



Minutes for the Southwest WI Chapter of The Prairie Enthusiasts Board of Directors  
March 18, 2026 on Zoom

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by President Becky Fernette. All Board members present with the exception of Lynnette Dornak and Kay Wienke. Gary Eldred joined the meeting at 6:40 p.m. Also attending were Mark Leonhart and Tom Hunt.

Approval of the Minutes for January 21, 2026 - Ross made the motion, Roger seconded, minutes approved.

Treasurer's Report: Board members received a copy of the January 2026 Cash Balances and the spreadsheet of Site & Committee Expenses. A brief discussion followed.

Chapter Support Board Report: Board members received a copy of Kay's report prior to the meeting. Becky reviewed the highlights of the Board retreat and the most recent Board meeting. She stressed that all Chapters and Chapter Support are being asked to budget conservatively due to the budget deficit; our Chapter budget is \$25,000 less than initially requested. Site stewards were asked to reduce their use of land management contractors for prescribed burns and other land management activities.

Conference Report: Minimal discussion by Board members who attended the conference.

Land Management Committee: Jack reported that a prescribed burn at Eldred Prairie was completed on March 2. Burns are planned at all of our sites this spring.

Events:

- The Holiday Party in Muscoda was attended by 30 people. All seemed to have a good time. Next year we'll seek out a larger venue. One Board member commented that the music made conversation difficult.
- Prairie du Chien Meet-Up - Ten people in the PdC area attended the meet-up at Marjie Bennett's home on February 1. Attendees shared their experiences with prairies and prescribed fire. They agreed to join an email list to receive updates. Following the meeting, an additional 5 people who were unable to attend the meeting were added to the list.
- Women's Work Party: Becky reported on a women-only work party co-hosted by the WI DNR & Pheasants Forever at the Ridgeway Pine Relict on March 1. Thirty women attended and learned how to use brushcutters, build brushpiles, apply herbicide, and about proper PPE. Becky would like to offer a similar event hosted by the SW Chapter.
- Burn School Update: Postponed to March 21. Fifteen people have registered.

- Neonic Presentation: Held at the Hildebrand Public Library in Boscobel with guest presenter Ellen Voss from River Alliance of WI. Participants felt it was an excellent program; 3 people with no prior TPE affiliation attended.
- Upcoming events: Attached to the minutes.

Scholarship Committee: Lynnette is in the process of sending out the information to area schools. Board agreed to continue the award at \$1000, and to include a gift membership.

Barn Committee: Becky reported that an estimate provided by Droessler Restoration, Inc. was approved by the committee members in the amount of \$1,333.20, which was significantly lower than the amount previously budgeted to repair the foundation.

Site Steward Update: Becky encouraged site stewards to figure out how to conduct burns at our larger sites without the use of outside contractors. Costs continue to rise, and our budgeted amount for land management was reduced to \$25,000 (not including restricted funds from our endowments). Becky congratulated the stewards for the work they have been doing to restore and protect these sites.

Grant Application: Jack informed the Board about two grant applications submitted by Reid Bartholemew, Chapter Support, to Cornell Lab of Ornithology Land Trust Bird Conservation Initiative to create grassland bird habitat for \$25,000 and the James E. Dutton Foundation to support the Cornell grant with funding for prescribed burns for \$10,000. A copy of the summary on p. 8 of the Cornell Lab grant is attached.

2026 Chapter Goals & 3-year vision: Documents reviewed with discussion. Goals accepted with minor revisions and attached to these minutes.

Membership & Volunteer Recruitment/Retention: Becky updated the Board about current membership and volunteer numbers. She encouraged Board members to actively build relationships with potential members.

Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Minutes recorded by Jack Kussmaul with revisions by Becky Fernette

Attachments:

1. Upcoming Events
2. Cornell Lab grant summary
3. 2026 Chapter Goals & Vision

Upcoming Board Meetings:

- May 30 - Gary Adams' home, 14462 Co. Rd H, Soldiers Grove - 1 p.m.
- July 11 - (Note date change) - Roger & Pat Smith, 17121 Kiwanis Rd, Boscobel - 1 p.m.
- Sept 20 - Annual Gathering & Board Meeting - Borah Creek Barn - Noon potluck with meetings to follow
- Nov 18 - via Teams at 6 p.m.

Attachment 1: Upcoming Events

March 21 Burn School at Borah Creek  
 June 21 Tour of Grell private restoration near Bear Valley  
 August 2 Tour of Graef private restoration near Potosi  
 Sept 12 Butterfly program at Borah Creek  
 Sept 20 Annual potluck & gathering - Borah Creek Barn

In the planning stage are:

- Burns at Borah Creek, Feist, Bush Clover, DOS, Iris Drive, Thomas Wet
- Tours of two TPE sites
- Prairie Discovery tour at UW-Platteville prairie restorations
- Fundraising event

Attachment 2: Summary of Cornell Lab grant application – March 2026

**A simple budget for the \$10,000 OR \$25,000 award and budget justification for your project. Show any co-funding in your budget framework. Note: if these funds are part of a larger project’s budget, please be sure you clearly outline the use of the \$10,000 or \$25,000 within the larger project and if you are asking for salary dollars be sure to link them to an objective(s) in your justification or activities in your narrative.**

Item	Project Total Cost	The Prairie Enthusiasts	James E. Dutton Foundation (Pending)	Cornell Small Grant
6-Person Crew Equipment Cache	\$5,500.00	\$5,500.00	\$-	\$-
Staff Time Training (60 hours)	\$2,100.00	\$-	\$-	\$2,100.00
Lodging and Travel Expenses for Trainers	\$2,000.00	\$-	\$-	\$2,000.00
Outreach Materials	\$200.00	\$-	\$-	\$200.00
Class Supplies (Lunch/Refreshments for Trainees and Visits)	\$450.00	\$-	\$-	\$450.00
Class Space Reservation	\$500.00			\$500.00
Bird Monitoring Equipment	\$4,500.00	\$-	\$-	\$4,500.00
Contract Labor (Prescribed Burns and Site Prep)	\$20,000.00	\$-	\$8,500.00	\$11,500.00
Volunteer Labor	\$13,600.00	\$13,600.00	\$-	\$-
Indirect Costs	\$5,250.00	\$-	\$1,500.00	\$3,750.00

<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$54,100.00</b>	<b>\$19,100.00</b>	<b>\$10,000.00</b>	<b>\$25,000.00</b>
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Budget Justification

Equipment cache – Estimated based on the remaining equipment needed for the Chapter to outfit a volunteer crew of six people and shipping costs. Equipment includes: drip torches, fire rake, fire swatter, radios and harnesses, Pulaskis and sheathes, and an electric brush cutter. Funds for this are to be donated by private philanthropy for use in training and burn crews.

Lodging and travel expenses for Trainers– Travel and lodging for teachers for three classroom trainings and two live-fire trainings to collaborate with Chapter burn leadership and develop Chapter capacity to conduct trainings independently in the future.

Staff training time – Estimated costs of The Prairie Enthusiasts Staff ecologist leading 60 hours' worth of trainings at \$35/hr

Class supplies – Nominal refreshments to be supplied during the 8-hour trainings estimated at \$5 per person. Bird Monitoring equipment – Estimated at eight autonomous recording units at \$500 per unit

Contract Labor – Estimated that \$20,000 of contract labor for prescribed burns will allow for 50 priority acres to be burned.

Volunteer Labor – In-kind volunteer labor from The Prairie Enthusiasts, 400 hours at [The Independent Sector](#) Wisconsin value of volunteer time of \$34/hr.

Indirect costs – There are considerable indirect costs which underpin our ability to conduct prescribed fire as an organization, including prescribed fire insurance across the organization, staff time tracking and administering Chapter burn programs, and staff time committed to assisting with outreach and coordinating with partners.

Calculated at the federal de minimis rate of 15%.

Attachment 3: 2026 Chapter Goals and 3 year Vision

ONE-YEAR GOALS	THREE-YEAR VISION
<p>End Date: 3/31/2027</p> <p>Revenue: <b>\$60,000</b>  # of Members: <b>200</b> (172)  # of Volunteers: <b>55</b> (40)  # of Outreach Events: <b>8</b></p> <p><b>Goals:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Secure lower level of Borah Creek Barn <i>(Steve)</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Complete foundation repair</li> <li>2. Replace support posts</li> <li>3. Install metal door with coded lock</li> <li>4. Replace/repair doors &amp; windows</li> <li>5. Thorough cleaning of lower level</li> </ol> </li> <li>2. Complete renovation of upper level of Borah Creek Barn <i>(Becky)</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Finish painting &amp; updating kitchen area</li> <li>2. Replace wood shelves on metal work tables</li> <li>3. Install vapor barrier &amp; Masonite panels in NE storage room</li> <li>4. Install vapor barrier &amp; Masonite panels in main room</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Increase revenue through fund-raising &amp; grant-writing <i>(Becky)</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Submit 4 grant applications</li> <li>2. Host music-based fund-raising event</li> <li>3. Inform member donors about funding needs through <i>The Prairie Promoter</i> Chapter Updates, <i>Constant Contact</i> emails, Facebook posts, and personal appeals</li> </ol> </li> <li>4. Increase Chapter membership &amp; engagement <i>(All)</i> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Invite event attendees to become members</li> <li>2. Promotional materials (brochures, PP, donation envelopes) at every event</li> <li>3. Tabling at 3 nature-focused events</li> <li>4. Meet with UWP REC Club - Sept/Oct 2026</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p>Future Date: 3/31/29</p> <p>Target Revenue: <b>\$100,000</b>  Target Membership: <b>240</b>  Target # of Volunteers: <b>85</b>  # of Outreach Events/Year: <b>12</b></p> <p><b>What does it look like?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Increase land management &amp; stewardship capacity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Increase prescribed burn capacity by adding new burn bosses (2), line bosses (4), and crew members (8)</li> <li>○ Host Burn School II every spring</li> <li>○ Recruit site steward for Millville Conservancy</li> <li>○ Recruit co-site stewards for Borah Creek, Eldred Prairie, &amp; Iris Drive</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Borah Creek Barn repairs &amp; renovations complete with access to running water <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lower level secured</li> <li>○ Seed cleaning and storage area completed</li> <li>○ Metal siding installed with new sliding door</li> <li>○ Plan developed for the other buildings</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Annual submission of Site Steward goals &amp; projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ New kiosks at all sites</li> <li>○ Signage updated and consistent with Chapter Support guidelines (60%)</li> <li>○ Expansion of all sites except Thomas Wet &amp; Bush Clover (prairie and/or oak savanna restorations)</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Increase membership &amp; volunteer engagement</li> <li>● Increase revenue sources beyond donations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Grant applications</li> <li>○ Contracts to conduct prescribed burns</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Obtain Chapter-specific table banners (sites &amp; activities)</li> <li>6. Distribute promotional materials to Board members, site stewards, and strategic locations (libraries, hardware stores, NRCS offices, coffee shops, relevant college/university departments &amp; partner programs at MVC, DALC, etc.)</li> <li>7. Host 3 “area events” - Gays Mills, Dodgeville, Lancaster</li> </ol> <p>5. Increase volunteer numbers (<i>Site Stewards, Bob C.</i>)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase number of work parties &amp; advertise through <i>Constant Contact</i> emails, Facebook posts, and personal invitations (<i>email, calls, texts</i>)</li> <li>2. Recruit treasurer, secretary &amp; 2 new Board members</li> <li>3. Send “thank you” note to new volunteers</li> <li>4. Record volunteer names/hours at work parties/burns</li> <li>5. Volunteer recognition at Annual Meeting</li> <li>6. Maintain updated Burn Volunteer database (<i>Jack</i>)</li> <li>7. Host Burn School II following the annual conference</li> <li>8. Convert 3 burn apprentices into crew member status</li> <li>9. Invite 1 crew member to attend Line Boss training &amp; one line boss to attend Burn Boss training</li> <li>10. Review recruitment efforts at Board meetings</li> <li>11. Create a “new volunteer” protocol (<i>work group</i>)</li> <li>12. Host 3 “area events” - Gays Mills, Dodgeville, Lancaster</li> <li>13. Review site steward assignments</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Invent a management tool that we can sell</li> </ul>
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