



The PRAIRIE PROMOTER

VOL 21, NO.3 Fall 2006

Grassroots Conservation at Work

President's Message

By Evanne Hunt

It is a great time to be a prairie enthusiast!

TPE is an organization where each member can make a difference. Every time you participate at a work party, lead a field trip, share your knowledge, or volunteer your time, you help achieve the mission of TPE:

- Ensure the perpetuation of the remaining native prairies and savannas through preservation, restoration, and management.
- Educate the public through presentations and publications about our prairie and savanna heritage.
- Assist both public agencies and private groups to restore prairie and savanna communities.

I believe we have a noble mission -- to save our "rain forest" - the prairie and oak savanna of Wisconsin, Illinois, and Minnesota. Just like the rain forests, there is so much we do not know about the ecosystems. It would be a tragedy if they disappeared. The flowers, grasses, birds, and insects are individually fascinating, but the ecosystem as a whole is amazing. To quote Aldo Leopold,

"Only those who know the most about [the complexity of the land organism] can appreciate how little we know about it. The last word in ignorance is the man who says of an animal or plant: "What good is it?" If the land mechanism as a whole is good, then every part is good, whether we understand it or not. If the biota, in the course of aeons, has built something we like but do not understand, then who but a fool would discard seemingly useless parts? To keep every cog and wheel is the first precaution of intelligent tinkering."

It is a great time to be a prairie enthusiast. It is a great time to be President of TPE. I want to hear from you. I want to hear your suggestions and complaints. And I want to hear your enthusiasm. Contact me anytime at 715-381-1291 or eahunt@pressenter.com. This is a volunteer position, so feel free to contact me evenings and weekends.

From the Desk of the Outgoing President – Departing Words

I wish to thank Evanne Hunt for stepping forward to take on the duties of TPE President. Her commitment to our organization and its mission is much appreciated. I can assure you all that the reins of TPE are now in very capable hands.

Rich Henderson

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The Prairie Enthusiasts (TPE) 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, TPE has protected 1,417 acres that harbor at least five state or

federally protected species through acquisitions, easements and management agreements. TPE has a stewardship program which provides active management to ensure the ongoing health of protected sites.

TPE is actively involved in planting prairie on its 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.

TPE 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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*The Prairie Promoter is a quarterly publication of The Prairie Enthusiasts. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without permission. We welcome submissions of letters, articles, announcements, artwork and photographs that are relevant to prairie and savanna ecosystems. Material should be typed; electronic submissions are strongly preferred. Writers who use computers can e-mail their submissions to jenkinma@uwplatt.edu using MS word. **Do not format.** Letters and articles may be edited for length or style. Computer disks, art, and photographs will be returned. Deadlines for submission of material are February 25 (Spring issue); May 25 (Summer issue); August 25 (Fall issue); and **November 25** (Winter issue).*

TPE CHAPTER	CONTACT
Chippewa Savannas	Darren Lochner - 715-855-8325
Coulee Region	Jim Rogala - 608-786-1855
Empire Sauk	Rich Henderson - 608-845-7065
Northwest Illinois	Robert Wehrle - 815-777-9015
Prairie Bluff	Rob Baller - 608-368-0901
St Croix Valley	Evanne Hunt - 751-381-1291
Prairie Smoke (MN)	Joel Dunnette - 507-365-8091
Southwest Wisconsin	Jesse Bennett - 608-794-2724
WinnebagoLand	Randall Maurer920-748-7823

Editorial Volunteers

Coulee Region Chapter 608-637-3735	Diane Hanson S5588A CTH NN Viroqua WI 54665
Empire Sauk Chapter 608-233-2483	Cate Harrington Charrington@tnc.org
Northwest Illinois Chapter 815-947-2287	Rickie Rachuy 11219 E. Stockton Rd Stockton IL 61085
Prairie Bluff Chapter 608-368-0901	Rob Baller 935½ Church St Beloit WI 53711
Southwest Wisconsin Chapter 608-794-2724	Jesse Bennett 13058 Rock School Rd Glen Haven WI 53810
St Croix Valley Chapter Eokeefe@pressenter.com	Donna O'Keefe 715-425-7227
Prairie Smoke Chapter 507-867-9229	Andrea Mueller 13134 Mill Creek Rd Chatfield MN 55923
WinnebagoLand Chapter Hseaver@cybershamanix.com	Harmon Seaver 651 Jackson Street Oshkosh WI 54901
TPE Editor jenkinma@uwplatt.edu	Mary Jenkins Penn

FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR

(Overlooking Elderberry Prairie)

By Renae Mitchell

As I drove along the mighty Mississippi in late August the reddening of the sumac and the yellow flowers of Indian grass reminded me that autumn is here. I had installed the photography exhibit in La Crosse at the Pumphouse Arts Center where the Coulee Region chapter of The Prairie Enthusiasts held a wonderful reception, sponsored by the Mississippi Valley Conservancy (MVC). I met several MVC members and we all enjoyed an enthusiastic presentation about bluffland prairie creatures by DNR ecologist Armand Bartz. The next morning I joined Jim Rogala and others on a hike through the newly acquired Holland Sand Prairie which is a unique site with dry sand prairie on floodplain dune and swale and an oak savanna that are being restored. It is a great example of a partnership between TPE, MVC, DNR, the town of Hollandale and Friends of Holland Sand Prairie that recently saved this place and its unique species of special concern like the elusive prairie dunewort from certain extermination by a planned subdivision development. We could even see the old markers near special plants like hairy

puccoon and silky prairie clover where MCV was preparing to dig the plants for relocation, as the sale for development of the site was nearly assured in the next year! Talk about a close one!

I look forward to the upcoming photography exhibit showings AT tHe kiak poo Valley Reserve Visitor Center Sept 13 - 25, The Phipps center for the Arts in Hudson, WI, near the twin cities, Sept 29-Oct 29 and at the UW-Platteville Nohr Art Gallery Nov. 6 - Nov. 22. These chapters are inviting members of their communities to the receptions - folks that have been our partners in projects, or new people who may become members, purchase prints, and learn more about our efforts.

I was also in Galena recently for a meeting with Northwestern Illinois Prairie Enthusiast chapter leaders regarding our mutual needs and desires. Like most TPE chapters and the organization as a whole, we are currently trying to strategically plan for the future. We all have important prairie remnants and restorations we are protecting and we are all feeling the need for more volunteers, more resources (like land management grants and donations for operating expenses) and more pull with local authorities and agencies to get things done. By sticking together we have more opportunities for grants, more sharing of resources and information, more members and more clout!

A good example of this is the recent acquisition of Shea Prairie by the Empire-Sauk chapter and over \$300,000 in land management and inventory grants recently received for work throughout SW WI.

In September the TPE board of directors will be holding a strategic planning session with a facilitator from Gathering Waters. We will be reviewing our many accomplishments and the current state of the organization as well as working to plan the next steps. We are at a critical stage in the organization. We could leap forward to find benefactors, build endowments and become a sustainable, accredited land trust with professional staff and more members/volunteers. We could pull back and rethink our structure and function. We could come up with innovative ideas and new relationships. We could use your input even if you receive this after the September date. We are also counting on your contributions to the upcoming annual fund drive. Last year we raised ten thousand dollars! These contributions are needed above and beyond your membership dues, in order to keep the overall organization operational and ensure an optimistic outlook (say that three times)! You will soon be receiving a letter in the mail outlining our accomplishments and funding needs. If you know of other friends of the prairies and oak savannas that we could write to as well please give their contact information to your local chapter representatives or call or email me at 262-473-2956 or tpedirector@idcnet.com.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

TPE Butterfly Enthusiasts!

Saturday, August 26, 2006

11 a.m. Butterfly Walk

12:30 p.m. Meeting

You are invited to a planning meeting to discuss forming a Madison local chapter of the North American Butterfly Association (NABA). Join us for a butterfly walk before the meeting! Meet at UW-Madison Arboretum Visitor Center parking lot at 11:00 AM for a butterfly walk around Curtis Prairie (rain cancels the walk). The meeting will be inside the Visitor Center at 12:30 PM (rain or shine!).

Bring along a sack lunch, water, and binoculars if you have them. For directions to the Arboretum, visit their web site (<http://uwarboretum.org>). For more information about NABA, visit <http://www.naba.org>. If you have questions about the meeting, email Ann Thering therannc@yahoo.com

The Prairie Bluff Chapter (PBC) of TPE developed the parsnip predator shovel, which has been getting quite a bit of press lately. There was an article by Rob Baller recently in the Ecological Restoration (Vol. 24, Number 2, June 2006 p. 108 "Tool Provides Lightweight, Ergonomic Option for Removing Wild Parsnip (Wisconsin)") explaining the features of it's custom design. This photo of WI Governor Doyle posing with parsnip predator at the dedication of the Friends of Hank Aaron State Trail is featured on the DNR website! The Parsnip predators and terminator version are available for \$32.00 from the PBC through Nick Faessler at faessler@wekz.net but he is having a hard time keeping up with he demand for these popular tools! Way to go PBC!



Governor Doyle, Fohast & DNR Gang with the Predator

NO BIRD LEFT BEHIND: Bird interactions with tall structures and how to reduce the risk

Plan now to attend the Upper Midwest Audubon Conference at Ho-Chunk Convention Center, Wisconsin Dells, **Friday – Sunday, Oct. 13-15, 2006** for an exciting and inspiring event! In the tradition of last year's first annual Midwest Audubon Conference held in Illinois, the Wisconsin Audubon Council will host this year's event. Cosponsors include WBCI, WI DNR, and others.

Friday, October 13, the Wisconsin Audubon Council will partner with the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative, WIDNR, and others to bring you the latest information on how to reduce risks to migrating birds.

Saturday and Sunday, October 14-15, workshops and field trips will focus on citizen science, birds and birding, habitat issues, and more. Jim Fitzpatrick will be the Saturday evening banquet speaker, talking about his experiences with the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. See www.madisonaudubon.org for more information.

Philosophy, Conservation, and Prairie Landscape

By Richard Oberle, Board Member, TPE

I cannot help but think about all the choices that we as individuals and a society make that truly affect the long term future of humanity, our environment, and the world as we know it. How good are we at conserving the truly natural things around us, things that took thousands or hundreds of thousands of years to develop? Generally, as a people we are rather shortsighted. Projects that span decades are beyond our imagination or desire. We are great at short-term objectives, such as building homes, roads, offices, commercial spaces, and farming. For example, a bur oak tree may live 400 years but how many people would choose to plant a slow to mature but long-lived oak in their yard instead of a faster growing ash or maple? How many people choose beautiful showy native prairie plants for their garden? Most people are discouraged once they learn that most prairie plants may not produce flowers for several years; even though prairie plants may outlive other plants. In our instant gratification society, how many people are courageous enough to think beyond our lifetime and truly consider the long-term future when making difficult choices?

Think about the transformation of the original native ecosystems of the Midwest as they existed prior to European settlement. Prairies and oak savannas were among the most widespread ecosystems but now they are the most endangered. In less than the span of one lifetime (about 60 years) most of the American tallgrass prairie was forever converted to

agriculture and other uses. In many ways, we owe the success of America to the lost prairies because prairie plants and their root systems created our best used agriculture soil.

It was not until after my 40th birthday that I consciously stepped foot onto a small remnant of original prairie, sod that had escaped the steel plow. Why did it take so long before I witnessed a prairie remnant up close? Our landscape has changed so much and most of us are unaware of the transformation. For most of us, the weeds and agricultural grasses that we see along the roadside are what we think has forever existed in the Midwest. We assume that what we have observed during our lifetime has always been there. However, it was not long ago when the Midwestern landscape looked different; there were fewer trees and there were vast open prairies with scattered oak savannas. Today, in a landscape disturbed or manipulated by modern humans, areas where farming ceases to occur, or in locations where fire is not allowed on the landscape, the vegetation is mostly non-native plants. Uninformed people confuse today's foreign plants with the original native Wisconsin vegetation that has been replaced by these non-natives. Many of the foreign plants are considered invasive weeds; some like dandelion or chicory intentionally brought to America as food sources or for other purposes, others came unintentionally.

The few remaining truly natural areas of prairie and oak savanna remnants are often hidden away in remote or private locations or are covered by brush, new tree growth, or invasive weeds so they go unnoticed by the average individual. Since our landscape in the Midwest has been transformed so much, people who experience an original prairie for the first time may see the plants and insects as highly unusual. These creatures appear different and foreign to the average person because they are uncommon and are rarely found where most people can view them. With proper management, these remnants can sometimes be restored to their original integrity.

One acre of rainforest is permanently disappearing each second, thus global transformation is still occurring, as it did for the prairie of the Midwest. People understand the value of time in regard to tree growth. Do we fail to understand the value of time in regard to prairie or grasslands? Like trees, replanted prairie areas require time to grow and mature, time to regain their natural balance. A prairie planting is not as simple and as quick as planting a lawn or a field of brome grass; it takes a mix of many prairie species and much time, and still a planting may never match the diversity of a prairie remnant for hundreds of years, assuming that seed of all of the original species can even be located. This exemplifies the importance of those few pieces of original prairie sod that still exist, usually along old roadsides, railroads or pioneer cemeteries or difficult to access cliffs and rocky back pastures. While prairie plantings give rare native plants a home and a chance to exist again on our landscape, the prairie remnants remain the true blueprints of the original. Remnants are warehouses of genetic diversity and they are home to species

that seldom find their way into the new plantings. Interestingly, I have noticed more and more of the common prairie plants being used by the City of Middleton in roadway meridian strips. With some luck, over time perhaps the prairie will escape back to the wild and replace the weeds that replaced the prairies.

Why all the talk about prairies? Because it represents conservation as it touches the heart of the Midwest. By saving the remaining prairie areas, we are conserving a part of history and protecting our native biodiversity for the future. Conservation allows future generations an opportunity to witness a part of the past that is nearly completely gone and leaves open options for species use in the future. It is very much like preserving a rare famous painting or a famous structure. The difference is that a prairie remnant is much older and its creatures may have uses we have not yet discovered. If time has value, then prairie landscape should be one of our most valuable remaining local treasures.

If you would like to witness the sensation of a managed original native prairie remnant in its full splendor, please contact me, Richard Oberle, Town of Middleton, 608 826-0559, and I will arrange to get you acquainted by one of the many field trips offered by *The Prairie Enthusiasts*. Likewise, similar tours are offered by *The Nature Conservancy*, the *Madison Audubon Society* and other local organizations. Additional information and links to Web sites of other organizations may be found by visiting www.theprairieenthusiasts.org.

This article was originally printed in the Middleton Times-Tribune opinion section. Richard has offered this for your use. I can also send this article to you electronically for distribution to your local newspapers. You could localize it by putting your local contact person and highlighting some of the projects or events your local chapter is having. We encourage TPE members to write articles and I am also available if you need help spreading the word about our organization and about prairies in general. Renae Mitchell tpedirector@idcnet.com or 262-473-2956.

The Sites We Save

By Rich Henderson

Name: Shea Prairie

Status: Protected TPE preserve.

Location: Iowa County, Wisconsin. Brigham Township (T6N, R5E, Section 26, W 1/2 of SW ¼). The preserve lies along the east side of Mounds View Road, ¾ miles south from the intersection of Mounds View and Prairie Grove Road.

Description & Significance: The Shea Prairie Preserve is 62 acres in size. It currently has 7 acres of good quality dry and dry-mesic remnant prairie, 6 acres of unplowed mesic prairie sod over-grown by trees and brush and severely degraded by grazing, 11 acres of cold water trout stream and stream bank

habitat, 2 acres of degraded spring seeps, ephemeral pond, and organic (peat/muck) wet soil, and lastly 36 acres of CRP grassland.

The preserve is located within the dissected, un-glaciated landscape of southwest Wisconsin. It lies within what was once a large prairie that extended north to the Military Ridge, covering many thousands of acres. At the time of the original land survey in 1832, the preserve was entirely prairie, including sedge meadow in the wettest areas. From the surveyor's descriptions, it was apparently devoid of trees or heavy brush. The property is traversed from north to south by William's Creek, and there are several areas of groundwater discharge (seeps), including a small ephemeral pond, where the valley floor meets the uplands. In the SE corner of the preserve, the land rises quickly to over 100 ft above the valley bottom. This high ground is where the prairie sod is located. The substrate is composed of Platteville and Galena dolomites, with a band of St. Peter's sandstone near the base of the slope. The latter formation is exposed at the surface in places. The soils across the property are predominantly silty to silt loam in texture. There is a layer of thin silt loam on the high ground and deep (> 4 ft thick) silty alluvium in the valley bottom. There is a deposit of wet organic (peat/muck) soil east of the stream. It is approximately 2 acres in size.



North Remnant, Shea Prairie by Amy Staffen

The preserve is significant for its remnant prairie vegetation and associated rare insects, and as wildlife habitat at both local and state levels. In fact, it may play a critical role in prairie ecosystem conservation in Wisconsin, for it lies within the 50,000-acre Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area (MRPHA). The MRPHA has been identified by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) as one of the best opportunities in the state for prairie/grassland conservation on a landscape scale. Due to the area's importance, there is a formal partnership of over a dozen public and private conservation organizations and agencies focusing resources into the MRPHA in an attempt to maintain and restore prairie and grassland habitat within a matrix of working farmland.

The MRPHA currently supports critical habitat for many

grassland dependent birds that have been in decline in recent decades, such as western meadowlarks, grasshopper sparrows, Henslow sparrows, dickcissels, bobolinks, northern harriers, and upland sandpipers. It is also home to a major concentration of the state-endangered regal fritillary butterfly (*Speyeria idalia*) which requires large tracts of prairie sod, as well as many other rare and endangered prairie insects and plants.

Specifically, the Shea Prairie is part of a sub-area within the MRPHA called the Mounds View Prairie Complex, which is one of the three most significant concentrations of prairie sod and grassland bird habitat within the MRPHA. The Shea Prairie Preserve is immediately adjacent to, or within 1/4 mile of, important tracts of high quality prairie remnants with rare and declining species and extensive acres of grasslands enrolled in CRP. The property connects to the 276-acre A to Z tract recently protected by The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and is soon to be transferred to TPE for management. With continued restoration and management, the Shea Prairie's 62 acres will provide important habitat for many area-sensitive grassland birds and other rare and declining prairie species.

Much of the high ground in the southeast corner of the property is too rocky and thin-soiled to have been tilled. Thus, it supports original unplowed prairie sod that ranges from dry to mesic in soil moisture on west and northwest facing aspects. The remnant sod is in varying stages of degradation due to both brush/tree invasion in recent decades and past livestock grazing. However, grazing has been absent for at least 32 years, and approximately half the prairie sod (the drier half of the moist spectrum) has rebounded to a state of moderate to good quality prairie vegetation. In the past few years, the recovery has been accelerated by active management. The remainder of the original unplowed prairie sod is dry-mesic to mesic in nature, and is extremely degraded by heavy tree/brush invasion and past grazing. The most level portion of this area may have been plowed a long time ago, but there is no clear evidence of old plow lines to confirm this.

Based on original land survey records and current conditions, the entire bottomland of the preserve was likely mesic to wet prairie with pockets of sedge meadow at the time of settlement. Most of it is now cropland that has been enrolled in the Federal Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). It was seeded to brome grass cover, which has since become weedy in many areas. The stream running through the property supports trout and is of very good water quality according to a Biotic Index based on stream invertebrates collected by the DNR. It has areas of sand and gravel bottom, and rock riffles. It appears to be in its original channel for the most part. Natural oxbows are present. There is some very limited native wet prairie and sedge meadow vegetation along parts of the
(Continued on page 7)

Why Do We Bother to Preserve Nature's Diversity?

By Rich Henderson, TPE Board Member

For some of us the motivation for preserving nature and its myriad forms of life on this planet stems from a sense of fairness or altruism. We do it for the sake of the species and nature itself. We believe they have as much of a right to exist as we do.

For some of us the motivation has a moral or religious foundation. We believe God created this world for us to have dominion over and consider His creation as good. We therefore feel obligated to be good stewards of God's creation as is written in the Bible. Preserving nature and its species seems to be in line with being good stewards, and thus to do so is a small step toward salvation.



Curt Meine's "BRRR OAK"

Some of us are more utilitarian in our outlook. We view nature as a bank or insurance policy of genetic resources or a provider of services such as oxygen or clean water. We think it simply a wise choice to retain all of nature's pieces in case there is information we have not yet tapped into to improve crops, cure diseases, etc.

Lastly, there are those of us that seem to be simply and inextricably linked to nature and other forms of life. We seem to need them for our emotional wellbeing, and to satisfy our ingrained curiosity to explore and experience. To us, nature provides recreation and wonderment for our minds. We realize that, as we lose species, natural ecosystems, and wild areas, we become poorer in opportunities to experience and enjoy life, and to keep our minds active. E.O. Wilson calls this connection to nature "Biophilia". He believes we humans are so "hardwire" connected to the biodiversity of the natural world that we personally, and as a society, begin to suffer emotionally and physically when deprived of the connections. As Aldo Leopold stated "There are those who can live without nature and those who can not." Those of us in the latter group have a strong motivation to preserve nature's diversity.

There are probably many more reasons for preserving nature, but I suspect they all come down to two core driving forces. First is altruism towards other species and to future generations of people. The second is personal self-interest for recreation/entertainment, enjoyment and mental wellbeing, or personal salvation. I suspect that the majority of humanity is driven more by the second force than the first. This streak of selfishness is not necessarily a bad thing. In the long-run, nature does not need us to thrive and create diversity. Should we end up killing off most other species and then, inevitably, our own, nature will come back after so many millions of years with a new array of rich biodiversity. It has already happened several times on this planet. A decline in biodiversity will be our loss alone, not nature's. We and future generations will be the ones to suffer.

Given there may be a strong underlying selfish motivation when it comes to preserving nature, it becomes important that as many people as possible become aware of just what diversity is being threatened.

For if people are unaware (i.e., have not experienced a species or natural community), they will not experience personal loss at its disappearance (e.g., ignorance is bliss), and, thus, likely lack sufficient motivation to act to prevent the loss, either for their benefit or future generations. People need to experience species and natural areas firsthand to truly care about them.

From these observations, I have come to believe that nature preserves, such as TPE's, or at least a significant subset of them, need to be accessible to people so they may learn, enjoy, explore, and become aware of the biodiversity that is at risk. Yes, we certainly have to take precautions regarding access to avoid damage and species loss, but I believe the access is nonetheless crucial to building and maintaining support for nature conservation.

The Sites We Save

(Continued from page 6)

stream and in a few of the wettest pockets away from the stream. Some of these pockets have organic soil, with native wetland vegetation starting to reestablish, and a small ephemeral pond with breeding frogs (chorus frogs, spring peepers, Cope's gray treefrogs, and toads) in the spring. Willow and other tree invasion has been occurring along the stream over the past 50 or more years. Along the east edge of the lowland where it meets the uplands, there is a small area of raised peat that appears to have been a perched fen. Now, it is overgrown with box elder and is beginning to oxidize. Some bluejoint grass, Jacob's ladder, and a few other fen associates are still evident, but extremely limited. There is another small groundwater discharge area near the base of the north end of the prairie remnant hill, with sedges and other wet meadow species reestablishing. The entire bottomland area has great potential as grassland bird habitat, and, with prairie restoration, it will eventually provide critical refuge for the

state-endangered regal fritillary butterflies during dry years. The property's cold-water stream and spring/seep wetland areas are significant for the MRPHA, for they provide important habitat diversity to this generally dry upland landscape.

Thorough biological surveys of the property have yet to be done, some information is available. Deer, coyote, and badger are present. Casual observations have detected 32 species of birds during the breeding season. These include the state-threatened Bell's vireo and various other grass & brush land species such as woodcock, eastern meadowlark, grasshopper sparrow, sedge wren, field sparrow, brown thrasher, willow flycatcher, and clay-colored sparrow. Northern shrike have been observed spending time on the property during winter months. So far, 125 native plants species have been found, including three state-listed species: prairie turnip, Richardson's sedge, and Hill's thistle. There are strong displays of rough blazingstar, hoary puccoon, shooting star, and cream Baptisia on the better remnant sod. Surveys of insects are yet very incomplete, but it is noteworthy that the state-threatened regal fritillary butterfly moved onto the property two years ago, from adjacent land, as trees and brush were removed and fire reintroduced.

History: Bordner's 1936 Land Use Economic Inventory listed the upland prairie areas of the Shea Prairie Preserve as pasture and the lowlands as a combination of pasture and cleared cropland. John and Diane Shea moved on to the farm in 1974, but they never pastured the prairies. They grew crops in the bottomlands along William's Creek until enrolling the fields in the Conservation Reserve Program in 1998. The non-cropland portions of the bottomland were burned once sometime in the 1980s. The remnant prairie was not burned during their ownership.

In the mid 1990s, Rich Henderson, while gathering information for a DNR study on landscape-scale management opportunities in Wisconsin for grasslands and savanna ecosystems, identified the Shea property as likely having remnant prairie. The ID was made using aerial photos and long-distance observation across the valley. In June 2000, Scott Sauer and Eric Maurer, working on a DNR Prairie Insect Inventory Project, visited the site with the owner's permission. They appear to have been the first ecologists to visit the Shea Prairie. In 2003, Kristin Westad, as the field coordinator of the newly established MRPHA Project, contacted the Sheas to inform them of the biological importance of the project area and the significance of their property within it. At about the same time, Amy Staffen, working for TPE on land management projects and in coordination with Kristin, contacted the Sheas to see if they would be interested in entering into an agreement to allow management/restoration of their prairie remnant. They were very receptive, and entered into an informal agreement with TPE and, eventually, into an agreement with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) as well.

In the spring of 2004, Kristin Westad (representing TPE) and Derek Johnson (with TNC) met with the Sheas to explore the possibility of permanent protection of their prairie. The Sheas were very supportive of the idea. TNC (starting with Derek and ending with Rodney Walter) and TPE (Rich Henderson) continued discussions with the Sheas that culminated with 62 acres becoming a TPE Preserve on August 18, 2006.

Protection of this site was made possible by a grant from the Knowles-Nelson State Stewardship Fund, donations to TPE from Pheasants Forever-Dane & Iowa County Chapters and several private individuals, help and guidance from TNC, and of course the support and cooperation of the Shea family. We are very grateful to them all.

Needs & Management: Half of the open prairie sod was burned on April 13, 2004, by TPE volunteers. From April-August 2004, contractors were hired by TPE, paid for by a U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) grant, to clear trees from the best prairie areas; they also pulled/dug/cut parsnip and sweet clover in the prairies during June-August. TPE volunteers continued with parsnip and sweet clover control and tree/brush removal on the prairie remnants in 2004 and 2005. In the winter of 2005-2006, two-thirds of the trees along the stream were removed by contractors under agreement with FWS Private Lands Program.

Even with the significant work that has been done, the Shea Prairie Preserve is still very much a work in progress, but one with great potential for making a major contribution to both short and long-term prairie ecosystem conservation in Wisconsin. At least two-thirds of the tree and brush removal still remains, invasive weeds are not yet fully under control (including some serious patches of reed canarygrass), many acres need to be planted to prairie, and there are wetlands to restore and a coldwater stream to improve. There are also improvements needed to facilitate limited public use that comes with state grants and good neighbor relations, improvements such as a parking lot, a kiosk, and posting of property boundaries. With the help of ongoing and additional land management grants and the dedication of our many TPE volunteers, we are confident in reaching our goal of restoring a rich and diverse prairie ecosystem that ranges from wet to dry.

A dedication ceremony and field trips at the Shea Prairie will be held this fall; details will be listed on the TPE Web site.

Fire Breaks on a North Dakota Prairie

Hal Kantrud is a TPE member from North Dakota who has conducted 15 burns on his property – this year alone!



Psoralea Ampha Firebreak

This photo shows the "BPW" (Burn Between Wheeltracks) firebreaks.



This photo shows immediate response from Psoralea and Amorpha inside a firebreak. This type of firebreak gives a little sample of plant response had the tract been burned at the same time as the firebreak.

Mr. Kantrud works on burning as often as possible. Thick, dry mats of *Poa pratensis* litter will carry a fire to ground level any month of the year. He has burned prairie in January on south-facing slopes.

The canopy of green *Poa* leaves actually helps safely construct firebreaks during the current dry conditions. His firebreaks

are burned between wheel tracks and about 4 1/2 ft wide. They mostly follow the low areas between slopes. Three or four trips with his van and the tires compress the green material into a mat that stops fire even better than during April and May when there is a much greater percentage of dry matter. After that, it's just him and his flapper. The worst areas are where *Symphoricarpos* or native tallgrasses are abundant. He finds it nice to have cultivated land and wetlands around also, but adjacent CRP land is a big problem.

May burns in North Dakota produce huge populations of *Apthona* beetles that eat leafy spurge. Kantrud has had as many as twenty-four people sweeping them up for free distribution around the county. He has also made good money transporting and releasing *Apthona* beetles for private landowners in other counties.

Wild parsnip is invading here also, first seen two years ago just south of his place along the James River. Now there is one which looks like a giant *Ratibida* coming in nearby weedy CRP.

Kantrud's goal is to find 120 species of native plants on his prairie. It hasn't happened yet, but he has one spot burned seven times where few introduced or invading species remain.

EMPIRE – SAUK CHAPTER

Annual Meeting of the Chapter Membership

On July 12, the Empire-Sauk Chapter held its annual picnic and meeting at Fair Meadows State Natural Area in Rock County, where we were hosted by Penny and Gary Shackelford. About 30 members and guests attended and enjoyed a delicious potluck dinner, followed by a short annual meeting, which included a review of the previous year's accomplishments and re-election of Karen Agee as chapter treasurer. Afterwards, attendees were treated to a tour of the natural area by the Shackelfords, land stewards and prairie enthusiasts extraordinaire. The Shackelfords purchased their first 180 acres at Fair Meadows in 1985. They have spent many years restoring their land—conducting plant and animal surveys, removing invasive species, planting prairie, and managing their woodlands. Trip participants enjoyed close-up views of the rare and beautiful eastern prairie fringed orchid as well as many other prairie wildflowers. A good time was had by all, and we thank the Shackelfords for generously sharing their time and experiences with us.

Summer Report on Land Stewardship

By Rich Henderson

Due to lack of time, I have been unable to compile statistics on the amount of work done this summer. But, I can say that the volunteer turnout was very good, including several new faces. Thank you all for pitching in. We were also fortunate

to have both a US Fish & Wildlife Private Stewardship Grant and a State Wildlife Grant for this year. This allowed us to accomplish much more than last year. We seem to be staying on top of the weeds. The primary activities this summer were control of sweet clover and wild parsnip via cutting or pulling, but work was also done on pulling and spraying of spotted knapweed, spraying of leafy spurge, mowing/cutting of sumac and berry canes, and collecting and planting of prairie seed.

We worked at 11 sites this year, but 75% of the effort went into the Mounds View Grassland (Underwood, Schurch-Thomson, Shea, and A to Z). We also worked at Rettenmund Black Earth Prairie, Mazomanie (School Section) Bluff, Koltes Prairie, the two Ripp Prairies, Smith/Egre Drumlin Prairies, Schluckebier Prairie, Kalscheur Oak Savanna, Voss Prairie, and the Goodman Campus Restoration. We also continued with the maintenance and expansion of the seed orchard at Underwood Prairie.

New Equipment

Our chapter's arsenal of equipment for weed control now includes another back sprayer for herbicide application and two propane backpack blowtorches. The additions have all proven invaluable in garlic mustard control work this past year.

Coordinator of Seed Collecting and Planting Sought

The Empire-Sauk Chapter's efforts in prairie seed collecting and planting need a boost. We very much need a person or two to step forward to get things up and running in earnest. We could use both an overall coordinator as well as local leaders focused on specific sites. If you are interested, please contact Kathy Cartwright (608-839-5148 or kcartwright@charterinternet.net).

Help Needed for Seed Collecting and Cleaning

Help is needed this fall to both collect and clean seed. Major activity areas will be Underwood & Schurch-Thomson Prairies and nearby areas south of Blue Mounds, Ripp & Koltes Prairies, and Black Earth Rettenmund Prairie. If you wish to be on the contact lists to help with these activities, please contact our chapter volunteer coordinator, Kathy Cartwright (839-5148 or kcartwright@charterinternet.net).

Fall Work Party Plans

This fall, the Empire-Sauk Chapter will continue its efforts at restoring prairie remnants. Volunteers are needed on a dozen sites to clear trees and brush. We now have several grants to help with the work. But these grants require a match of in-kind volunteer time to earn the grant money. So, for every hour of volunteer time that you put in, we receive from 3 to 9 hours of paid contract labor. This fall and winter, we will be working at the Underwood, Shea, Voss, and Schurch-Thomson Prairies south of Blue Mounds, Ripp Prairies north of Waunakee, Mazomanie Bluff, Schluckebier Prairie west of Prairie du Sac, Black Earth Rettenmund Prairie, Walking Iron County Park near Mazomanie, Swenson Prairies near Arena, Kalscheur Savanna south of Hollandale, and Smith Drumlin

Prairies near Cambridge. Be on the lookout for fliers, e-mails, and other notifications of work parties. Bring friends. Fall/winter work parties are rather fun with refreshments (homemade cookies) and crisp weather, and are a good source of outdoor winter exercise. You always leave with a sense of accomplishment after clearing trees and brush.

If you wish to help with work on these sites, and you are uncertain as to whether or not you are on the e-mail or phone notification lists, please contact Empire-Sauk Chapter volunteer coordinator, Kathy Cartwright (608-839-5148 or kcartwright@charterinternet.net).

Recent Donations to Empire-Sauk Chapter

The following donations were made to the Empire-Sauk Chapter during May, June, and July 2006. These are donations made in addition to membership dues.

- \$1-49 Sheltered Wings (photo exhibit)
- \$50-99 Winterland Nursery (photo exhibit)
Scott Weber (photo exhibit)
Tom Brock (photo exhibit)
Anonymous (photo exhibit)
- \$100-499 Richard Oberle (photo exhibit)
Rich & Kathy Henderson (photo exhibit)
Anonymous (photo exhibit)
Mark Leach (Shea Prairie purchase)
Laureen & Ron Thorstad (Shea Prairie purchase)
- \$500-999 Richard Oberle (Land management equipment)
- \$1,000-4,999 Gary & Pam Gates (Shea Prairie purchase)
- \$5,000-9,999 Jim & Rumi O'Brien (Shea Prairie purchase)
Pheasants Forever – Iowa Co (Shea Prairie purchase)

Thank you, donors. Your contributions help locate, protect, and care for the remnant prairies, sedge meadows, savannas, and open oak woodlands of our area.

PRAIRIE SMOKE CHAPTER

Prairie Smoke members (and other interested folks), we have some great seed collection trips coming up in the fall! And here is what the chapter has been doing in 2006.

Event Highlights:

- Picnic on Aug. 20th - 55 members show up for the hikes/picnic (see photo!)
- Plant ID/Prairie Walk on July 26th – more than 25 members enjoyed an evening of prairie plant identification at Joel Dunnette’s house (Prairie Smoke President)
- Hayden Prairie (Iowa) Hike on June 16th - 12 members came and enjoyed this beautiful prairie

- Spring Burns (April) – 205.3 acres burned for 23 landowners with a total of 291 volunteer hours
- Spring TPE Conference in Lanesboro – 297 people took part in some/all of the event organized by Prairie Smoke



Prairie Smoke Chapter Picnic on Aug. 20

Equipment Highlights:

- Purchased 2 chainsaws late in 2005
- Purchased brush saw
- Purchased spray equipment (hand held sprayers; backpack sprayers)
- Purchased more prescribed burning equipment; new parts to fix equipment (the goal is to have three complete sets of burning equipment)

Financial Highlights:

- Awarded \$99,500 U.S. Fish & Wildlife Grant (focusing on 4 remnant areas that contain endangered or threatened species).
- Awarded \$5,000 Stewardship Grant (to write 2 prairie management plans for private landowners).
- Individual members donated over \$1,500 to our chapter, including one \$300 matching grant from IBM.
- Came out on the plus side financially for the TPE conference.

If you did not get your recent TPE newsletter (put out by the Wisconsin regional office), access it electronically at <http://www.theprairieenthusiasts.org/newsletters/PPsummer2006.pdf>

Prairie Plant Seed Collection Trips 2006

By Joel Dunnette

Enjoy the richness of the prairie in late summer and fall. Learn about prairie plants, help expand the remaining prairie, and chat with fellow conservationists. Come prepared for walking through prairie vegetation, and 2-3 hours in the field. Bring water, collecting jugs and/or paper bags if you have some, and your enthusiasm. Different species mature at

different times, so come more than once to experience more diversity!

In case of damp weather, the session will be cancelled.

If you have questions contact Joel at 507-365-8091 (home) or 507-269-7064 (cell) or jdunnette@kmtel.com.

SOUTHWEST CHAPTER

**Saturday, September 9, 9:00am
Gramercy Park Work Day
East Dubuque, IL**

Gramercy Park is located just over the WI border with Illinois and just across the Mississippi from Dubuque, IA. The park sits atop a river bluff and contains prehistoric Indian Mounds, CCC structures, and lots of large open-grown oaks.

Recently, the park's friends group became aware of savanna restoration. They are interested in removing the Black Locust and restoring savanna structure to the park. As the closest TPE chapters, representatives of the NW Illinois chapter and the Southwest WI chapter will be there to help with this important project. We'll be cutting brush and trees and piling them.

Things to bring: wear work clothes, including gloves. If you have a chainsaw to bring, make sure you have proper safety gear (glasses, hardhat, and chaps if you have them).

**Sunday, October 8, 1:00 pm
Eldred Prairie
Ellenboro Township, near Lancaster, WI**

We'll be liberating more prairie from the shade of the old Christmas trees. We will cut and pile pine trees. If it is wet enough, we may burn the brush piles that day, too.

Things to bring: wear a long sleeve shirt and work gloves. If you have a chainsaw to bring, make sure you have proper safety gear (glasses, hardhat, and chaps if you have them).

For more information about these work parties, contact: Jaye Maxfield 608-794-2724

See directions for both work parties in the Calendar of Events table at right.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

PRAIRIE SMOKE WORK PARTIES		
CHESTER WOODS		
Sun.	Sept. 24, 1-4 PM	Meet at the park contact station.
Thur.	Sept. 28, 9 AM-Noon	Meet at the park contact station.
Sun.	Oct. 8, 2-5 PM	Meet at the park contact station.
Thur.	Oct. 19, 9AM - Noon	Meet at the park contact station.
Sun.	Sept. 24, 1-4 PM	Meet at the park contact station.
FRONTENAC STATE PARK		
Sat.	Sept. 23, 1 – 5 PM	Meet at the park contact station.
WEAVER DUNES		
Come for mornings, afternoons, or both; bring lunch. We have lots of past years' seed to get spread, so new collection is a lower priority.		
Sat.	Sept. 16 10AM-3PM	Spread past years' seed; possibly do some collection; also possibly brush cutting.
Sat.	Oct. 21 10AM-3PM	Spread past years' seed; possibly do some collection; also possibly brush cutting.
Sat.	Nov. 18 10AM-3PM	Cut brush.
SOUTHWEST CHAPTER WORK PARTIES		
GRAMERCY PARK, East Dubuque, IL		
Sat.	Sept. 9, 9AM	From Sinsinawa Ave in East Dubuque, turn East (Northeast) on Montgomery. Take a left on Sherwood (at the top of the hill), then another left on Beecher. Beecher ends in the parking lot.
ELDRED PRAIRIE, near Lancaster, WI		
Sun.	Oct. 8, 1 PM	Directions: From the intersection of 35/81 and 61 next to the Lancaster town square, take 35/81/61 south to Lincoln Rd. Take a left turn on Lincoln Rd. (traveling east). While traveling Lincoln Rd, you will cross Hwy 129 and continue on Lincoln Rd to the property. You are there when you see the prairie and the yellow 8" x 11" TPE management signs. Parking is along the road or just inside the gate.

THE PRAIRIE ENTHUSIASTS
PO BOX 620556
MIDDLETON WI 53562-0556
www.ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org

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