

The Prairie Enthusiasts Protect a Rare Piece of Wisconsin's Natural Heritage

MADISON, Wisconsin.— The Prairie Enthusiasts is pleased to announce the conservation of 40 acres of land in eastern Dane County, in Christiana Township, near Cambridge. The acquisition contains drumlin hills formed by the passing of the last glacier over 11,000 years ago. It also has original prairie sod with native wildflowers and grasses that once covered much of southern Wisconsin prior to European settlement in the 1840s.

The dry and dry-mesic remnants of prairie (13 acres) within the new preserve are fine examples of native plant communities that once dominated southern Wisconsin, but are now rare to find in their original states. The preserve harbors over 100 native prairie plant species, including stunning displays of cylindrical blazingstar, rough blazingstar and bird's-foot violet, a healthy population of the federally-threatened prairie bush-clover, and, in a few locations, species typical of very rare mesic prairie, species such as prairie lily, rattlesnake master, rosinweed, and compass plant. In addition, the preserve is home to eight species of prairie-dependent leafhoppers, including *Memnonia panzeri* which is a State Species of Greatest Conservation Need that feeds exclusively upon prairie dropseed. The 40-acre site, all in grass cover, also supports grassland bird species that have been in severe decline over the past 40 years or more, species such as eastern meadowlark, bobolink, and grasshopper sparrow.



The preserve was purchased from Glenn Smith, whose family had owned the land since the 1920s. Glenn, a TPE supporter who enjoys walking the prairie hills, is very pleased to see the land conserved as habitat for threatened and declining species, and as a place where people can experience a rare piece of our natural history. The purchase was made possible in part with a

grant from the US Fish & Wildlife Service for permanent protection of critical habitat for Endangered/Threatened species. The grant covered ¾ of the purchase price. The Prairie Enthusiasts is pursuing grants and donations to cover the remaining expense.

We are extremely grateful to Glenn for recognizing the significance of this natural



treasure and for facilitating its restoration and protection. We are also grateful to the US Fish and Wildlife Service for supporting this conservation effort, and to all of the volunteers who have helped with the site's recovery. The Prairie Enthusiasts and its volunteers have been managing and restoring the site for the past 12 years. This acquisition now provides permanent protection.

Reiner-Smith Drumlin Prairie will be open to the public for hiking, bird-watching, and other low impact outdoor activities. Guided hikes have been, and will continue to be, periodically offered to the public. Plans are under way with the WI Department of Natural Resources to dedicate the preserve as a State Natural Area.

The Prairie Enthusiasts organization works with private landowners, volunteers, and grant money to recover and protect remnants of original prairie, oak savanna, and oak woodland communities.

