



THE PRAIRIE PROMOTER

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Celebrating twelve years of prairie conservation in the Upper Midwest

12th Annual TPE Banquet A Great Success

This year's decision to combine The Prairie Enthusiasts' Annual Banquet with a joint gathering of the WI Chapter of The Nature Conservancy, the UW-Madison Arboretum, and the Madison Chapter of The Wild Ones, paid off handsomely. There were 650 registrants for the workshops during the day, and the Atrium, where the vendors and various organizations set up their displays, was humming with energy from 9am until the end of the day. Snatches of conversation overheard throughout the day signified wholehearted approval for the workshops, the displays, and the fellowship.

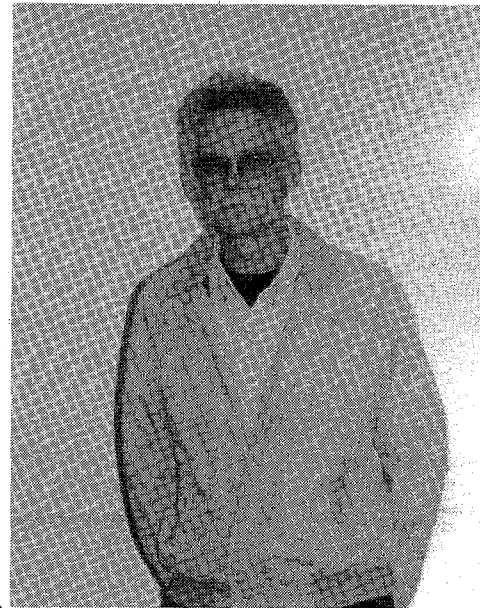
We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone concerned that helped organize this incredible event. A very special thanks goes to The Nature Conservancy staff and volunteers who spearheaded the effort and, of course, to our very own Rich Henderson, who once again demonstrated his awesome organizational skills with the raffle and auction. Once again, the raffle and auction were enjoyed by the attendees, and there was a steady stream of ticket sales right up to the deadline. (In fact, Kathy Kirk almost did not make it, purchasing her tickets at 4:28pm!) A special thanks goes to all those folks who sat in the corner unraveling yards of tickets for eager participants. The raffle and auction items this year raised over \$4,000 for prairie conservation.

There were 130 attendees at the evening banquet buffet. The Southwest Chapter honored Gary Adams with an award for his years of dedicated service to The Prairie Enthusiasts. Gary was one of the original seven founding members of the organization and has been a dedicated participant in the organization for twelve years.

The Prairie Enthusiasts gave their TPE Volunteer of the Year award to Jim and Rose Sime for their outstanding achievements in the area of conservation. As a couple they have given thousands of hours of work to a number of conservation organizations. Their enthusiasm, creativity, and special skills have contributed much over the years. President Gary Eldred gave out a very special award to Professor Emeritus Hugh Iltis of the UW-Madison. The Prairie Enthusiasts have named a

newly acquired savanna remnant in Green County the Hugh Iltis Savanna, in recognition of the Professor's tireless efforts for conservation and preservation of biodiversity.

We hope to see all of you next year at the banquet on March 3, 2001. It will be hosted in Eau Claire by the West Central Chapter. If you have ideas or suggestions for next year's banquet, please e-mail them to kannemi@uwec.edu. Please don't forget that you make the banquet a success.



Gary Adams, Southwest Chapter Volunteer of the Year

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The Prairie Enthusiasts is a grass roots organization of volunteers which is solely committed to the protection, management, and restoration of native prairies and savannas in the Upper Midwest. To date, The Prairie Enthusiasts has protected over 1,000 acres that harbor at least 5 state or federally protected species requisitions, easements, and management agreements. The Prairie Enthusiasts has a stewardship program which provides active management to ensure the ongoing health of protected sites.

The Prairie Enthusiasts is actively involved in planting prairie on it's properties and on other conservation lands and has assisted both public agencies and private groups in these efforts. Thus far, more than 150 acres have been planted with seeds of prairie plants from local sources.

In addition, The Prairie Enthusiasts develop educational materials and provide presentations on prairie and savanna ecology, conservation, and management for both children and adults.

The Prairie Enthusiasts was incorporated in Wisconsin in 1987 as a private nonprofit, tax exempt corporation under section 501(c)3 of the Internal Revenue Code. Donations are tax-deductible.

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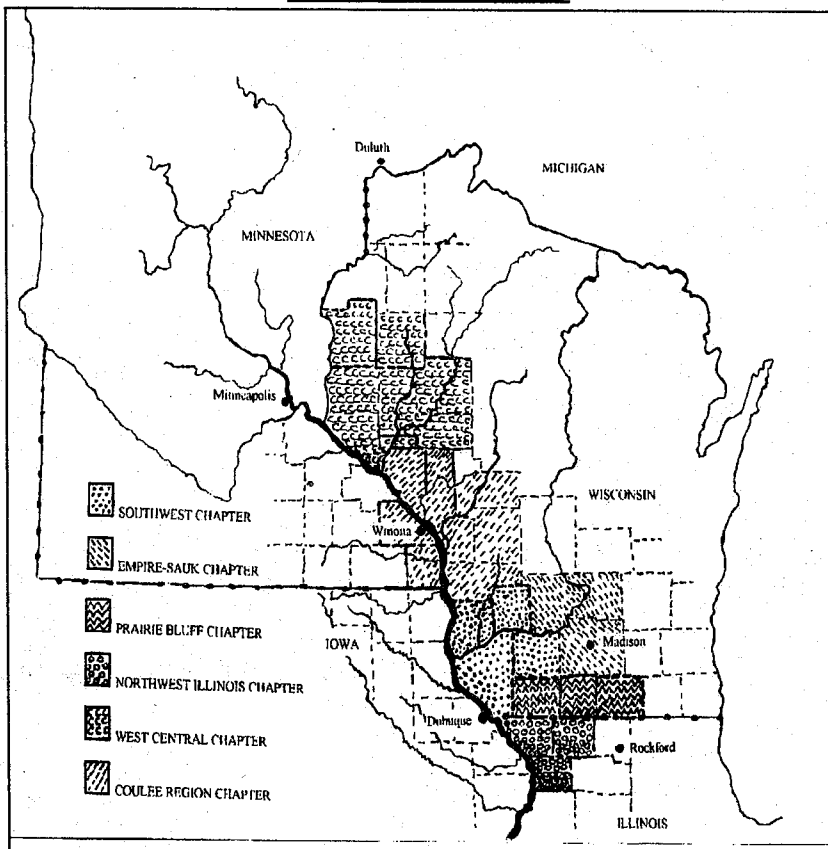
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President's Message

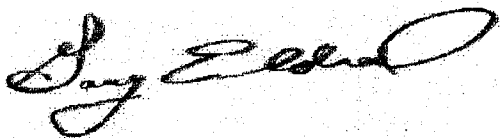
Time moves quickly between newsletters, particularly when most of us are so busy "doing" that we don't take the time to "think" about prairies and savannas. There is always something going on with The Prairie Enthusiasts, and after thirteen years, much of what we do, day to day, is routine. For this president's message, I would like to focus on the up-coming work season and what we expect the challenges to be.

There will be many work parties, focused on pulling non-native weeds, cutting trees and brush to eliminate detrimental shade, mowing and burning, fence repairs, and signs to post. There will be field trips and hikes, lectures, slide talks, landowner visits, and workshops to organize and attend. There will be training sessions, chapter and corporate board meetings, and the cycle of site inventories, seed collecting and cleaning, and fall planting.

The Prairie Enthusiast's biggest challenge will be to raise substantial sums of money to protect and properly manage prairie and savanna remnants, to expand our efforts to educate the public about the importance of prairie and savanna preservation, and to increase our membership.

The only feasible way to raise the amount of money needed to accomplish these goals is to hire a person who can focus on them on a full-time basis. You can make a significant contribution toward prairie and savanna conservation by joining or renewing your membership annually as a Blazing Star. But please don't forget that your time and effort donated to stewardship activities is also needed and greatly appreciated.

Remember, we are all links in this conservation chain, and a chain is only as strong as the weakest links! Have a great spring, and I will see you on the prairies!



A PROPOSAL FOR THE FUTURE USE OF LAND AT THE BADGER ARMY AMMUNITION PLANT, SAUK COUNTY, WISCONSIN

**Prepared by the Community Conservation
Coalition for the Sauk Prairie (CCCSP)**

Introduction

The 7,354-acre Badger Army Ammunition Plant lies within a diverse and beautiful landscape in Sauk County, Wisconsin. The ancient and scenic Baraboo Hills border the plant on the north, and the Wisconsin River flows to the south and east. Glaciers sculpted the site during the last ice age and the terminal moraine crosses the property. The historic Sauk Prairie occupied a significant portion of the Badger lands. These lands were home to the Sauk, Fox, and Ho Chunk peoples, and later to Euro-American farmers, before the federal munitions plant was constructed in 1942.

The Badger site is extraordinary for: its globally significant geological features; its population of declining grassland birds; its value as green space in a rapidly urbanizing region; its opportunities for scientific research, education, and community participation in its restoration; and its special place in our area's history. The geology, topography, and size of the Badger property and its location in the Wisconsin River valley adjacent to the Baraboo Hills and Devil's Lake State Park offer the only opportunity in the Upper Midwest to protect and restore on a large scale a broad array of the region's native ecological communities.

Our Philosophy

The proponents and endorsers of this proposal recognize that the lands occupied by the Badger Army Ammunition Plant are of exceptional conservation value, and that a variety of potential land uses can enhance that value. The disposition of the lands at Badger affords the citizens of Sauk County, the State of Wisconsin, and the United States a one-time-only chance to retain this property in public trust as a conservation area for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.

This proposal provides the foundation for a long-term conservation vision for the entire Badger property that includes and integrates: protection of all of the site's unique geological, biological,

historic, and cultural features; ecological restoration of prairie, savanna, woodland, and wetland communities; and continuing opportunities for public education, recreation, agriculture, and scientific research

Achieving this vision will require the active involvement of people, organizations, and institutions in the communities surrounding the Badger lands. This proposal rests on our conviction that citizen participation in the conservation of these lands is itself one of the significant benefits we now stand to gain.

Toward a Conservation Future for the Badger Lands: A Proposal

A conservation future for the land at Badger can and should be secured according to the following principles:

- The property should be maintained and managed as a whole with diverse but compatible uses;
- The entire property should remain in public ownership, under single or multiple public and/or sovereign entities;
- Decisions regarding future uses of the land should be guided by a unified land use vision and land use plan developed for the entire property.

The long-term goal of the land use plan should be the conservation and enhancement of the site's geological, biological, historic, and cultural resources for the benefit of the public and of local communities.

The land use plan should accommodate activities compatible with the rural and ecological character of the area, including: protection and enhancement of geological biological, historic, and cultural resources; restoration of the site's ecological communities; recreation; public education; sustainable agriculture; and scientific research.

A coordinating committee should be established to:

- (1) develop a set of guiding principles that define conservation goals and practices for the Badger lands;
- (2) draft the terms of deed restrictions or restrictive covenants that further the stated conservation goals and that are binding upon future landowner(s) and/or landholder(s);
- (3) prepare the initial land use plan for the

property;

- (4) review and approve permissible land uses that contribute to the goals of the long-term land use vision;
- (5) prepare an economic analysis of the land use plan and an economic strategy to support it; and
- (6) prepare and implement a site management plan for the property.

The coordinating committee should include (but not be limited to): town and county governments; the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the USDA Dairy Forage Research Center, other state and federal agencies with interest in the site; the Ho Chunk Nation; the University of Wisconsin; and representatives of community and non-governmental organizations.

Future landowner(s) and/or landholder(s) should agree and adhere to the set of guiding principles that define the conservation goals and practices for the Badger lands. The rights and responsibilities of the future landowner(s) and/or landholder(s) should be clearly defined through deed restrictions, restrictive covenants, or other permanent and binding legal methods, and should be established prior to the transfer of any federal land at Badger.

The site management plan will specify activities that meet the objectives of the land use plan. The site management plan should be implemented in phases. The plan will reflect our evolving understanding of changing conditions and opportunities at the Badger site. To ensure that it remains flexible, the plan should include a mechanism to respond to unforeseen conservation opportunities and options at the site.

A process must be established to encourage and ensure the participation of local citizens and communities in land use activities during every stage of land use planning and site management.

Potential uses of existing infrastructure (buildings, utilities) should be identified in the land use plan and further defined in the site management plan as land use proposals are reviewed and approved. Only those buildings and structures that contribute to the broader conservation goals for the site should be retained. Exceptions may be made for short-term uses. All other structures should be salvaged and/or recycled for their materials.

Farmers and businesses currently leasing land or buildings may continue to do so until the land is needed to implement the long-term land use plan. Other short-term uses may also be identified. However, new residential and industrial developments are not considered compatible long-term uses. Limited commercial activities may be permissible, but only if they contribute to the broader conservation goals for the site.

Ecological restoration activities will expand upon restoration projects that the Army has already undertaken. Funding for ecological restoration could come, in part, through lease fees generated by the use of land and buildings, and through revenues generated from salvage and/or recycling of structures and equipment.

The Army has accepted responsibility for environmental clean-up at the site. This should include removal of all toxic and contaminated building materials, equipment, and infrastructure. Funds should be appropriated by Congress to ensure that the entire site is completely remediated to the highest standards in a timely manner.

Embracing the Opportunity

The imminent change in ownership and use of the Badger property presents a **once-in-a-lifetime** opportunity to protect and pass along to future generations a significant piece of land that is a vital part of the natural and cultural heritage of Sauk County and the State of Wisconsin. By protecting and restoring the unique features of the site, and by working together to realize this vision, we have an opportunity as well to strengthen our local communities and to enhance the quality of life in our region.

The Community Conservation Coalition for the Sauk Prairie (CCCSP) is a citizen-based volunteer initiative. The Coalition supports future uses of the Land now occupied by the Badger Army Ammunition Plant that are compatible with the ecological, economic, rural and social character of the surrounding countryside. A major component of the CCCSP vision is the restoration of prairie oak savanna and other natural communities on the land.

Restoring the Sauk Prairie: Several Projects Take Shape. plus a tribute to Doug Rhead.

by Scott Weber

The Nature Conservancy lists the Baraboo Hills as one of the "Last Great Places." When viewed from the air, the large block of unbroken forest stands out in sharp contrast to the surrounding landscape of orderly farms, towns, and the subdivisions now creeping across the landscape. If we had an aerial view of Sauk County before 1840, we would see another great place immediately south of the bluffs, the Sauk Prairie. Once covering 14,000 acres, it now is reduced to a few remnants totaling perhaps 30 acres.

Although much of the prairie has been lost, there are several projects in the county aimed at restoring at least a part of the prairie on state, federal, and private property. The largest project, about 1,500 acres, lies inside the Badger Army Ammunition Plant adjacent to Devil's Lake State Park. In addition to this site, the Army has also planted several other areas of the plant to prairie grasses and forbs, including several acres along Hwy. 12. At Devil's Lake State Park, 400 acres are being restored to wetland, prairie, and oak savanna in the Roznos Meadow, which lies between Hwy 113 and the terminal moraine at the southeast end of the lake. About seventy acres of former cropland have been planted to prairie within the past two years. Just east of Devil's Lake State Park lies a large tract of land which Wisconsin Power and Light purchased years ago as a possible power plant site. The site is now managed by the Riverland Conservancy. About 800 acres have been set aside for savanna restoration and prairie plantings. Coupled with the state park lands, Badger, and the Nature Conservancy preserves, a continuous corridor of restored habitat from the Wisconsin River to the heart of the Baraboo Hills is possible.

Much of the work for these projects comes from volunteers. Both the Riverland Conservancy and Devil's Lake have their own volunteer networks. Prairie Enthusiast members can also volunteer to help collect and plant seeds, clear brush, plant nursery acreage, and inventory

remnants. Anyone interested in helping either at Badger or Devil's Lake this year can contact me directly by phone (608-356-0179) or e-mail (bluestem_farm@juno.com). I can also put you in touch with the Riverland Conservancy.

One man, however, deserves special mention: Doug Rhead. Doug works for the Army at the powder plant and is responsible for managing its lands. Doug was transferred to the plant about the same time the DNR was interested in planting prairie seed production fields on site. When the DNR finally got the go-ahead to plant, Doug borrowed a new John Deere tractor from the USDA Dairy Forage Center, and the two of us loaded the drill full of yellow coneflower and went at it, one of us driving, the other checking the drill to be sure the seed was flowing smoothly. When it was my turn to drive, I looked up at the Baraboo Hills and suddenly realized how heart wrenching it must have been for the settlers of the prairie to leave their farms when the plant was built. What a view! And how sad, too, for the Native Americans who were forced from the prairie before them. This place is too beautiful to have witnessed such conflict and loss, and yet I was surrounded also by the powder magazines, reminders of a global war which the original inhabitants could never have imagined. But sadness was soon replaced with great exuberance as we planted prairie seeds. It felt good to be back in business in style, with over 100 horsepower at my fingertips, courtesy of Doug.

Doug is retiring at the end of February and I will miss him. Not only has he been great to work with, but he has a very important knack of finding money within the Army budget for restoration work. In particular, he secured money to start a badly needed project: a nursery dedicated to the forbs and grasses that are in short supply. Last summer he laid out nearly a half acre of weed barrier, put irrigation pipe in place, and helped plant several thousand prairie dropseed plugs.

Thousands more plugs of many species, including shooting stars, will be planted this spring (VOLUNTEERS TAKE NOTE), and Doug says he'll come back to help. Such a nursery will help reverse the trend to plant easily collected and harvested species at the expense of diversity and authenticity. With some money and help from Dairy Forage, Doug was able to do in a few months what we could not do in years. Doug will

return full time to his farm by Tomah to tend his cattle and I wish him well.

The future of the plant is still mostly undecided, but Doug assures me that it will be a long time before the Army is out of there. In the meantime, the prairie vision remains large on the horizon, thanks to many of Doug's plantings. Let's keep up the work!

The Remnants We Save: Ziegler (Koch) Prairie

by Rich Henderson

Location: Two miles north of Middleton, in Dane County, WI. NW of the intersection of Co. Hwy. K and US Hwy 12. (Note: this site is not open to the general public.)

Description & Quality: Ziegler Prairie is 8 acres of upland dry-mesic to mesic prairie straddling a low hill, the core of which is limestone. There are limestone outcroppings at the south end, and glacial till is deposited in places at the north end. The hill is surrounded by a sea of cropland that was the St. Peter's Prairie at time of settlement, a lobe of the vast Empire (Arlington) Prairie of northern Dane and southern Columbia Counties. Ziegler Prairie is one of several dozen small remnants of the original St. Peter's Prairie still surviving, but, it is only the second to be protected.

The prairie here is of very good quality, but after 70 years without fire it is showing signs of major deterioration. There has been a noticeable decline in the prairie sod, woody plant invasion aside, in just the past 22 years. Many species have declined in numbers or are no longer evident, such as the purple and white prairie clovers. The site is not entirely free of active disturbance. A small area on top of the hill was used for growing melons for a brief time in the 1930's. One of the lower slopes had been tilled prior to 1920. The old plow line is still evident along with a difference in plant composition between the plowed and unplowed sides after 80 or more years. The remnant is so far from the farmstead that it likely did not experience much grazing; there has definitely been no grazing for the past 80 years.

So far, 75 species of prairie plants have been found on the site, as well as a very healthy

population of the state endangered red-tailed leafhopper. Of special note are large areas of prairie dropseed sod (the host plant for the red-tailed leafhopper) and large populations of rattlesnake master, rosinweed, and showy sunflower. Some noteworthy, but less common, species include coreopsis, compass plant, needlegrass, Leiberg's panic grass, green milkweed, wood lily, prairie gentian, hoary puccoon, sand cherry, and upland prairie willow. Once fire is brought back to this site, it is likely more species, that have so far gone undetected, will begin to emerge.

History & Status: This prairie remnant went unnoticed by the scientific and natural area conservation communities until it was visited by Rich Henderson in the fall of 1978. Rich immediately struck up a relationship with the owner, John Koch, an elderly bachelor farmer, visiting him and the prairie at least once a year over the next 15 years. Rich also began working towards the prairie's protection, which turned out to be a long haul indeed. John had farmed the land with his bachelor brother Frank who had died in 1977. The farm had been in the Koch family since the 1840's. John said that the prairie had been regularly burned by his uncle in the 1920's and before, but that he was deathly fearful of fire. Thus, he would not consent to it being burned.

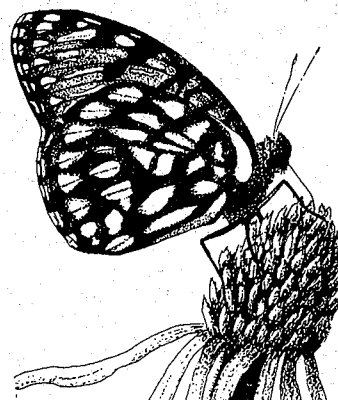
John appreciated the prairie and its wildflowers but he did not fully understand its rarity and significance. However, he was in favor of it being protected for its scenic beauty. In 1984 the Dane County Environmental Council presented Mr. Koch with a certificate of appreciation for retaining his prairie. This pleased him greatly, and a few years later he offered to donate the prairie to the Dane County Natural Heritage Foundation, but unfortunately that fell through when a neighbor of his talked him out of it. The neighbor had expressed concern that making the site a nature preserve would just invite beer parties and trash dumping. In the early 1990's, John's health began to fail and he moved to a nursing home. Shortly after, the Empire-Sauk Chapter of The Prairie Enthusiasts reached an agreement with Mr. Koch's executor to manage the site and use it as a seed source for the Gov. Nelson State Park restorations. Brush clearing, tree girdling, and weed control work was begun, but no burning was allowed. Mr. Koch died in 1997 and the 80 acres of his farm with the prairie remnant was listed for

sale as a single parcel in a sealed bid auction. The Nature Conservancy put in a bid, but unfortunately they were out-bid by the Ziegler family, an active and successful local farming family. However, the DNR Natural Areas Program immediately began negotiating with the Zieglers to purchase the prairie separate from the rest of the land. Two years later, after dealing with much red tape and politics, the hard work of Doris Rusch and Mary Zickerman of the DNR paid off and the deal was sealed. In 1999, title to 11 acres and the development rights on another 29 acres were transferred to the DNR. The site is now officially the Ziegler unit of the Empire Prairie State Natural Area.

Although the site is a State Natural Area, access is restricted. The Prairie Enthusiasts, however, will be hosting periodic field trips for those wishing to take a look.

Needs & Management: The DNR Natural Areas crew took over management from the Prairie Enthusiasts this past year. Tree and shrub invasion is now well under control. Plans are being made to conduct the first burns, and to plant prairie onto the 3 acres of cropland that came with the remnant. There is a small population of parsnip that still needs to be addressed. However, the large infestation of leafy spurge that spread across the site in the early 1980's appears to be in major decline after flea-beetle bio-control agents were released onto the site 5 years ago.

The DNR Bureau of Science Services has been inventorying the site's insects over the past 5 years, thus providing good baseline information prior to burning. Also, a research project has begun on the site to measure the response of its plants and insects to the fires.



EXPERIENCE EXCHANGE

By Patrick Handrick

Virtually all prairie remnants and restorations require management to control undesirable trees and shrubs. Cutting and burning can remove the above ground portion of brush, but new top growth will usually sprout from the roots. In some cases re-sprouting brush comes back even thicker than before.

Herbicide application is often the most effective way to eliminate undesirable brush permanently. Applying herbicide to the brush without harming adjacent desirable plants can be problematic. Spraying is usually out of the question due to the potential for over-spray onto desirable plants. Most frequently, brush is cut and the stumps are painted with a liquid herbicide solution. The herbicide is absorbed through the stump and the plant dies. Cutting and herbicide application can be time consuming, particularly for plants with many stems.

During the spring and summer of 1999, I experimented with controlling brush using an herbicide applicator call a Stem Pick. A Stem Pick looks like a small green plastic test tube with a pointed end. The device is about 4 inches long and 1/2 inch in diameter. Up to 1/3 fluid ounces of liquid herbicide can be placed in a Stem Pick. A flexible plastic cap with a 1/8 inch hole in the top fits over the open end of the Stem Pick.

To apply the herbicide, a vertical growing branch between 1/8 to 3/8 inches in diameter is selected from the plant to be treated. A pruning shears is used to cut the branch. The branch stub is pushed through the hole in the plastic cap of the Stem Pick. The flexible cap creates a seal around the branch keeping the herbicide from leaking out. The herbicide in the Stem Pick is absorbed into the plant through the wound at the end of the branch.

I used Stem Picks on several species of trees, shrubs and coarse herbaceous weeds of various sizes. I was particularly interested in how the herbicide application would work for clonal species. I hoped to be able to treat a few individuals in a clone and have herbicide translocation kill the entire clone.

Various concentrations of Roundup were tried. 100% Roundup was too viscous and didn't always get absorbed. 1=BD % solutions were not effective in killing whole plants. A 75% Roundup solution seemed to deliver the maximum herbicide while still being absorbed well. Lower concentrations of Roundup may be effective for killing smaller plants with less herbicide. However, I did not test lower concentrations enough to offer recommendations.

The results of the tests follow. Some plants reported as killed may have been only top killed, but they appeared to be completely dead in the fall.

Buckthorn: 8-10 small (1-3 ft tall) buckthorn were treated with one Stem Pick each. All the plants treated with Roundup solutions of 50% or more appeared to be killed. Most of these plants had numerous small stems and they would have been quite tedious to cut and paint with herbicide. I had no larger buckthorn to test on.

Multiflora Rose: 6-8 multiflora rose (1-3 ft tall, 3-5 ft diameter) were treated with one Stem Pick each. Total kill seemed to have been achieved on the smaller plants. At least one of the larger plants had about 20% of it's stems surviving the treatment. A second Stem Pick would likely have resulted in a total kill. The numerous stems and thorns on these plants would have made other treatment methods difficult.

Bush Honeysuckle: two plants (2 ft tall) were treated with a 1 =BD % Roundup solution. This only killed one branch on each plant. They were treated again with a 75% solution in the late summer and appeared to be dead by fall.

Smooth Sumac: several sumac in the middle of large clones were treated with applications of 100%, 75%, and 50% solutions at various times. The latex that oozed from the stem cuts seemed to interfere with absorption. In one case, no herbicide was absorbed from the Stem Pick. In other cases, the treated plant was killed but there was no impact on adjacent plants. Perhaps there would have been better herbicide absorption and translocation either earlier or later in the year.

Bigtooth Aspen: in one case, a 4 inch diameter aspen was killed by a single treatment of 100% solution. However, subsequent treatments on slightly larger aspen resulted in killing only the branch that was treated. The fact that the 4 inch aspen was the smallest in the clone and not very thrifty may have accounted for it's demise more than the herbicide. Several aspen suckers (3-4 ft tall) were treated. In most cases, the treated sucker was killed but nearby aspen suckers did not appear to be affected. In one case, suckers within a few inches of the treated one were also killed.

Autumn Olive: two multi-trunked 6-8 ft tall plants were treated with a single Stem Pick in May. The plants were treated again with another Stem Pick later in the summer. By fall, trunks that had been treated were dead but other trunks were alive.

Black Locust: one plant was treated. It was a small tree (1 inch diameter) that had been cut the previous year and was sending up two vigorous suckers. A treatment in mid- summer killed the treated sucker. The second sucker was treated in late summer and that seemed to have killed the plant.

Blackberries and Raspberries: several clumps of brambles were treated with various concentrations of herbicide. The treated stem would typically die with no apparent effect on adjacent plants in the clone. Most of the experiments on

brambles used the 1=BD% solution. More work needs to be done to determine the response to higher concentrations of herbicide and variations in treatment date.

Canada Thistle: a single thistle stem in a very thick clone was treated with a 75% solution. There didn't appear to be an impact on adjacent plants. The herbicide was applied after the plants had flowered and no longer actively growing. Another experiment applying the herbicide during the active growth stage is warranted.

Stem Pick applied herbicide was an effective way to control small to medium sized shrubs with large numbers of stems, such as small buckthorn and multiflora rose. These plants would be difficult to treat with cutting and stump painting because of the difficulty applying adequate amounts of herbicide on numerous small stems. Large shrubs and trees were typically not killed by one or two herbicide applications.

I will continue experimenting with using Stem Picks to control brush. I plan to determine how many Stem Picks are required to kill large shrubs and trees that couldn't be killed with just one or two applications. I also plan to continue experimenting with controlling clones of aspen, thistles, blackberries and sumac. Variations in the season of application and the type of herbicide may produce better results.

Stem Picks can be purchased from Gempler's, Belleville, WI, 1-800-832-8473, (www.gemplers.com) for 9 cents a piece.

Announcing the 17th North American Prairie Conference

The 17th North American Prairie Conference will be held on July 17-20, 2000 at North Iowa Area Community College in Mason City, Iowa. (Located in north central Iowa; only 120 miles from Prairie du Chien or 170 miles from Dubuque or 210 miles from Madison).

For conference information and registration materials, contact Carol Schutte, North Iowa Community College, 500 College Drive, Mason City, Iowa 50401.

e-mail: schutcar@niacc.cc.ia.us. Also visit the web page at ww.niacc.com/prairie2000/.

The Upland Garden Club's 2nd Annual Plant Sale will be held May 20, from 8 to 11am at Harris Park Pavilion in Dodgeville. Items offered for sale include: annuals, perennials, vegetables, herbs, shrubs, prairie plants, house plants, rock garden plants, and miscellaneous items.

NEWS BYTES

By Jim Rachuy

On the Federal legislation front...

Vice President Gore announced the administration will seek \$1.3 billion in the FY01 budget for conservation programs to help family farmers protect the environment.

The Whitehouse says:

"The centerpiece of the proposal is a new \$600 million program (the Conservation Security Program) providing additional income to family farmers who voluntarily adopt comprehensive plans to curb erosion and protect water supplies from pesticide and nutrient runoff."

The proposal also asks Congress to expand CRP so that an additional 4 million acres of farmland (for a total of 40 million acres) may be enrolled, plus an additional \$550 million to strengthen programs like the Environmental Quality Incentives Program, the Wetlands Reserve Program, and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program.

Of course, these are only proposals. They will require Congressional approval. On the other hand, 2000 is an election year. For the entire text, see: <http://www.pub.whitehouse.gov/urires/l2R?urn:pdi://oma.eop.gov.us/2000/1/7/12.text.1>

On the sprawl front...

New figures from the USDA National Resources Inventory show that nearly 16 million acres of forest, cropland and open space were converted to urban and other uses from 1992 through 1997. The average rate of conversion, 3.2 million acres per year, is more than twice the rate of 1.4 million acres per year recorded from 1982 through 1991. Oops.

Montana Supreme Court upholds citizen's "right to a clean environment"...

What started as grassroots outrage over the state-sanctioned discharge of arsenic-laden groundwater into Montana's Blackfoot River (from a gold mine) has ended with a major legal victory with broad and positive implications for nature.

In a landmark opinion, the Montana court agreed with the National Wildlife Federation that Montana's citizens have a "fundamental right to a clean and healthful environment." The justices unanimously agreed that if a law threatens citizens'

environmental rights, it cannot legally survive unless the state establishes a "compelling state interest" in overriding this right.

Why this decision? Quite simply, the court upheld "the right to a clean and healthful environment" because that's what it says in the Montana Constitution! Question: have you read the Illinois Constitution lately? I have: the wording is almost identical.

finally ...

Dutch biologists have upended two long held ecological principles, that is, that "species exist to fill niches" and "only the fittest survive." Working with computer simulations, they found that in systems with more than two limited resources, as many as nine competing species never reach equilibrium.

Fluctuations in populations continue because when a species that excels at garnering one resource gains an upper hand, its growing population drives down the availability of other resources that it needs. A second species, better at scavenging that nutrient, then comes into its own and supplants the first. As the balance of nutrients shifts, different sets of skills can each momentarily be advantageous. In this way, every species gets a recurring chance to be the fittest.

"No one would have guessed that if you put three limiting resources together with many species (in a spatially featureless environment) that they would be able to coexist," says ecologist David Tilman of the University of Minnesota. "This is a major advance. I know I will think about whether this applies in the grasslands in which I work."

Later, JLR

Snakes in the Grass, Snakes in the Trees

by Ed Heske, Center for Wildlife Ecology, and Larry Keller, UI Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Studies.

(An article reprinted by permission from the Illinois Natural History Survey January/February, 2000 No. 361)

Snakes are difficult to study in the field because of their secretive behavior, and many features of their ecology and natural history are

not well known. Although snakes are frequently considered vermin and often indiscriminately killed by humans, most species of snakes are harmless to humans, and many serve in beneficial roles as predators of small mammals and invertebrates. Because many species of snakes are declining in numbers in regions where the land is dominated by row-crop agriculture, such as in central Illinois, it is important to identify and protect critical habitats and landscape features relevant to their conservation. For example, sites used for hibernation may be particularly important for snakes living in temperate climates. Conservation biologists also have recently begun to suspect that some species of snakes may be major predators of the eggs and nestlings of songbirds. Studies of habitats used by snakes could help resource managers determine if local manipulations of habitat could improve nesting success for declining species of songbirds.

We use radiotelemetry to monitor habitat use by black rat snakes (*Elaphe obsoleta*), fox snakes (*Elaphe vulpina*), and blue racers (*Coluber constrictor*) at the Middle Fork Fish and Wildlife Area (MFFWA) in Vermilion County, Illinois. In Illinois, black rat snakes may grow to about 68 inches long, fox snakes may grow to about 51 inches, and blue racers may grow to about 60 inches. All three species feed on a variety of small mammals, and may prey on nests of birds. Blue racers have the most general diet, which includes a variety of arthropods, annelids, amphibians, and reptiles.

Because these three species are similar in size and diet, we wanted to see if they differed in habitat use. You can't put a radio collar on a snake. Instead, we brought each snake we captured to a surgical facility at the University of Illinois where, with the help of professional veterinarians, we anesthetized it with isoflurane gas and inserted a small radio transmitter into the body cavity. A flexible slender wire antenna was inserted under the scales but above the muscle layer along the side of the snake. Thus, the body of the snake became its own broadcast antenna. We monitored each snake for two days after surgery to make sure of a healthy recovery, then released it where it was initially captured. In all, we implanted transmitters into 7 snakes (3 black rat snakes, 3 fox snakes, 1 blue racer) in 1997, and 17 snakes (10 black rat snakes, 2 fox snakes, 5 blue racers) in 1998. We tried to locate each

snake about three times a week during the spring and early summer, then about once per week in the late summer and fall until they moved to their hibernation sites.

Each time we located a snake, we recorded the habitat in which the snake occurred, and whether the snake was below ground, on the soil surface, or above ground in vegetation. We also plotted the locations of each snake on maps of the MFFWA, and used a geographic information system (GIS) to conduct spatial analyses. These analyses allowed us to compare use of a type of habitat to the amount of that habitat available to each snake, and thus statistically evaluate selection and avoidance of habitat types.

Black rat snakes at the MFFWA were most frequently located in forested habitat. In contrast, fox snakes and blue racers both were typically found in prairies and old fields, and avoided forests. All three species generally avoided agricultural fields. Another interesting pattern to emerge involved the use of vertical space. Almost 50% of all the locations of black rat snakes were high up in trees, and an additional 15% of locations were in vegetation but below about 10 feet above the ground. The remaining 35% of locations were on the soil surface or below ground, most likely in rodent burrows. In contrast, all locations of fox snakes were on the surface or below ground. Blue racers were similar to fox snakes in their use of vertical space, except that about 5% of the locations were in vegetation less than 10 feet above the ground. Our telemetry data support the general descriptions given by Phillip W. Smith, a former scientist with the Natural History Survey, in his 1961 bulletin, *The Amphibians and Reptiles of Illinois*, and they provide the first quantitative data on habitat selection for those species in Illinois.

Although we do not know whether competition for resources influences the behavior of these species, it is interesting to speculate about how differences between species might facilitate their ability to coexist. Our data provides an example of two species in the same genus, black rat snakes and fox snakes, that have similar diets but differ strongly in their use of habitat where they occur together. In contrast, habitat used by fox snakes and blue racers were very similar at the level we examined it. Blue racers seemed to be active on the ground at warmer temperatures, to move more quickly at warmer

temperatures, and to move more slowly at cooler temperatures than did fox snakes. Perhaps these species have different thermal preferences. Hatchling fox snakes readily feed on newborn mice whereas hatchling blue racers refuse mice and prefer insects. Blue racers also do not constrict their prey as much as black rat and fox snakes do, and may be more limited in the size of the prey they can overpower. Perhaps differences in diet reduce competition between these species. The community ecology of snakes would make a fascinating subject for future studies.

We located three hibernation sites, including one site that appeared to be a major center for hibernating snakes. At least five species hibernated at this site, with black rat snakes aggregating there in larger numbers. Some snakes migrated almost a mile from this site in the spring to their summer foraging areas, and returned in the fall. We prefer to keep the location of these sites confidential, as not everyone appreciates snakes for the wonderful creatures they are.

The next time you are out walking in the early spring before the trees leaf out, you might look up to see a snake basking in the branches as well as watch out for the ones underfoot.

(This project was supported by a grant from the Illinois Wildlife Preservation Fund and Federal Aid to Wildlife Restoration Grant W125 through the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.)



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

COULEE REGION CHAPTER			Sun.,	Apr. 16	Chapter meeting at home of David Lowe, 205, E. Merrimac St., Dodgeville, at 1pm. Followed by annual meeting and election of officers.
EVENTS			Sun.,	Jun. 18	Chapter meeting at home of Sue Linder, 505 Airport Rd., Boscobel at 1pm.
Sat.,	Mar. 25	Work party at the Hogback Preserve, 9am, contact Greg Nessler at 608-627-1376 for details.	EVENTS		
Sat.,	Mar. 25	Work party at Hixon Forest, for details call 608-784-0303.	Sat.,	Apr. 8	Burn at Kalscheur's Savanna at 10am.
Sat.,	Apr. 1	Work party at Anna Motivans, at 11am. Contact 608-788-3312 for details and directions.	Sat.,	Apr. 15	Brush cutting at Vale or burn at Thomas Wet Prairie. Call for details at 608-375-5271.
Sat.,	Apr. 1	Work party at Tom and Ceci Erb's, for directions and details contact 608-648-3681.	Sun.,	Apr. 30	Heather's Prairie at 10am.
Sat.,	Apr. 8	Work party at Genoa Power Plant. For directions and details contact George Johnston at 608-788-1417.	Sat.,	May 6	Vale Prairie at 10am.
Sat.,	Apr. 15	Work party at Lloyd and Mary Croatt's. For details and directions contact 608-788-1417.	Sat.,	May 13	Kalscheur's Savanna at 10am.
Sun.,	Apr. 16	Work party at George and Carmeen Johnstons'. For directions and details contact 608-788-1417.	Sun.,	May 14	Bush Clover Prairie at 10am.
EMPIRE-SAUK CHAPTER			Sat.,	Jun. 3	Heather's Prairie at 10am.
MEETINGS			Directions to Vale: from Hwy 69, turn east onto Hwy 39. At Purinton Rd turn east. Proceed to Schneeburger Rd and turn north 0.2 miles, take the farm lane west (trees are on the south side of lane and crop land is on north side). For information call Gary Eldred at 608-375-5271.		
Tues.,	May 2	Chapter board meeting, 7pm, Scott Weber and Muffy Barrett's Bluestem Farm, S5920 Lehman Road, Baraboo, 608-356-0179.	Directions to Heather's Prairie: From Fennimore, take Hwy 18 west to Pine Rd. Turn left (east) on Graham Rd., then south on Mt Ridge Rd. to fire number 12109. For information call Gary Adams at 608-624-5797.		
PRAIRIE BLUFF CHAPTER			Directions to Bush Clover Prairie: Take Hwy 61 north at Lancaster, and turn left on Co. Rd. K. Proceed about four miles and turn left (west) on Badger Rd. Go around curve and prairie is on the right. For information, Gary Eldred at 608-375-5271.		
EVENTS			Directions to Kalscheur's Savanna: From Hollandale (SW Iowa Co.) go south from Hwy 39 on Co. Rd. K about 2 miles. Site is on left (east) side of road. Look for parked cars along road. For information call David Lowe at 608-935-9586.		
Sat.,	Apr. 1	Garlic mustard pull at Abraham's Woods at 10am. Meet at the Oliver Road parking lot.	SOUTHEAST CHAPTER		
Sat.,	Apr. 8	Pasque Flower Hike at Muralt Bluff Prairie. Meet at County Highway F Parking Lot, (CTH F is former STH 39). For more information contact John Ochsner at 608-862-3816.	EVENT: Earth Day, Sat., April 29. See chapter news for details.		
MEETINGS			GENERAL CALENDAR		
Tues.,	Apr. 4	Chapter meeting 7pm at Turner Hall Ratskeller, 1217 17 th Avenue, Monroe.	Sat.,	May 13	TPE Board Meeting, 10am, Black River Falls.
Tues.,	May 2	Kittentail Potluck and hike followed by a chapter meeting at Marshall Bluff Bowhunter Club House, Monticello. Hike at 5:30pm, Potluck at 6pm, meeting at 7pm.	Sat.,	May 20	Uplands Garden Club Annual Sale. See article page 9.
Tues.,	Jun. 6	Chapter meeting at 7pm, at Monroe Arts Center, 1315 11 th St. Monroe. Guest speaker will be Mike Mossman from WI DNR.	Sat.,	Jul. 29	TPE annual picnic and TPE board meeting, Perrot State Park, Trempealeau, WI. Save the date.
SOUTHWEST CHAPTER					
MEETINGS					

EMPIRE-SAUK CHAPTER

Brush mower fund making progress but still needs help

We are 50% of the way to our goal of \$2,145.

Thank you to the following contributors:

Wayne Pauly

Jon & Peggy Traver

Laureen & Ron Thorstad

Meagan Yost

Kathy & Rich Henderson

Noll Valley Home Owners Association

Vilas Neighborhood Association

Jim Welsh

Guerdon & Jeanette Coombs

Susan Slapnick

John & Carmen Wagner

Dan & Deb Weidert

Gary Werner

Craig Annen

Just \$5 a piece from each of our remaining members would finish the job. Please send donations to the Prairie Enthusiasts c/o Jim Welsh, 55685 Old Lake Road, Baraboo, WI 53913.

Burn season is here

The Empire-Sauk chapter has over 30 burns lined up for this spring in Sauk, Columbia, and Dane Counties. If you would like to help on these and have not received a spring burn volunteer sign-up form, contact volunteer coordinator John Mecikalski, 1501 Dover Dr., Waunakee, WI 53597 (849-8358). We will begin as soon as the snow melts and the frost is at least part way out of the ground.

A Wealth of Remnants in our Backyard

There is an exceptionally rich clustering of good quality prairie remnants in portions of northern Dane County and southern Columbia County, where there are 50 or more sites ranging in size from ½ acre to 40 acres. However, only 4 of these remnants are currently protected or are under management agreements. The Empire-Sauk Chapter is in contact with some additional landowners and things look promising for long-term protection and management. However, there are many more owners we want to contact to let them know what they have, to stimulate their interest and concern, and to offer our help. To accomplish this, we need more volunteers. We

need people to meet with landowners and develop relationships over time. We need volunteers to periodically visit the remnants to check on their condition and see what species are there. If these types of activities are of interest to you, please contact John Mecikalski, 1501 Dover Dr., Waunakee, WI 53597 (849-8358) or Rich Henderson (845-7065).

The Blufflands Project – Maintaining the Conservation Value of Private Lands

by Steve Swenson, Blufflands Project Manager and Ecologist for the Aldo Leopold Foundation.

The beginning of a new millennium represents a symbolic opportunity to put into perspective the past as well as to imagine the future. The last millennium has witnessed many changes in our natural landscape, arguably with the most dramatic of those in just the last 160 years. Identifying these changes is invaluable; it allows us to identify our present concerns, and possibly predict future concerns.

How have recent changes in the landscape affected the extent of prairies and savannas?

The settlement of Europeans in the 1840's brought an increase in private land ownership, agriculture, and development (i.e. roads, houses, etc.). The majority of prairies and savannas were directly eliminated as land was converted to agricultural fields or developed for houses and roads, resulting in a fragmented landscape. This dramatic loss of prairie has resulted in the decline of some grassland birds that require vast prairie. It is understandable why many of the remnant prairies and savannas are found in areas where either the topography or soils were not compatible with crop agriculture and/or development.

Fortunately, many small, high quality remnant prairies and savannas can be found dotting the rugged bluffs along the Wisconsin River! Yet, even these sentinels of the past continue to shrink in the absence of an important ecological process.

In part, prairies and savannas are sustained by the natural process of fire. Typically, plant growth and reproduction is more vigorous after fire. As European settlement of the area increased, wildfire suppression became a priority in order to protect families and homes. Without fire, prairies and savannas slowly transform into a closed-canopy forest, as fire-intolerant species are able to invade (e.g. red cedar, poplars, etc.).

Further, prairie and savanna species will not persist under closed-canopy conditions.

Given that prairie remnants are typically small, require fire management, and are typically privately owned, how can land stewardship efforts be effective in maintaining the few remaining prairies and savannas? More importantly, can these efforts also address future concerns about declining species dependent on large prairies?

One answer is The Blufflands Project. This is a collaborative project between the Aldo Leopold Foundation, The Prairie Enthusiasts, private landowners, and volunteers. The essence of the Blufflands Project is to provide private landowners the infrastructure and expertise they need to maintain and expand their remnant prairies and savannas. What distinguishes The Blufflands Project from the work of The Prairie Enthusiasts is our concerted effort to focus management on several adjacent landowners' properties. Having one landowner's prairie in close proximity to another landowner's is of tremendous value.

From a biological perspective, larger areas of land under management carry many benefits. Typically, a larger piece can harbor greater diversity since there is more variation in the physical environment (soil moisture, soil type, aspect, slope, light availability, etc.). The potential for successful grassland bird populations increases with acreage. The middle of a larger area of prairie is much less susceptible to invasive species. Additionally, larger units allow for a greater diversity of management techniques to be applied. For example, certain butterfly species have obligate host plants, in which case, we would prefer to burn only half of the host plants in any given year. From a practical standpoint, our prescribed burning techniques are then dictated by topography and vegetation types, rather than arbitrary property boundaries. This seemingly minor point grants us immeasurable efficiency and safety. This also allows our project to continually increase the quality of our work without compromising safety. Most importantly, management across property boundaries has also developed a sense of community and camaraderie among the participants... neighbors joining to maintain the natural beauty and wonder of the landscape is truly special!

What are the accomplishments of The Blufflands Project?

The Blufflands Project works on approximately 600 acres of privately owned land along the Wisconsin River, between Sauk City and Spring Green. In an effort to provide private landowners the infrastructure that is most needed, our primary function has been to lead prescribed burns. We have led prescribed burns every year since 1989, recently completing as many as 15 each year, encompassing over 30 landowners and approximately 200 acres. We have been active in the removal of cedar from remnant prairies and the planting of 23 acres of prairie. We have also maintained a research program, investigating the economics of prairie restoration from a private landowner perspective. All totaled, these activities have required the coordination of over 900 hours of volunteer time each year. We continue to be approached by new landowners interested in participating with The Blufflands Project.

How can I get involved?

We are always interested involving more people in The Blufflands Project. If you are interested in participating, volunteering, or learning more about The Blufflands Project, please contact Steve Swenson, Blufflands Project Manager, Aldo Leopold Foundation, P.O. Box 77, Baraboo, WI 53913. Phone (608) 355-0279 Email steve@aldoleopold.org

SOUTHWEST WI CHAPTER

Work Parties

Although our winter has again been a relatively mild one, the majority of our work parties were canceled due to snow-fall or cold temperatures. We have lots more prairie and savanna work parties coming up and we would love to have you join us. Due to the unpredictable nature of our weather, we encourage you to call the appropriate work site contact person to verify whether the work party will convene or not.

Southwest Chapter scores a Bull's Eye!

The Southwest Chapter is delighted to announce that it has purchased 22 acres of prairie/savanna! This purchase is especially important because it is adjacent to the very important Muralt Bluff prairie preserve in Green

County, WI. The purchase will increase the total preserve size from 73 acres to 95. The site will need a lot of work but has some very good dry bluff prairie and is blessed with some of the most spectacular savanna oaks we've ever seen. The purchase was made in the last half of December, 1999 and our board felt there was no better way to start a new millennium. We are anxious to show off our latest acquisition and are going to put together a field trip to the site. The site visit will be posted in the summer issue of *The Prairie Promoter*, so watch for the details. The cost of the purchase was \$35,000, and that took a very big bite out of our funds. We are asking for donations to help defray the cost of this savanna gem. Any amount will be welcome, and is also tax deductible. Send donations c/o Gary Eldred, 4192 Sleepy Hollow Rd, Boscobel, WI 53805. If you have questions about this purchase, call 608-375-5271.

SOUTHEAST WI CHAPTER

The Southeast Wisconsin Chapter will participate in the Milwaukee Earth Day 2000 with a display booth and a presentation: "A Beginner's Guide to Planting a Prairie". This is an excellent opportunity to educate the public and expand our membership base! This environmental fair will be at the Arthur Square and the nearby County Courthouse and M.A.T.C. buildings near 7th and State in downtown Milwaukee. The fair date is Saturday, April 29 and begins at noon, ends at 7pm. If you are interested and would like to help staff our display booth, please call 608-988-4760 (evenings) by April 22.

THE PRAIRIE ENTHUSIASTS MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name _____ County _____ Home Phone: _____
 Work Phone: _____ e-mail: _____
 Address _____ Business _____
 Title/Address: _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____

SELECT CHAPTER OR GENERAL MEMBERSHIP:

☐ **Coulee Region Chapter**
 Buffalo, Houston, Jackson, LaCrosse,
 Monroe, Trempealeau, Vernon, &
 Winona Counties

☐ **Empire Sauk Chapter**
 Columbia, Dane & Sauk Counties.

☐ **Northwest Illinois Chapter**
 Carroll, JoDaviess & Stephenson Counties

☐ **Prairie Bluff Chapter**
 Green, Lafayette & Rock Counties
 Can we provide your name and address to
 Other environmental organizations Y / N
 Other Prairie Enthusiasts in your area
 Y / N

MEMBERSHIP LEVEL

☐ \$250 ANNUAL CORPORATE MEMBERSHIP

☐ \$10 STUDENT

☐ \$20 INDIVIDUAL

☐ \$30 CONTRIBUTOR

☐ \$75 SUSTAINING

☐ **\$200 BLAZING
STAR MEMBER**

NEW!

☐ **Southeast WI Chapter (pending)**
 Dodge, Fond du Lac, Jefferson, Kenosha,
 Milwaukee, Ozaukee, Racine, Sheboygan,
 Walworth, Washington, & Waukesha
 Counties.

☐ **Southwest WI Chapter**
 Crawford, Grant, Iowa & Richland Co.

☐ **West Central WI Chapter**
 Barron, Chippewa, Dunn, Eau Claire,
 Pepin, Pierce Polk & St Croix Counties

☐ **General Membership**
 outside chapter areas

☐ Donation

\$ _____

☐ \$30 FAMILY

☐ \$500 IND.LIFE

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO:

The Prairie Enthusiasts
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Boscobel, WI 53805

I Will Help With:

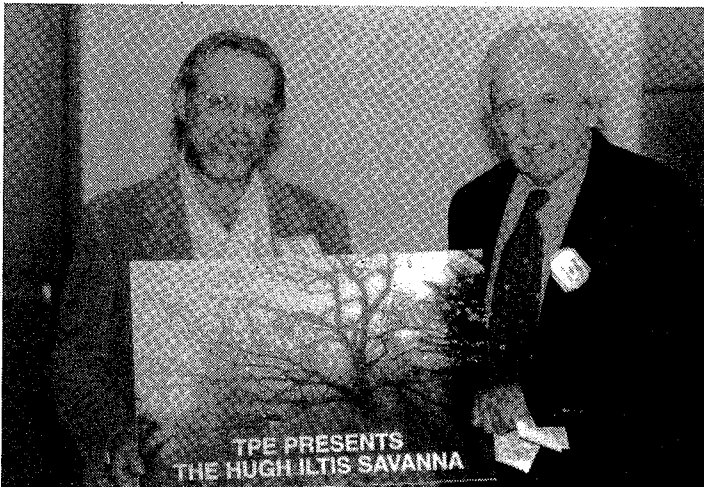
- ☐ Site Inventories
- ☐ Organizing/Leading Field Trips
- ☐ Developing Educational Materials
- ☐ Seed Collecting/Planting
- ☐ Planning Social Activities (banquet, picnics)
- ☐ Fund Raising/Grant Writing
- ☐ Stewardship (Burning, Brush Cutting)
- ☐ Communications (newsletter, articles)

12/3/1999

THANK YOU

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Gary Eldred with Professor Hugh Iltis



Rose and Jim Sime, TPE Volunteers of the Year

