our way toward how to fulfill our mission in a populous and developed metropolitan area that presents unique challenges and opportunities.

We continue to look for sites that our Chapter will have primary responsibility for managing but are also cultivating connections with other organizations, agencies and municipalities, exploring how we might partner with them and support their restoration efforts.

We have learned that a number of quality sites owned by municipalities are in desperate need of attention and care due to limited staff and budgets. As we build relationships and trust with key staff, opportunities are opening up for our Chapter to assist with the active management of these sites.

The Prescribed Fire and Prairie Maintenance Work group led by Alex Carroll and Regina Flanagan has been busy making connections. In March, our Chapter co-hosted a Prescribed Burn Association interest meeting in Dakota County with Pheasants Forever. We also established a working relationship with the University of Minnesota's Cedar Creek Ecosystem Science Reserve and anticipate providing volunteers for prescribed burns at this research facility located on the Anoka Sandplain north of the Twin Cities. We are also talking with the Wakan Tipi Awanyankapi Center in downtown Saint Paul, stewards of a sacred Dakota site on the Mississippi River, about assisting with management of their prairie in cooperation with Saint Paul Parks and Recreation.

Our Leadership Team has put energy into developing our Chapter infrastructure. We revised our Chapter Guidelines, developed more systematic ways of making decisions and worked with Chapter Support on how best to follow up with lapsed members. We recently added three new members to our Chapter Board and are excited about the skills, viewpoints and enthusiasm they bring. Welcome Ben Bullard, Rebecca Zerlin and Leah Snavely!

Chapter member Brent Anderson has been energetically building our social media presence on both Facebook and LinkedIn. Several of his fascinating articles have been added to the The Prairie Enthusiasts blog.

We have many educational tours and events scheduled for spring and summer:

Dakota County hosted our Chapter for a tour of their new 5,000-square-foot native plant propagation

greenhouse at Lebanon Hills Regional Park, Eagan, Minnesota on April 25. Natural resources staff Sara Nelson and Sam Talbot presented their native plant propagation program that is capable of producing 140,000 plants annually for restoring woodlands and savannas in Dakota County Parks. We learned about seed collection and propagation strategies for common and rare plant native plant species using local eco-types gathered within 100 miles of the county, growing strategies and restoration planting.

Our Chapter sponsored a tour of the Three Rivers Parks District Nursery on April 28th. This sold-out event took place at the Park District's 55-acre plant materials nursery located at Crow Hassan Park Reserve, which produces native perennials, trees and shrubs for use within the Park District.

On May 7, the City of Burnsville's natural resources staff led us on a tour of their 70-acre oak savanna restoration at Terrace Oaks Park. We learned about the city's ongoing efforts to restore oak savanna habitat and remove invasive plant species at this site, which included tree thinning, native plant seeding and controlled burning.

Dan Carter will be here the weekend of July 18 and 19, and while the specifics are still being sorted out, we anticipate combining a presentation with a field trip to two sites.

Brent Anderson has volunteered to lead a plant walk in late July or early August at the Robert Ney Regional Park near Maple Lake. Details will be coming soon.

Our second annual seed collection event at Crow-Hassan Park Reserve is scheduled on September 16 from 10:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.

Later this year, we will hold our Chapter's first Annual Meeting to celebrate our accomplishments and talk with the membership about future plans. ■

Dakota County natural resources staff Sam Talbot explains that plugs of wetland native plants require periodic inundation in this special plant water table.

Sara Nelson, Natural Resources Specialist, answered questions during the tour of the new Dakota County propagation facility.

Highly visible from Pioneer Trail behind Twin Bluff Middle School, the iconic "Coon Hill" in the Billings-Tomfohr Conservation Area burns to remove thatch and invasive plants, making way for native bluff prairie plants to grow.

Minnesota Driftless

Update by Wendy Johnson

Prescribed Burn Heats up BTCA Restoration

Volunteers with The Prairie Enthusiasts and Friends of the Bluffs set afire five acres of the iconic Coon Hill in the Billings-Tomfohr Conservation Area (BTCA) with a prescribed burn on Sunday, March 29—a critical step in its prairie restoration.

The BTCA is home to rare remnant dry bedrock bluff prairie and oak savanna. It's a gem of the less than 1% of the original native prairie and savanna ecosystems that exist today. The 93-acre area rises 200 feet from the valley floor, located behind Twin Bluff Middle School. It provides scenic vistas of neighborhoods and Hay Creek Valley to hikers and hosts unique and endangered native species, including the American chestnut, bladderpod and Leonard's skipper butterfly.

Over the years, several prescribed burns have been completed, as well as invasive species control work. Unfortunately, for the past ten years or so, habitat work has been limited due to a lack of funding, and much of the site had become threatened by encroaching invasive species.

That changed in 2025 thanks to the efforts of The Prairie Enthusiasts and its Minnesota Driftless Chapter. The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources awarded The Prairie Enthusiasts a $45,000 Conservation Partners Legacy (CPL) Grant to initiate restoration efforts in 2025. An additional grant recently awarded in 2026 will support continued restoration with a completion date set for the end of 2027.

Jeff Lightfoot, project supervisor, began coordination of restoration efforts with the Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa, a private contractor, and dozens of volunteers to complete 10 acres of cutting, treating and brush hog mowing invasive species. In total, 43 volunteers contributed 860 volunteer project hours towards the restoration in 2025.

The March 29 prescribed burn attracted 12 more volunteers with rakes, fire swatters, water backpack tanks and drip torches. They continued to prepare the land for native plants to once again thrive in an open fire-dependent environment.

"I've conducted burns on our land, but burning on a bluff was a new experience," said burn volunteer, Lisa Smiley, Red Wing local and board member of both Friends of the Bluffs and Minnesota Women's Woodland Network. "It was challenging but rewarding. We had a great crew, and I was proud to be part of it."

Lisa has helped Jeff Lightfoot with invasive removal on the BTCA site over the past year and said she's committed to it. "I also have a lot of respect and admiration for Jeff and enjoy learning from him."

If she could tell others one thing, it would be to help restore land throughout Minnesota. "There are so many opportunities," she said. "Get involved . . . It is such rewarding work and a great way to make friends!"

The presence of rare habitat such as found at BTCA and the abundance of life that it supports has drawn together a tight-knit community dedicated to restoring the land to its full potential. ■

Pasqueflower by Addie Theis Paradis.

Many Rivers

Update by Addeline Theis Paradis

Chapter Update

The second year of monthly prairie hikes has kicked off for the 2026 season within the Many Rivers Chapter. Jason Anderson and his wife Michelle Biodrowski have been leading these outings to gather members at public prairie sites in southern Minnesota. The first gathering occurred in early April when a small group gathered at Ottawa Bluffs. This site is owned by the Nature Conservancy and protects a beautiful remnant oak savanna. The goal of this early season hike was to view the Pasqueflower blooming on the sandy bluffs. The hike was successful, as many Pasqueflowers were found on the different slopes of the bluffs. Ottawa Bluffs is a steep oak savanna that provides amazing views of the backwater channels of the Minnesota River. Due to the steep nature of the site, it was never tilled for crop farming, but previous landowners had grazing animals on the site which had prevented some woody encroachment compared to other areas along the Minnesota River Valley that are full forest systems currently. Today, volunteers work throughout the year to remove non-oak trees that have closed some of the canopy of the savanna in addition to treatment of aggressive sumac in the understory. Next outing will be in June at Bluff Park in North Mankato and July in Butternut Valley Prairie SNA in Blue Earth County. Check out the event calendar for more information regarding future gatherings and hikes for the Many Rivers Chapter. ■

Addie point out Pasqueflower. Photo by Cortiney Galuska.

Coulee Region

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

Friends of the Blufflands Collaboration

Our Chapter continues to work together with Friends of the Blufflands (FBL) in the La Crosse area. Prescribed burns were accomplished on three bluff prairies that have been worked on by FBL in collaboration with our Chapter: Stry Prairie, Mathy Bluff Prairie and Lookout Prairie and Savanna. Although an increase in the insurance carried by The Prairie Enthusiasts was necessary for these burns because of the requirements for the City of La Crosse, FBL felt that paying for the extra cost was well worth it.

As an expanded part of the collaboration, The Prairie Enthusiasts Ecologist Dan Carter will be doing site visits to assess three of the bluff prairies and write detailed management plans on Mathy Bluff Prairie, Lookout Prairie and Zoerb Prairies in May of this year. This work is being funded by a Stry Foundation grant which was successfully applied for by The Prairie Enthusiasts with the support of FBL in 2025.

The black after a successful Lookout Prairie burn in La Crosse's Hixon Forest. Note the unburned refugia on the left side of the photo. Photo by Jon Rigden.

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Collaborations Grow

The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Herbarium is an archive of approx. 60,000 pressed and dried plant specimens, mostly from the Driftless Area. Along with the specimen itself, label data includes the locality, scientific name, and ecological or morphological field observations. Funding by The Prairie Enthusiasts and other organizations are supporting databasing and imaging of these specimens. These archived specimens are used in education and scientific research including taxonomy, morphological analysis, phenology and even genetic analysis. Over the last several years, students and external volunteers have been working to make thousands of digital records of these specimens that can be freely accessed via the internet and integrated into WisFlora. In addition to this work in the database, we also prepare newly collected specimens for mounting and preservation.

All are welcome to help with this work. You don't have to be an expert to begin volunteering. Working in an herbarium will provide an enormous boost in your knowledge of native plants. For more information, contact Dr. Adam Schneider at: aschneider2@uwlax.edu.

A Drifty Award

On behalf of The Prairie Enthusiasts, the Coulee Region Chapter applied for an inaugural Drifty Award. The award program is sponsored by Sustainable Driftless Inc., a nonprofit promoting the Driftless Area. We submitted our 2025 Summer Gathering event for an education award, highlighting the opportunity to educate attendees on the unique bluff prairies that are a special part of the ecology in the area. We were one of the finalists and had a short video produced that was shown at the awards banquet in La Crosse on April 18.

Midway Railroad Prairie Restoration

Midway Railroad Prairie, located near Onalaska, WI, is a remnant sand prairie on a west-facing slope. It was designated a state natural area in 1955. The site is owned and managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, La Crosse District. The Coulee Region Chapter is collaborating with the Friends of the Refuge, Pools 7&8 to organize some workdays to remove invasive plants on the site. Research turned up detailed plant surveys from 1961 and 1994, which will be used to compare with contemporary plant lists. ■

A UW-La Crosse herbarium specimen and associated data for green milkweed collected in a small patch of prairie north of the La Crosse airport in 1977. Photo by Adam Schneider.

Contractors mowing brush at Smith-Reiner. Photo by Gary Birch.

Empire-Sauk

Update by Reid Bartholomew

Improving Bird Habitat at Smith-Reiner Drumlin Prairies

This past winter, Smith-Reiner Drumlin Prairies was filled with the sounds of saws and mowers making space for the sounds of birdsong that had arrived for the summer. Smith-Reiner Drumlin in eastern Dane County encompasses two dry upland remnant prairies and is a hotspot for some of the most iconic grassland birds, including eastern meadowlark, field sparrow, dickcissel, grasshopper sparrow and (outside of breeding season) short-eared owl. However, though they fare well on this site, grassland birds are the fastest declining group of bird species in North America, with their populations declining 43% since 1970, according to the 2025 State of the Birds Report. With this decline largely being spurred by a loss of habitat, the protection of their breeding and nesting grounds is of the highest concern.

The Prairie Enthusiasts was invited by the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin in 2025 to propose a project for their Bird Protection Fund, which is a grant program that supports the conservation needs of Wisconsin's birds. We were generously awarded the funds to enhance the quality of habitat at Smith-Reiner Drumlin Prairies, and site steward Gary Birch went straight to work coordinating contractors for the removal of brush on the site to ensure open spaces for nesting birds.

Thanks to these funds, the contractors, with Gary's oversight, were able to clear and treat four scattered acres of sumac, dogwood, honeysuckle and aspen that had encroached into a few locations throughout the 40-acre site. When Gary went back to check on their progress in April, all but a portion of the aspen had remained totally wiped out. This makes a massive difference for the birds that call this place home. Next time you visit Smith-Reiner Drumlin Prairies, take a moment to listen for the buzzy call of the dickcissel or the warbles and whistles of the meadowlark! ■

Glacial Prairie

Update by Nancy Gloe

Chapter Update

The Glacial Prairie Chapter hosts work parties at Wisconsin DNR State Natural Areas (SNAs) on a monthly basis. Last summer, our dear friend, mentor and steadfast volunteer, Charles "Herb" Sharpless, made a generous donation to help out with equipment needs at these events.

The DNR SNA equipment trailer is towed from site to site and is used by several work party leaders in southeast Wisconsin. Some of the equipment in the SNA trailer is starting to show its age (in fact a tree fell on one of the chainsaws and smashed it beyond repair last winter). After a short deliberation process, DNR staffer Jared Urban and volunteer trailer manager and work party leader Zach Kastern came up with their "wish list." It included a new Stihl chainsaw and brush cutter, a saw pack (a backpack designed to carry a chainsaw), new helmets and other gear.

The equipment was officially put into service this past February. Suffice it to say, the new equipment makes it easier to get our equipment to remote work areas and is making it a breeze to cut through tough brush and unwanted trees. Special thanks to Herb for his wonderful generosity and thoughtfulness! ■

Herb Sharpless, Nancy Gloe and Zach Kastern with the DNR SNA equipment trailer. Photo by Helen Holtz.

Southwest Wisconsin

Update by Becky Fernette

Prescribed Burns

Even though it was a challenging spring for prescribed burns in Southwest Wisconsin, our Chapter completed burns on all eight of our sites—woot woot! We're grateful to the crew at Adaptive Restoration LLC for burning Eldred and Borah Creek Prairies, Dr. Chris Baxter and UW-Platteville REC Club students for assisting with the burn at Sylvan Road Conservation Area, and Jeb Barzen for his mentorship of our Apprentice Burn Boss, James Haas at Iris Drive Prairie.

Thanks to generous donations, we were able to purchase burn equipment for use by private landowners/members in the Richland Center area which added to the safe burning of three prairies.

Events

Kay Wienke kicked off 2026 by arranging for prairie-minded folks to watch a webinar hosted by The Wild Ones on "Turn That Patch Into a Plan" at the Gays Mills Community Commerce Center. Zoe Evans (Plan it Wild) and Heather Evans (Design Your Wild) showed the audience how to use design strategies to incorporate native plants into their yards to make the space more welcoming for pollinators, birds, other wildlife, as well as the human inhabitants. Participants sketched out the area where they wish to add native plants, paths, and water features with guidance from the presenters. Several attendees commented how much they enjoyed thinking about native plants in the middle of winter!

Thirty members and friends attended our annual Holiday Party at the Sportsmen's Lounge and Supper Club in Muscoda. It was wonderful connecting with one another without having to run a brushcutter or chainsaw. James Haas was the big winner that night—he won the coveted seed apron made and donated by Bob Retko, and he won the honor of the Ugliest Holiday Garb 2026. We were entertained by Ann Christoffer, a local musician/crooner who serenaded us with favorites from the 60s, 70s and 80s.

In March, Kay Wienke organized a presentation by Ellen Voss, River Alliance of Wisconsin Climate Resilience Director and co-coordinator of the Wisconsin Neonicitinoid Workgroup on "Hidden Threats to Your Local Habitat by Nearby Neonic Insecticides." She presented disturbing statistics about these widely used insecticides; imidacloprid, clothianidin and thiamethoxam

Prairie fairie volunteers tabling at the Kickapoo Area School. Photo by Samantha Goodwin.

are the most commonly used chemicals in the United States that threaten the health of pollinators, and all beings in the food web, including us.

Outreach

A third area meet-up was held with members and friends who live near Prairie du Chien at the lovely home of Marjie Bennett. Attendees expressed appreciation for the opportunity to build community; several offers for summer prairie tours were forthcoming.

We brought prairie enthusiasm to the Kickapoo Area School elementary students as they celebrated Earth Day on April 24. Four "prairie fairies" talked about the importance of prairies and helped the children make "seed bombs" which they tossed into their school prairie. They also learned about the need for fire to keep the prairie healthy. Several students shared that they have prairies at home and also regaled the fairies with cautionary tales about chainsaw accidents! Then on April 26, five prairie ambassadors tabled at the Birds and Nature Festival at Warner Park in Madison. Yours truly gave a short presentation about The Prairie Enthusiasts and invited them to visit our sites. Such a busy spring!

2026-2027 Goals

During our March Board meeting, we approved the following goals for the next year:

1. Secure lower level & complete the restoration of upper level of Borah Creek Barn
2. Increase revenue through fundraising and grant writing
3. Increase Chapter membership and engagement
4. Increase volunteer numbers

Although the Board will take the lead on achieving these goals, we invite all members to participate in growing our Chapter. Sharing your enthusiasm for our organization benefits everyone, and most importantly, our beloved prairie remnants. ■

Prairie Enthusiasts Remembered

Memorial gifts dedicated between January 14, 2026 and May 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:

Alice Davis
Remembered by Timothy Davis

Brennan Peter DeLap
Remembered by Russell DeLap & Bonnie Schlinder-DeLap

Judy Edgar
Remembered by Barbara Nelson

Dor & Bill Gilbert
Remembered by Anonymous

Robert J. Hahlen
Remembered by Heidi Hahlen

Rosemarie & William Harle
Remembered by Andrew Wright

George D. Johnson
Remembered by
Patricia Bangert
Ben Darrow
Sally Drew
Daphne Lloyd Holterman
Janice Packer
Kristy Pearson-Denning

Kelly Kearns
Remembered by John Barkei

Dennis Leaf
Remembered by Tim Yanacheck

Karen Mlinar
Remembered by Michael Mlinar

Ervin Mudgett
Remembered by David Mudgett

Ursula Muehllehner
Remembered by
John Whitmer
Carolyn & Jim Colsher

Dr. Joseph L. Roti Roti
Remembered by Patricia Roti Roti

James "Jim" Sime
Remembered by
Gary Adams
Kay Bongers
Andrew, Courney & Millie Dehner
Julie Diehls
Becky Fernette
John Kalson
John Kussmaul
Eugenia Lerum
Sandy & Lyman Martin
Kyle & Stacy Richards
Rose Sime
Amy & Richard Staffen
Dennis Tande & Mary Manering
Lila Waldman

Michael Skelley
Remembered by Meg & Todd Goldthwaite

JoEllen Torresani
Remembered by John Powles

Shannan Thompson
Remembered by Michael & Connie Schad

Harold & Crescent Vale
Remembered by Elaine Vale & David Silver

Elizabeth Woldt
Remembered by Anonymous

Ron & Barb Wolfe
Remembered by Anonymous

Mary Jo
Remembered by James Dresen

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Welcome, New Members!

January 14, 2026 to May 13, 2026

Chippewa Savannas
Josefine Jaynes
Patrick Mantyh
Lucas Prokopinski
Ron Waits

Coulee Region
Andre Boening
Leanne Buttke
Andrew Ericson
Linda Halley
Amy Ries
Michael Roskos
Greg Schauf
Jan Wee

Empire-Sauk
Braeden Buchanan
Kevin Burke
Amanda Davis
Andrew, Courtney & Millie Dehner
Ernst & Linda Dow
Sally Drew
Sarah Cronn
Molly Gribb
Thomas Guerin
Kathleen Henning
John Kalson
Scott Kremer
Eugenia Lerum
Michael Maestri
Sandy & Lyman Martin
Erik Olson
Mark Rauls
Janelle Reinke
Kirk Robinson
Sherry Sinclair
Kim Skram
RC Wieboldt

Glacial Prairie
Ginger Klug
Mark & Jenny McGinley
Megan Raddatz
Ric Rowley
Amy Siettmann

Many Rivers
Peter Carlson
Margaret Maire
Stan Wood

Minnesota Driftless
Catherine Brandel
Duncan Cintron
Donna Kamann
Joseph Lompart
Rae Moore
Ray Radatz
Henry Slocum
Thomas van der Linden & Jean Silberman

Minnesota Oak Savanna
Karli Flom
Paul Hoisser
John Howe
M. Krljic
Greta Larson
Jacob Mauren
Stephanie Rivery
Mark Schmidt
Christie Taylor
Jonny Tostenson
Nick VanDuzee

Northwest Illinois
Ryan Hance

Prairie Bluff
Daniel Obert
Mark Spreitzer

Southwest Wisconsin
Joe Brungardt
Kecia King
Brady Radtke
Kyle & Stacy Richards
Andrew Wright

St. Croix Valley
Susan Amacher
Peter DeCarlo
Tovah Flygare
Marsha Mose
James Pallin
Lloyd Vasilakes

Sunrise
Marshall Deters
Kathleen Flynn
Wayne Gartland
Alex Legeros
Ward Mehlan

Unaffiliated
Patricia Bangert
Beth Churchill
Ben Darrow
Arlyn DeBruyckere
Julie Diehls
Jessica Hepker
Daphne Lloyd Holterman
Rhett Johnson
Beth Leitschuh
Bob McCallister
Janis Packer
Kristy Pearson-Denning
Terry & Bonnie Shetler
Tanya Sliwinski
Doug Watson
John Whitmer
Holly Wissing
Austin Wolff
Jeffrey Wood