



# COULEE CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2007

## Chapter President's Message

More and more folks are asking TPE, through its members, to act as experts in the field of "prairies." That may include asking for information on such things as plant identification, planting prairie plants, or maintaining plantings or prairie remnants. While each of us has built up our own knowledge over the years, are any of us really experts? Individually, we have varying levels of knowledge about prairies, but I for one, realize that I only know a small fraction of what is known as a whole.

I've been sharing some information with you on prairie plants through the *Taxonomy 101* feature in our chapter newsletter. The recent addition of the *Prairie Practice* feature in our chapter newsletter adds the opportunity for us to share some experience that might assist others in making wise choices in establishing or maintaining prairies. Although these are good avenues to share knowledge, it is obviously limited.

I find most of my learning occurs through conversations with, or presentations by, other expert want-to-be types. Keep this in mind as we try to find the time to attend a field trip or assist on some work party. Not only do we get to see prairies on the hikes, or do our part to conserve prairies through our management actions, but we have the opportunity to share knowledge amongst ourselves while doing so. I hope to be both the teacher and the student the next time we meet.

*Jim*

### Mark Your Calendars for These Upcoming Events

- Our next Chapter Meeting will be held on Saturday March 31, 2007 at 10:00 am in Room 301 in Cowley Hall on the campus of UW – La Crosse. Check inside the newsletter for details.

## **TPE Coulee Chapter Officers and Officials for 2007**

Name	Office	Phone	Email
Jim Rogala	President	608-786-1855	<a href="mailto:jrogala@usgs.gov">jrogala@usgs.gov</a>
Jessica Bolwahn	Vice President	608-637-3753	<a href="mailto:Ja4bolwahn@hotmail.com">Ja4bolwahn@hotmail.com</a>
Barb Christie	Past President	608-634-2110	<a href="mailto:edbarbc@webtv.net">edbarbc@webtv.net</a>
George Johnston	Secretary	608-823-6098	<a href="mailto:ctr66098@centurytel.net">ctr66098@centurytel.net</a>
Ned Gatzke	Treasurer	608-269-2033	<a href="mailto:cngatzke@centurytel.net">cngatzke@centurytel.net</a>
Diane Hanson	Member-at-large	608-637-3735	<a href="mailto:nosnah@mwt.net">nosnah@mwt.net</a>
Don Nelson	Newsletter editor	608-435-6203	<a href="mailto:don094@centurytel.net">don094@centurytel.net</a>
Jean Stramel	Membership coordinator	608-625-4069	<a href="mailto:jeanstr@mwt.net">jeanstr@mwt.net</a>

## **Looking Ahead to Important Chapter Events**

### **Coulee Chapter Spring Meeting – March 31, 2007**

The meeting will open with a presentation by Jim Theler entitled *Pre-Columbian Native American Adaptations to the Prairie-savanna Landscape of Western Wisconsin*. After Jim's presentation we will be

- Electing selected chapter officers (Secretary and Treasurer),
- Finalizing our spring work parties,
- Critiquing our chapter display, and
- Looking at our strategic planning process.

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

### **Work Party – March 31, 2007**

Following the chapter meeting on March 31, there will be a work party at Decorah Mound near Galesville (weather permitting). We will be establishing firebreaks for a spring burn. Work will include raking (or blowing) leaves and cutting brush along the break. Bring leaf rakes, a leaf blower (if you have one), and loppers, along with sturdy gloves and enough strength to make the climb to the top of Decorah Mound. The view is worth the hike!

### **Coulee Chapter to Host TPE's 2007 Summer Picnic and 2008 Conference**

The Coulee Region Chapter will host the 2007 **TPE Summer Picnic** at the Holland Sand Prairie on Sunday July 15. We have reserved a picnic shelter in the park adjacent to the prairie. We have also booked the Holland Town Hall (also adjacent to the prairie) in the event of rain. Field trips are frequently held before or after the picnic. The TPE picnic is one of our group's major social events, so please make plans to attend.

The **Annual TPE Conference and Banquet** in 2008 will likely be at UW-L on March 8, 2008. We are seeking a few more members to join us in planning for these events. Please contact Jim Rogala if you'd like to be involved.

## Coulee Chapter Business Items

### Minutes of January 2007 Membership Meeting (submitted by George Johnston)

The meeting of the Coulee Region Prairie Enthusiasts was convened at 10 AM on 1/12/2007 at Room 301 Crowley Hall, UW - La Crosse.

In attendance: George and Carmeen Johnston, Scott Cooper, Greg Nessler, Don Nelson, Ned Gatzke, Andrea Benco, Renae Mitchell, Jessica Bolwahn, Margaret Farley, Jean Stramel, Larry Severeid, Sam Skemp, and Jim Rogala.

#### I. Guest Speakers

Meredith Thomsen, UW-L Department of Biology, provided a presentation entitled *California Dreaming - The Invasion the California Grasslands*. In her talk, Meredith reviewed her research on the impact of Mediterranean species on California grasslands since the earliest years of settlement.

Renae Mitchell, TPE Executive Director, discussed the work of TPE Central including organizational, administrative, grant writing and fund raising activities. Renae also reviewed the TPE Central budget for 2006 including an explanation of Central's need for additional funds.

#### II. Chapter Business Items

President Jim Rogala summarized an earlier discussion by the chapter board concerning a transfer chapter funds to support Central activities. Following additional discussion, Jim Rogala moved that we transfer \$5000 to Central. Don Nelson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Jim Rogala provided information about upcoming work parties. The sites discussed included Sugar Creek, Decorah Mound, Kickapoo Reserve, Elk Creek, the Lakeview planting and the Hixon remnants. Jim also mentioned the possibility of chapter involvement at the Holland Sand Prairie, Norskadahlen, Vernon County-owned remnants, the West Salem School Forest and a highway bypass project near Viroqua. Jim circulated a note pad requesting information on the locations and dates on other worksites, including the members' own prairies.

Several of those in attendance commented on the importance of members sharing information about prairie management techniques. Don Nelson suggested using the newsletter as a forum for members to exchange management and resource ideas.

Jim Rogala requested information from the members on the hours they had volunteered for TPE activities in 2006. This information is crucial to TPE's ability to provide inkind contributions for current and future grants. Jim will email the membership requesting their volunteer hours.

#### III. Quick Items and Announcements

Our chapter will host the 2007 TPE Annual Meeting and Picnic. The Holland Sand Prairie is the likely site for the picnic probably during July.

Our chapter will also host the TPE Annual Conference in 2008. The conference will be held at the UW – La Crosse campus.

Barb Christie is collecting raffle and Silent Auction items for this year's Annual Conference in Menominee. Barb is requesting additional items for the conference.

Jim Rogala is creating a brochure about goat prairies and is requesting assistance from the membership.

Meeting adjourned at 12:30.

#### Coulee Chapter Treasurer's Report for 2006

Treasurer Ned Gatzke reports that the chapter entered 2006 with a balance of \$4496.06. For the year, the chapter's income was \$2546.18 while the chapter's expenses were \$1801.10. These figures result in a balance of \$5241.14 at the end of 2006. Copies of the complete Treasurer's Report will be available at the March 31 Membership meeting.

### **Prairie Stewardship**

#### **Prairie Practice**

**Editor's Note: Prairie Practice is a new feature intended to provide a forum for members to share what has been tried, what has worked (and what hasn't!) as well as sources of expertise and resources that members have found to be of value. Please submit your items for Prairie Practice to Don Nelson at [don094@centurytel.net](mailto:don094@centurytel.net).**

#### Is There a Burn Plan in Your Future? (submitted by Don Nelson)

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TIFF (LZW) decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

Many of us have established our prairies through the CRP program. As you well know, the CRP program comes with numerous strings attached. I recently found out about a new "string" associated with prairie burns on CRP acres. When I contacted the Monroe County FSA Office about the initial burn on my prairie, I was informed that I would be required to complete, submit and have approved a NRCS Prescribed Burn Plan.

The FSA Office sent me the three-page NRCS form along with guidelines for conducting a prescribed burn. Additional required documentation including a burn plan map and an aerial photo of the site. In general, the form asked me to detail specific aspects of my plan including my objectives for the burn, site information, a list of pre burn notifications (neighbors, sheriff, fire department, etc), the names of the folks helping with the burn and a list of the available burn and safety equipment.

I was asked to use the burn plan map to layout the site including its boundaries, firebreaks, roads, water resources and escape routes. I also was instructed to draw in the sections to be burned along with the sequence of the burn including projected head, flank and back burns.

My plan was reviewed at the county, regional and state level. I received a critique of my original plan and did have to rework some aspects of the plan in consultation with the NCRS folks. My plan was then resubmitted and I have since received approval to proceed with the burn. The approval process took about six weeks from beginning to end.

While few of us look forward to doing paper work, I did find that completing the form and the map were useful preparations for my first burn. Be sure to check *Prairie Practice* in the next newsletter to find out how it all turned out!

### Spring Work Parties

**This partial listing provides some general information on upcoming work parties. Please contact the listed person for more details and final plans. These are great opportunities to hone our skills in conducting prescribed burns and other management techniques.** Note: the work party list is also available on our chapter web page.

Name, location of prairie	Type of work	Date and time	Contact person with phone, email info
Decorah Mound, near Galesville	Fire break	March 31, early afternoon	Jim Rogala, 786-1855, jrogala@usgs.gov
Rogala remnants, near Rockland	Fire break	Late March	Jim Rogala
Rogala remnants, near Rockland	Burn	Early-April	Jim Rogala
Decorah Mound, near Galesville	Burn	Mid-April (14-15 <sup>th</sup> )	Jim Rogala
Pope planting, near Readstown	Burn	April	Sue Pope, 236-4281, smpope@wisc.edu
Nelson planting, near Wilton	Burn	Mid to late April	Don Nelson, 435-6203, don094@centurytel.net
Christie planting, near Viroqua	Burn	Late April	Barb Christie, 634-2110, edbarbc@webtv.net
Kickapoo Valley Reserve	Burn	Late April	Greg Nessler, 627-1376, prairienurse@hotmail.com
Rogala planting, near Rockland	Burn	Week of April 23 <sup>th</sup> , weeknight	Jim Rogala
Lakeview planting, in West Salem	Burn	Week of April 23 <sup>th</sup> , weeknight	Jim Rogala
Johnston planting, near Norwalk	Burn	May	George Johnston, 823-6098, ctr66098@centurytel.net
Norskedalen, near Coon Valley	Girdling	May	Jim Rogala
Hixon Forest remnants, near La Crosse	Girdling	May	Jim Rogala

### **Prairie Education and Outreach**

#### Stewardship Fund on the Edge (submitted by Ned Gatzke)

I recently participated in Conservation Lobby Day at the state capitol sponsored by the Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters. The purpose of the lobby day was to place over 400 conservationists from all over the state in a direct conversation with their legislators concerning conservation priorities for the 2007-2008 legislative session. A major objective of the Lobby Day participants was to urge legislators to support reauthorization and enhancement of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund.

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund has been used extensively by conservancies and state agencies to acquire and protect significant parcels of land and shorelines. The Fund also is used to develop state properties such as visitor centers at state wildlife refuges such as the visitor center at the Kickapoo Valley Reserve. Local communities can also use Stewardship Funds to acquire and develop park and recreation lands. The acquisition of over 475,000 acres of recreational lands, wildlife habitat and other natural areas through the Stewardship Fund explains why a broad coalition of organizations strongly supports the purpose and reauthorization of the Fund.

As many of us know, the price of land is not going down and development pressures continue to increase thus placing many large land parcels and sensitive environments at risk of being lost. The Stewardship Fund allows the public to compete for these parcels, enabling agencies and organizations to quickly and acquire the parcels.

As Prairie Enthusiasts, the Stewardship Fund represents our collective conservation values and our desire to protect ecologically significant places. Our legislators need to hear from us concerning our desire that the Stewardship Fund be reauthorized and at an increased level to keep up with inflating land values.

More information about the Stewardship Fund and the Conservation Priorities may be obtained from the Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters ([www.conservationvotersinstitute.org](http://www.conservationvotersinstitute.org)) and the Department of Natural Resources ([www.dnr.state.wi.us](http://www.dnr.state.wi.us)) click on Natural Resources, then Financial Assistance, then Grants, then Stewardship.

### **Goat Prairie Brochure**

At the last meeting, Jim Rogala unveiled a draft of a brochure that will contain information on goat (hill) prairies, the most common prairie remnant in the Coulee Region. The brochure is being developed as an informational tool for use during landowner contacts. The brochure will contain a brief description of what goat prairies are, where they are found, how to identify them (e.g., common plant species), what are the threats to their continuing existence, and types of management actions that are used for restoration. Jim is still looking for a digital photo of a goat prairie to grace the front of the brochure, so contact him if you have one that is suitable.

### **Goat Prairie Display**

Although our goal was to have a display ready for the conference (as all chapters were encouraged to have one), we didn't quite pull that off. However, we still intend to put a display/poster together in the near future. Jeff Fredrick has offered to lead this production, and will continue to work with other members to create a display. Following the lead of the brochure, we selected goat prairies as the topic of our display. The display will provide a wide range of information about goat prairies from general characteristics to the more rare and unseen denizens. The display would be available for use by TPE members from any chapter as well as our conservation "partners." As with the brochure, we are seeking photos of scenic views of goat prairies. In addition, we could use digital images of species that are common to goat prairies. Contact Jim Rogala if you have photos to contribute.

## Information about Prairies and Oak Savannas

### Taxonomy 101 for Plants of the Coulee Goat Prairies (submitted 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.*

#### The “Grass” That is Really an Iris.

I last presented a brief introduction to grasses of goat prairies. To further complicate the grass identification issue, there are several forbs that have grass-like leaves. One such diminutive forb is the blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium spp.*). Despite the common name, it is not a grass at all, but rather in the Iris family.

Prior to flowering, it would be difficult to find among the true grasses and may be missed during an informal survey. While in flower during late spring to early summer, the small flowers can be readily found if looking close enough to the ground (it seldom reaches a foot tall, especially on the poor soils of goat prairies). Though the petals are sometimes a striking blue, they are often pale blue to whitish. At first glance it appears to have six petals, but in reality there are three pairs of petals and sepals that are attached to each other at the base. The center is yellow. There is usually a small umbel of flowers, with one or more flowers blooming at one time. Upon maturing, the seeds are distinctive enough that you still may see the capsules if you search hard enough.

If you read closely above, you noticed that I did not list a particular species of blue-eyed grass. There are several that may be found on goat prairies, but are difficult to distinguish from one another. The most common is the prairie blue-eyed grass (*Sisyrinchium campestre*). Even trained taxonomists have difficulties distinguishing the different species, so, for our purposes; we’ll just call them blue-eyed grass. Try finding these little irises during your next hike on your favorite goat prairie.

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### 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

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