



COULEE CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2008

Chapter President's Message

I can't believe it's May already – the birds are singing, it's green (not white) outside and there are actual flowers blooming. Looking back, though, it was a good winter. Our chapter hosted a successful annual TPE Conference and Banquet and we have our outgoing president, Jim Rogala, to thank for it. Granted, Jim would be the first to say he had help, but it was his attention to detail and cool, calm, and collected attitude under pressure that pulled the event together. After an extended run as chapter president – four years now, it was a heck of a way to go out.

Of course though, the conference wasn't the only thing that Jim has been involved with during that time. Have you all seen the new Hill Prairie brochure he put together? How many TPE members have attended one of the hikes he's given? Worked along side him at workdays and on burns? Then there's that remnant-mapping project. I'm confident that you'll still be seeing Jim's newsletter contributions and I'm sure he'll still be attending workdays, too. He's a true prairie enthusiast and that means I have some big shoes to fill. So on behalf of the chapter membership I'd like to say, *Thank you, Jim, for your time, knowledge and dedication – and relax, you deserve it!*

It does feel a little odd becoming a chapter president as I was first introduced to TPE only five years ago. I have Barb Christie to thank for that. Since spending a day with Barb at the 2003 Prairie Wetlands Conference, I've really been drawn in by TPE members' genuine nature and zeal for prairies (not to mention the opportunity to rub elbows with other plant nerds and nature nuts!) I look forward to working with all of you to help make everyone's experience as great as mine has been. Please feel free to drop me a line with ideas for projects, speakers, and other ways we can reach out to the public at large to share your enthusiasm – hoping they'll catch a little, too. And of course, don't forget to participate in one of the wonderful TPE hikes being offered this summer – I hope to see you on one!

Jessica

TPE Coulee Chapter Officers and Officials for 2008

Name	Office	Phone	Email
Jessica Bolwahn	President	608-637-3753	Ja4bolwahn@hotmail.com
Jim Rogala	Past President	608-786-1855	jrogala@usgs.gov
Scott Cooper	Secretary	608-785-6983	cooper.scot@uwlax.edu
Ned Gatzke	Treasurer	608-269-2033	cngatzke@centurytel.net
Diane Hanson	Member-at-large	608-637-3735	nosnah@mwt.net
Don Nelson	Newsletter editor	608-435-6203	don094@centurytel.net
Jean Stramel	Membership coord.	608-625-4069	jeanstr@mwt.net

Coulee Volunteers on TPE Corporate Board and Committees

Name	Office
Jim Rogala	Corporate Board
Carmeen Johnston	Fundraising and Endowment committee
George Johnston	Fundraising and Endowment committee
Jim Rogala	Land Management committee

Coulee Chapter Business Items

March 29, 2008 Coulee Region Chapter Membership Meeting Minutes

Members present: Jim Rogala, Jessica Bolwahn, Sam Skemp, Ben Johnston, Don Nelson, Greg Nessler, Andrea Benco, Carmeen Johnston, George Johnston, Gordy Powell.

Vernon County: We have been asked to help with a prairie planting along the new by-pass near Viroqua. We discussed collecting or purchasing seed and donating it to the county for roadway plantings. One issue is that the county will not maintain the prairie through burning. Also, mowing roadsides will spread weed seed. The State of Iowa has a good program for roadside natural vegetation that we could use as a model.

CRC VP: We will be seeking nominees for this position at the next meeting.

TPE Annual Conference: There may not be a TPE annual conference next year. The Northern Illinois chapter is supposed to host it but has declined. Instead, there may just be a banquet held in conjunction with another conference.

TPE Brochures: New brochures with corrected addresses will soon be distributed.

Work Party Schedule:

- Decorah Mound – Tree cutting, girdling, brush removal were discussed. It is TNC owned and they will not burn this year. If it is transferred to MVC/TPE, we may burn again in the future (contact is Jim Rogala).
- Sugar Creek Bible Camp – Last burned three years ago. Should we burn again? Is there other work needed? (contact is Armund Bartz)

- Kickapoo Reserve – There will not be a burn this year. We should weed out parsnip and spotted knapweed in the summer (contact is Greg Nessler).
 - Lakeview planting – This piece was mowed last year. If we burn this spring, it needs to be done when there is a west wind because of a nearby nursing home (contact is Jim Rogala)
 - Elk Creek planting – Sam, Barb and Don helped on the workday last summer with members from the DNR and Trout Unlimited. There is a \$500 credit available for seed. Unfortunately, a timeline from DNR for continuing/completing the project seems lacking.
 - Vernon County parks – Last fall the site was brushed by the county. Much more work on buckthorn and honeysuckle is needed. We'll probably schedule a work party or two in the fall (contact is Greg Nessler).
 - Hixon Forest – This spring's activities seem to be up in the air. There is a need to herbicide sumac on middle goat prairie. The Hixon Forest Board would probably welcome a management plan that would better guide the work (contact is Jim Rogala).
 - Norskedalen – There are remnants worth working on and a good volunteer base. A girdling party will be scheduled for mid-May (contacts are Jim Rogala and Sam Skemp).
 - Holland Sand Prairie – MVC is taking the lead and there will be burning in April or May. Most of the work will be on the brome area. The remnant areas will probably be burned in a few years. We'll probably assist in developing plans for the burning (contact is Jessica Bolwahn).
- Other Potential Projects:
 - Green's Coulee Park property in Onalaska. Andrea, Jim and Jessica have looked at this forty acre property. The lower area is residential, so there will be no burning. Remnants are present on the ridge top and work could begin on removing cedars. Also there's an opportunity for a planting in an old field near the top. Burning within the City is possible, but not guaranteed especially over time.
 - Briedel Coulee, South of La Crosse towards Coon Valley. Eight acres planning to be planted. Pheasants Forever, Trout Unlimited and the DNR may partner on this project (contact is Greg Erickson).
 - MVC property: MVC would like us to manage properties for them. We could initially pick one MVC goat prairie to work on. There are also numerous goat prairies owned by the city of La Crosse that might be chapter projects (contacts are Jim Rogala and Jessica Bolwahn).
 - Members' Properties: We would like to compile a listing of member-owned remnants and plantings. A list was circulated during the meeting.

Burn Information:

Burning may be restricted by the DNR based on daily air quality. The following link can be checked for advisories <http://dnr.wi.gov/air/aq/health/status.asp>

Hill Prairie Display and Brochures:

- Strategy for using these? Should we hand out and make personal contacts with individual landowners of goat prairies? The brochure is meant to build their interest, and then give them contact information for more details.
- How much are we willing to invest in copies of brochures? It was decided that, with CRC board approval, 1000 copies (minus time sensitive information) will be printed.
- Wall poster – Jim Rogala will make some in a few sizes and will bring options to the next meeting.
- Other chapters have been interested in the brochures. We will let other chapters now about the availability of the brochures and poster(s).

Coulee Region Prescribed Burn Class:

- S-130/190 – Jessica is looking into getting a class offered in the area. The Wisconsin Prescribed Fire Council would be interested in sponsoring a course here in the fall. It is a 40 hour program that could be taught in a few evening courses and a few Saturdays. They need 30-35 people to offer the course. Additional participants could include other conservation organizations, FWS, DNR, Ft. McCoy or local fire departments.

Chemical Treatment Course:

- We discussed if should try to organize a 2 hour course on safe and effective use of chemicals in prairie management.

TPE Central Updates:

- TPE has established a new chapter – Prairie Sands - in central WI. This chapter borders our chapter to the east.
- TPE already has a part-time accountant and administrative assistant. Other positions needed include a development director, outreach/PR director and an Executive Director.
- Fundraising and Endowment Committee was reviewed. The Compass Plan and Annual Appeal discussed.

Member Directory: Jim Rogala mentioned the need to update and reprint the member directory.

Coulee Chapter Summer Meeting – May 31, 2008

We will meet at the Norskedalen Center near Coon Valley* starting at 10:00. We'll be discussing "lessons learned" from your prairie experiences along with other topics of interest to TPE and the Coulee Chapter. Following the meeting, we hope to get some work done on Norskedalen's prairies. If you can stay and help, Jim is suggesting that you bring along your favorite girdling tools as well as appropriate "working on the prairie" clothing and gloves.

* Norskedalen is located on La Crosse County Road PI, 3 miles north of Coon Valley (off HWY P) or 3 miles south of Hwy 33 (off HWY 162).

Your input is crucial to the success of our chapter and we hope to see you at the meeting!

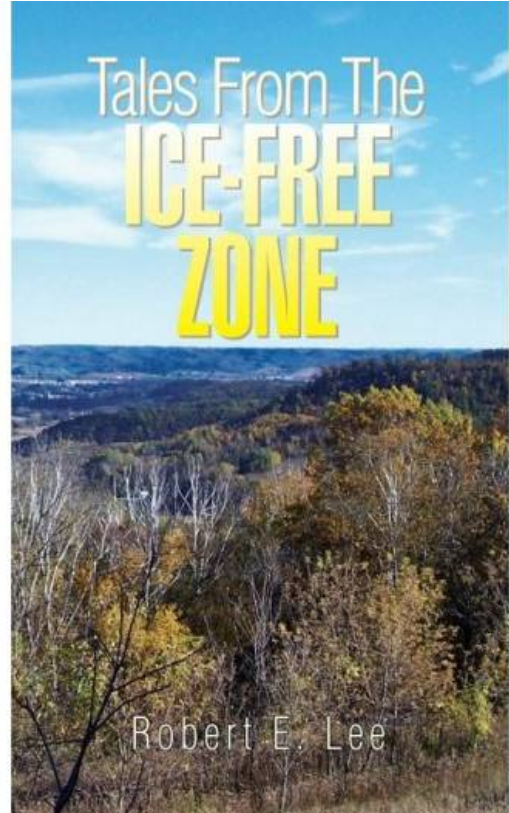
Prairie Education and Outreach

Tales from the Ice-Free Zone: A New Book by an Old Friend!

Robert (Bob) Lee has been hosting hikes along the State Natural Area near Rockland for many years. Those of us that have joined him have not only gained knowledge of the local plant and animal species, but have been treated to entertaining stories on most subjects imaginable.

Bob was born, raised and has spent most of his life in the farmland and small communities east of La Crosse, Wisconsin. In doing so, he has witnessed natural communities in action, and the changes that have occurred in those communities, that most of us can only read of.

Along with Bob's hikes, he has also been writing short articles for newspapers on the natural goings-on in the Coulee Region for several decades. In his book, Bob publishes a mixture of some old and new stories on a variety of topics. If enough of us are interested in a copy of Bob's book, we could submit a bulk order (contact is Jim Rogala).



Upcoming Prairie Field Trips

NOTE: We especially call your attention to the trips at **Fort Mc Coy** and **Coulee Point Oak Savanna**, as both are unique opportunities to see these sites.

Holland Sand Prairie

June 7 (Saturday) Time: 10:00 am

Trip Leader: Jessica Bolwahn (608-784-3606 x 6)

Directions: Exit McHugh Road off HWY 35 north of Holmen. Go west approximately 1/2 mi. and park on the south side of the road.

State Trail Railroad Prairie in Sparta

June 7 (Saturday) Time: 10:00 am

Trip Leader: Bob Lee (608-486-2154)

Directions: Meet at the trail headquarters on South Water Street in Sparta, WI. Take South Water Street 0.5 mile south off Highway 16 in Sparta.

La Crosse River State Trail's Rockland Prairie

June 8 (Sunday) **Time:** 1:30 pm

Trip Leader: Bob Lee (608-486-2154)

Directions: Meet in Rockland, WI (near I-90 in eastern La Crosse County) at the railroad crossing on Commercial St. (CTH J).

Explore the sand prairies of Fort McCoy

June 14 (Saturday) **Time:** 9:00 am

Trip Leader: Kurt Brownell (Kurt.A.Brownell@usace.army.mil) 608-269-6124

Directions: Meet at the "Stone Gate" entrance to Fort McCoy along HWY 16. This gate is located several miles east of Interstate 90 exit 28 on the north side of HWY 16 (east of Sparta). We will leave for the field trip site from there shortly after 9:00. Those who are late could wait until 10:00, when someone will come back to check for stragglers. Do not attempt to travel within the Army grounds on your own, as there are restricted areas (with munitions!).

Coulee Point Oak Savanna

June 22 (Sunday) **Time:** 10:00 am

Trip Leader: Armund Bartz (608-648-3683)

Directions: Meet at the Rush Creek State Natural Area parking lot approximately 1/2 mile north of Hwy 35 on Rush Creek Road (approximately 3 miles north of Ferryville, WI).

La Crosse River State Trail's Rockland Prairie

June 22 (Sunday) **Time:** 1:30 pm

Trip Leader: Bob Lee (608-486-2154)

Directions: Meet in Rockland, WI (near I-90 in eastern La Crosse County) at the railroad crossing on Commercial St. (CTH J).

NOTE: Check the TPE flier or www.ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org for more details on field trips throughout the TPE region.

Information about Prairies and Oak Savannas

Taxonomy 101 for Plants of the Coulee Goat Prairies by Jim Rogala

NOTE: This short narrative is provided to introduce you to some species likely found in bloom in specific settings or time frames. These narratives do not include taxonomic details on how to identify these plants, but may point you in the right direction. There are several excellent field guides and taxonomic texts for those interested in a more complete description of the species discussed below - J. R.

A Few Common Summer Bloomers

In searching for a species to use as the subject for this writing, I found many common species that I've not yet covered. I'll review a few of these, as they should be familiar to those of us who have visited at least one goat prairie.



I can't think of a single goat prairie that I visited where I haven't seen the purple prairie clover (*Dalea purpurea*). The conical shaped purple flower-heads make for certain identification. When not in bloom, the narrow five leaflets on the compound leaves are distinct enough that it is either this species or its less-common relative the white prairie clover (*Dalea candida*). Other than the obvious difference in the flower-head (white), the white prairie clover has leaflets that are a bit wider. Both of these species reach heights up to two feet, and typically have multiple stems per plant. These are a couple of the many late summer blooming legumes found on goat prairies

Another very common species on goat prairies is the flowering spurge (*Euphorbia corollata*). Don't let the name spurge bring fear into your minds, as this species is not an aggressive non-native plant like the leafy spurge. The commonness of this species stems more from the ability to efficiently seed itself, rather than the rhizomatous nature of the leafy spurge. As with all spurges, it has milky stems. The flowering spurge reaches a height of up to 3 ft, with branching stems near the flowering parts. The flowers are white bracts that appear to be petals, and tend to be loosely clustered on the branching stems. The seeds form inside capsules that explode, thus sending the seeds some distance from the parent plant. This trait makes seed collection challenging!

The last common species I'll mention here is the Prairie Tickseed (*Coreopsis palmata*). This plant has distinctive three-lobed leaves (thus the "palmata") running up the single un-branched stem. It attains a height of 2 ft or so, and is usually found in patches. The one and a half inch wide flowers are a bold yellow, having usually 8 petals that are notched at the end. The seeds often persist on the head through the winter (thus making seed collection easy!).

Now that we have these common species out of the way, I'll provide more challenging species in the next Taxonomy 101 write-up. Until then, look for these common species on your goat-like hikes on the Coulee Region uplands.

Don't Forget!
Membership Meeting
Saturday May 31st
10:00 am
at the
Norskedalen Center

There's Something Special about Prairie Enthusiasts!



Whether it's being decked out in the latest burn-wear, giving off a funky, but alluring, smoky essence or sporting a series of tastefully displayed smudges, there's something special about a prairie enthusiast. Who else do you know who enjoys inhaling gasoline and diesel fumes while carrying a forty-pound dripping water pack through burning embers? These are the same folks who gladly strain their backs to yank honeysuckle or risk second degree burns to dig out wild parsnip. And who but a prairie enthusiast responds to other's grandchildren pictures with a photo of their first blooming *Anemone patens*? If this description sounds like you (and you know it does), you, too, may be a prairie enthusiast! Congratulations for being committed (probably a poor choice of words, but you know what I mean) and keep up the good work!

A special "Thanks" to Margaret Farley, our featured model, and to Al Gartzke for his wonderful photo – DN

Let Us Hear from You!

Do you have information that may be of interest to other chapter members? We would be glad to share your news items, helpful tips or prairie experiences. Just forward those to me by mail or email. We all look forward to hearing from you!!

Don Nelson, Coulee Chapter Newsletter Editor
608-435-6203
don094@centurytel.net