



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Prairie Enthusiasts Protect a Critical Piece of Our Prairie Heritage

The Prairie Enthusiasts is pleased to announce the conservation of 62 acres of land called the Shea Prairie in eastern Iowa County. The purchase includes original pre-settlement prairie buffered by 54 acres of grassland, and a half-mile on Williams Creek, a cold-water trout stream.

The Shea Prairie is within the Mounds View Grassland, one of the three most significant concentrations of prairie sod and grassland bird habitat within the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area (MRPHA). It contains eight acres of original remnant prairie, 13 acres of stream and wetland habitat, and 36 acres of CRP grassland. There is also great potential for restoring another six acres of prairie. It lies within an area that was once a large prairie that extended north to the Military Ridge and covered many thousands of acres.

Rena Mitchell, Executive Director of The Prairie Enthusiasts noted, "The Shea property is a biogeographical lynchpin connecting two critical pieces of this important prairie complex. We are grateful to the Prairie Enthusiast volunteers who discovered and helped clear brush from the remnant, to the Shea's for recognizing the conservation needs of this natural treasure, and to the state Stewardship Fund program, The Nature Conservancy, Pheasants Forever and our members who supported this protection effort."

The Military Ridge area, and especially the Mounds View Grassland, provide critical habitat for rare or declining grassland/prairie species such as regal fritillary butterflies, bobolinks, meadow larks, upland sandpipers, northern harriers, dickcissels, Henslow's sparrows, and grasshopper sparrows.

The sellers, John and Diane Shea, are pleased to see the land being conserved so that people will be able to experience the sights and sounds of the prairie and so that habitat for rare and declining species is protected.

The Nature Conservancy was instrumental in helping with the negotiations and obtaining the option. The Shea Prairie is just west of 276 acres the Conservancy bought from A to Z Farm

Industries in 2005, which will eventually be transferred to The Prairie Enthusiasts for long-term protection and management.

“The Nature Conservancy is pleased to assist The Prairie Enthusiasts in conserving the Shea Prairie,” said Steve Richter, the Conservancy’s director of land management. “Thanks to the good work of The Prairie Enthusiasts and local citizens, children today and future generations will have the opportunity to experience the beauty and diversity of Wisconsin’s prairie heritage. We are privileged to work in this landscape where the citizens of Iowa County have been careful stewards of the land for generations.”

The land is being purchased through a combination of Knowles-Nelson Stewardship funds and private monies. Both the Dane and Iowa County Chapters of Pheasants Forever donated major funding toward the project as did several Prairie Enthusiast members.

The property will be open to the public for hiking, bird-watching, fishing, and limited hunting of pheasant, turkey, and deer. The Prairie Enthusiasts will pay property taxes at agricultural use rates.

The Prairie Enthusiasts is part of a diverse partnership of local landowners; local citizen groups; conservation organizations; local, state, and federal agricultural and resource agencies; and land trusts working together to conserve important grassland habitat, open space, public access and cultural heritage in the 50,000-acre Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area in Dane and Iowa counties.

The Prairie Enthusiasts will host a dedication ceremony and field trips at the Shea Prairie this fall and the details will be listed on their Web site at www.theprairieenthusiasts.org.

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The Prairie Enthusiasts (TPE) is a private organization committed to the protection and management of native prairie and savanna of the Upper Midwest. They have an incorporated, nonprofit status and are a grass roots organization comprised of volunteers. The Prairie Enthusiasts differ from other conservation groups in its sole dedication to the preservation of the last remaining pieces of the once vast, now endangered, prairies and savannas of the Upper Midwest. This is accomplished through land protection, such as holding land title or conservation easements and management such as prescribed burning, brush clearing and seed collecting. TPE has chapters in Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. Volunteers and contributions are always welcome. On the Web at www.theprairieenthusiasts.org.