

The
Prairie
Enthusiasts



**THE
PRAIRIE
PROMOTER**

VOL 19, NO.1 Spring 2006

Grassroots Conservation At Work

**ANNUAL TPE PICNIC &
MEETING OF THE
MEMBERSHIP JULY 16, 2006**

The Southwest Chapter is underway with planning the 2006 annual picnic and meeting of the membership.

This year the annual picnic and meeting of the membership is tentatively scheduled to be at Yellowstone Lake State Park.

The meeting will start at 10am, and will be followed by a potluck picnic at noon. Please bring a dish to pass, your beverage, plate and utensils, the southwest chapter will provide the meat.

In the afternoon there will be a hike through the restoration project planted by prairie enthusiasts over a decade ago.

For further details please check the TPE website at www.theprairieenthusiasts.org. We will contact members directly via email for those we have email addresses for.

**Savanna and Oak
Woodland Restorations
are Helping Birds**

By Rich Henderson, TPE President

Sometimes efforts to restore original oak savanna or open oak woodland, through tree removal and prescribed fire, are met with concern that important bird habitat is being damaged by such activities and conservation concern species are being driven away. But, evidence is now starting to emerge that such restoration efforts are producing multiple conservation benefits. Not only are rare and declining native plants and insects benefiting from restoration of over-grown oak savannas and oak woodlands, but also there seems to be a net benefit to bird conservation.

Work being done in Illinois by Jeffrey Brawn (2002, 2006) is showing that, yes, birds species associated with forest structure (typically considered forest interior birds) do decline in number when woodlots are restored to savanna and open oak woodland, but other species, in fact a greater number of species, seem to benefit and increase with the restoration. This latter group consists of species typically associated with savanna and open oak woodland habitats. Of the 31 species of birds that Brawn studied in sufficient numbers to analyze, five became less common, 14 were not apparently affected, and 12 increased in numbers with restoration.

Of the decliners, two, the wood thrush and veery, are considered to be Species of Greatest Conservation Need, at least in Wisconsin (WI DNR). But three of the increasers (red-headed woodpecker, brown thrasher and northern bobwhite) and one of the neutral species (yellow-billed cuckoo) are considered Species of Greatest Conservation Need as well. The red-headed woodpecker seems to benefit substantially from the restoration work, so much so that its future many depend upon such efforts should its populations continue to decline as they have been doing in recent decades. Overall, there seems to be a net bird conservation gain from savanna and open woodland restoration.

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The Prairie Enthusiasts 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, The Prairie Enthusiasts has protected 1,417 acres that harbor at least five state or federally protected species through acquisitions, easements and management agreements. The Prairie Enthusiasts has a stewardship program which provides active management to ensure the ongoing health of protected sites.

The Prairie Enthusiasts 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.

The Prairie Enthusiasts 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 which are relevant to prairie and savanna ecosystems. Material should be typed. Writers who use computers can e-mail their submissions to wamcp70@sbcglobal.net using MS word or text files. **Please 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).

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FROM THE DESK OF THE DIRECTOR

(Overlooking Elderberry Prairie)

by Renae Mitchell

I have just returned from my whirlwind tour of five TPE chapters that I rarely get to visit: Southwest WI, Chippewa Savannas, St. Croix Valley, Prairie Smoke and the Coulee Region. Thanks to everyone who attended the meetings. I now feel I have a much better idea of how things are going out there in your various areas.

I was also able to see some of the galleries where our photography exhibit will be displayed. The beautiful Phipps Arts Center in Hudson, WI has giant windows overlooking the St Croix Valley which will be especially colorful this autumn when they are hosting the exhibit. Barb Bend and Carol Benish hope to have school children make paper prairie plants with roots of yarn and telephone wire to hang from the windows. Favorably, the Arts Center theme for the year is sustainability!

Carol and Don Nelson have been busy making arrangements to host our exhibit at the Pump House in La Crosse. It is on the Mississippi and is a beautifully restored historic building that had gone to ruins before the Arts community transformed it. They welcome us as prairie protectors and fellow "restorationists." UW-Platteville will provide their campus art gallery and even free hors d'oeuvres for the reception. Thanks to TPE member Jeff Huebschman who teaches there. Several other chapters have already set up their locations as well. Look for my article about it in this newsletter.

The excitement is building around Rochester, MN as the Prairie Smoke chapter comes smoking toward the finish line for the Annual TPE conference. They had some great coverage with front page articles written in local newspapers about the event. They doubled their membership in preparation and will probably gain even more members with all their local advertising. They are out-doing themselves with a special concert, kid's activities and other new twists this year. By the time this newsletter is published it will all be over. With the knowledge gained from the speakers and panels, I'm sure those of us who attend will have enriched our lives and become better protectors of the prairies we love. Thanks to everyone in the Prairie Smoke chapter who helped put it all together.

Teamwork is a very important strength of The Prairie Enthusiasts. Our community spirit and visible accomplishments are what make work parties pleasurable despite the hot, hard work. Some of the chapters are very concerned that they need to attract more folks to be involved not only out in the field but also on their boards or else their many years of achievements could slip backwards. It is often the case with volunteer organizations that the first wave of people

were so busy enthusiastically working on their projects that they forgot to recruit and train the next wave to follow in their footsteps. One chapter even may have to dissolve soon if they cannot find new members for their board of directors. If you are a new member, please contact your chapter board to ask how you can help out.

Our membership coordinator, Victoria Oberle, can provide chapters with an updated list of your members and some chapters create useful membership directories to hand out. We are currently inputting the info we gathered from the membership data cards you returned during the annual campaign. We will be sending the cards out again this spring to those of you who did not send yours in so we can complete the project. **If you still have your data card sitting under papers on your desk please send it in to save us the postage cost of sending a reminder.**

With the new brochure, the photography exhibit and our revised website, we're attracting more new faces (we hope that they're attached to strong backs). We are growing in numbers, however, the key is to get new people involved right away while their enthusiasm is still fresh. **Try making a special effort to personally invite members to meetings. Ask them to ride with you to a work party or field trip, serve on a committee or volunteer for even a few hours at a local event like the photography exhibit.** This way new members will have more chances to get to know us at our best and realize that even a small amount of their time or financial resources will have important consequences for the future. **When people do provide special donations or give of their time, how does your chapter thank them?**

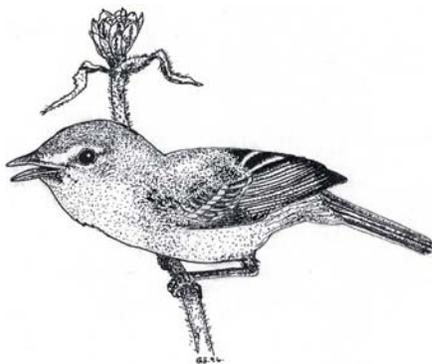
I am here to help support and promote all the chapters. I can help you write and send press releases, letters of request or acknowledgements and other materials to reach out to your members. I am putting together a power point presentation about TPE and writing the annual report for 2005. **Please keep me informed of your accomplishments** so I can let the world know our Olympic-quality team of Prairie Enthusiasts is setting the world on fire! Of course, I only mean that figuratively since everyone will be strictly following the prescribed burn policies reviewed in this edition of the Prairie Promoter.



(continued from page 1)

From Brawn's work, one might conclude that savanna and woodland restoration inevitably comes with a conservation trade-off between bird species, but that is not necessarily the case. It may actually be a complete gain. It turns out that the forest birds that declined with restoration, such as red-eyed vireo, ovenbird, wood thrush and veery generally require large forest tracts (500 acres on up) to have adequate reproductive success to sustain populations. Smaller woodlots attract these forest species, but they are far less successful in producing young in those settings. Smaller forest tracts tend to act like population sinks and may actually be a detriment to the species. It so happens that savanna and woodland restoration is done mostly in woodlots, or at scales below 500 acres, thus forest birds are not losing out, at a total population level, when such work is done in these "sink" habitats. Whereas the savanna and woodland bird species are reproductively successful in the smaller habitat patches which may be as small as 10-20 acres. Brawn also found that the savanna and woodland birds he looked at did not experience declines in reproductive success with burning and other restoration work; in fact, 11 of 13 had greater nesting success with the disturbance.

In conclusion, most restoration of savanna and open oak woodland on sites that used to be savanna or woodland and still have oak trees is providing a significant positive boost to bird conservation. So, keep up the good work, or get started, whichever the case may be.



Species responding to savanna/woodland restoration

Increases

- Northern bobwhite
- Mourning dove
- Red-headed woodpecker
- Northern flicker
- Eastern wood-pewee
- Great-crested flycatcher
- Brown thrasher
- Summer tanager
- Eastern towhee
- Indigo bunting
- Baltimore oriole

Decreasers

- Red-eyed vireo
- Wood thrush
- Veery
- Ovenbird
- Scarlet tanager

American goldfinch

References

Brawn, J.D. 2002.
Restoration of small reserves may be valuable for certain types of birds. *Ecological Restoration* 20(1): 63-64.

Brawn, J.D. 2006
Effects of restoring oak savannas on bird communities and populations. *Conservation Biology* 20(2): in press.

President's Message

The membership of The Prairie Enthusiasts is amply blessed with in-the-field, hands-on doers who would rather be out cutting brush, collecting seed, and conducting burns than doing administrative or outreach work like attending meetings, keeping records, contacting landowners, writing grants, giving presentations, fundraising, etc. I'm certainly one of the in-the-field, hands-on types. But if we are to fulfill our mission of saving what remains of our fire-dependant ecosystems of prairie, savanna, sedge meadow and oak woodlands, we also need members adept at and interested in those other areas of building and running an organization. At the very least, we need to raise the funds and build the endowments to be able to hire staff to get these critical administrative and development jobs done.

So, if you happen to have skills and interests beyond field work, please step forward. And if you are already helping in those areas, know that your contributions are greatly appreciated. It is crucial for all TPE members to give thought as to how we can reach out to a greater number and diversity of people in order to bring in these underrepresented skills and the major donations that build endowments. One way you can help is in supporting and assisting your local chapter in hosting the traveling photo exhibit coming this spring and summer that our Director, Renae Mitchell, has been organizing. This exhibit will be coming to each chapter's area to be on display for a period of time. It's a great opportunity for us to reach a new audience that likely has concern for endangered ecosystems but does not know what TPE does or the places we save.

I hope you all have a great spring and many chances to get out and enjoy nature.

Beck Henderson

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Friends of the Arboretum Native Plant Sale **Saturday, May 13, 2006 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.**

Wildflower tent near the UW-Madison Arboretum
Visitor Center
1207 Seminole Highway, Madison WI 53711
608-263-7760
www.uwarboretum.org

Over 100 varieties of woodland and prairie plants for sale.

- * Propagated plants -- not dug from the wild
- * All plants native to area
- * Experts on hand to answer questions
- * Information sheets detailing care with each plant
- * Order prairie mixes, native shrubs and trees through March 17 -- Go to www.uwarboretum.org or phone 608.263.7760

The sale is open to the public, and proceeds benefit Arboretum projects. There is a 10% discount to Friends' members.

Gift Memberships Available

If you would like to present someone with a gift membership to The Prairie Enthusiasts for any occasion please just send a note with the information to our membership coordinator Victoria Oberle at PO Box 620556, Middleton, WI 53562-0556. We will be happy to mail them a special letter explaining the gift along with a sticker, a copy of the Prairie Promoter and our field trip flier.

20th North American Prairie Conference 2006

The University of Nebraska at Kearney will be hosting the 20th North American Prairie Conference in July. Go to <http://www.napc2006.org/index.html> for details. the registration form is up and available, and more will be available soon.

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Illustrations Still Needed

Late last year we requested illustrations of prairie flora and fauna for a completely revised edition of TPE's *An Introduction to the Tallgrass Prairie and Savanna of the Upper Midwest*. We have since received a number of very high quality drawings. However, we need still more. Please contact us at wamcp70@sbcglobal.net for a current list of illustrations needed.

Original works will be scanned professionally to computer disc and promptly returned. All artists will be

credited for their contributions when the new edition is published.

Revised Ways of Giving to TPE

Our Finance committee has been working on a new investment policy and we have recently started a brokerage account for accepting stock options. We are also improving our system of acknowledgments and fund accounting so your tax deduction information will be promptly available.

In addition to accepting traditional monetary gifts, The Prairie Enthusiasts can also accept gifts of stock, real estate, easements, equipment and planned gifts through estate planning. Gifts of stock are an excellent way to make a charitable gift without suffering the burden of capital gain taxes, and planned giving enables you to see the legacy of conservation embodied in The Prairie Enthusiasts organization continue into the future.

Please contact Renae Mitchell, Executive Director at 262-473-2956 or tpedirector@idcnet.com with any questions or to make arrangements. Thank you!

Wishes DO Come True!

I had sent out a wish list in the last couple of newsletters and TPE members responded! Michael Dearing provided a hand-held GPS unit for any chapter to use out in the field for inventories and monitoring of conservation easements. Another TPE member generously donated the entire cost of our new membership and donor database software. Thanks to both of you for helping make our wishes come true!

We are currently inputting the data we gathered from the cards you returned during the annual campaign. We will be sending the cards out again this spring to those of you who did not send yours in so we can complete the project. If you still have your card sitting under papers on your desk please send it in to save us the postage for sending a reminder.

We are still in need of a cell phone or calling cards, reams of white and colored paper, a satellite internet service, PowerPoint projector and a filing cabinet.



Traveling Photography Exhibit Taking Shape. Sponsors needed

Almost 80 intriguing artistic photographs of prairies and oak savannas using a wide variety of angles, techniques and subject matter will be displayed in our **Prairie Roots~Prairie Patterns~Prairie Communities** Exhibit. It was very difficult choosing from among all the wonderful submissions and we thank all the photographers! These beautiful photographs from both professional and amateur photographers and from the archives of the WI State Historical Society will be available for purchase using an order form in the program booklets to be distributed at each site. Art posters will also be for sale. TPE chapters may have more local photography and other items for sale at the events they host in conjunction with the exhibit.

Historical, cultural, artistic, ecological, and conservation management themes will be interpreted with informative labels and quotes. **We are asking TPE members to send us your own quotes so we can include some personal reflections on why prairies and oak savannas are important to you, what you enjoy doing there and why. Please send quotes to Renae by the end of March to tpedirector@idcnet.com.**

Opening receptions and educational programs, as well as field trips, will accompany the exhibit at several TPE chapter locations this season. The chapters have been busy lining up art galleries and nature centers. **Although the dates are still tentative the latest itinerary is as follows:**

April 30 - May 31	Galena Territories - Galena, IL
June 16 - June 30	UW-Arboretum - Madison, WI
July 13 - July 30	Monroe Arts Center - Monroe, WI
Aug. 24 - Sept 11	Pump House Regional Arts Center La Crosse, WI
Sept 13- Sept 25	Kickapoo Valley Reserve Visitor Center - LaFarge, WI
Sept. 29 - Oct. 29	Phipps Center for the Arts - Hudson, WI
Nov. 6 - Nov. 22	UW-Platteville Nohr Art Gallery

Eau Claire, Rochester, MN and the Kohler Arts Center are looking to host it as well. We will be asking the photographers if they would be willing to extend the exhibit into next year.

We hope all Prairie Enthusiasts will come see the exhibit at any of the sites. Please bring your friends, family and local art patrons too! To make this event a success we will need everyone's participation! Art Posters, promotional posters and invitations will be printed using the WI Humanities Council grant and

donations from sponsors. Please help distribute them. **Let your chapter know if you would like invitations sent to anyone special.** We are still looking for more sponsors for this exhibit so if your company would like to make a donation please let us know and we'll be happy to send you a request letter and include the company name in accompanying literature. Thanks to all the committee members who are working to make this event a success!

Seeking Chapter Support for Regional Prairie Database

The Prairie Enthusiasts are attempting to develop a GIS database of all prairie remnants that we are aware of to help in tracking these landscapes into the future. To do this, chapter support is crucial. Please send John Harrington any remnant inventory data that you may have in your chapter. You can email it or mail it to jaharrin@tds.net or John Harrington, 25 Agricultural Hall, 1450 Linden Drive, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI 53706. The database is being developed at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Please include, to the extent available, site listings, locations (township, range, section if possible), species lists, soils, management needs, quality comments, inventory visit dates, contacts for each particular site, etc. A subcommittee chaired by Jim Rogala is overseeing the database and will be discussing the protocols for assessing it. Any feedback on this activity should be directed to Jim (jrogala@usgs.gov) and John.

TPE Prescribed Burns and Insurance

By Rich Henderson, TPE President

With the upcoming fire season, I'm sure many of you are wondering what is happening with the situation of non-profit land trusts (excluding The Nature Conservancy) not being able to obtain insurance to cover prescribed burns since 2002. The National Land Trust Alliance and many conservation groups in the Midwest have been collaborating with Agren, a consulting company out of Iowa, to work with the insurance industry to find a solution to this problem. With the use of a federal grant, Agren has compiled actuarial data from surveys in several states on prescribed burns conducted by non-government entities over the past five years. They now have information on how many burns, burn size, fuel type, number and size of escaped fires and amount of any resulting damages. They are now assessing the market for prescribed burn insurance by gathering information on what type of coverage non-profits and small contractors want, what deductibles they will accept and what premiums they can afford. Agren will then present actuarial and market information to the insurance industry.

New Guidelines for Grassland Bird Habitat

Three new bulletins are now available to guide rural landowners and farmers in ways to preserve and enhance grassland bird habitat. These educational bulletins are from New York State, but they have good application here in the Midwest. In fact, according to the author, Jim Ochtorski, Wisconsin and other Midwest-based resources were very valuable in preparing the bulletins.

The bulletins are:

1) *Transforming Fields into Grassland Bird Habitat*: This bulletin reviews the status of grassland birds, the nature of early successional state management and the many sites suitable for such management.

2) *Enhancing Pastures for Grassland Bird Habitat*: This bulletin explains the role of livestock pastures as surrogate habitat for grassland birds. It provides point-by-point guidelines for management.

3) *Hayfield Management and Grassland Bird Conservation*: This bulletin acknowledges the tradeoff between optimal hay quality and grassland bird habitat development and points out ways to harvest hay to minimize impacts on grassland birds.

These bulletins are available as free PDF downloads at the CCE South Central New York Agricultural team website: <http://scnyat.cce.cornell.edu/grassland>. Support for these bulletins was provided by a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

There is no guarantee that an underwriter will come forward with a reasonable proposal. If it happens, it will most likely be offered only as part of a complete insurance package to an organization. It will also most likely require formal training and fitness testing of some type for all burn participants.

Just what training will be required, we don't know. There is a good chance it may have to meet National Wildfire Group (NWG) standards, at least for the half dozen or so courses leading up to, but not including, burn boss training. Training to NWG standards at that level requires too much time and money, and includes many things not relevant to the size and types of fuels and conditions we encounter when burning here in the Midwest. NWG courses issue certificates and records are kept of who has been trained.

We in Wisconsin are fortunate to have the Wisconsin Prescribed Fire Council (WPFC). It is working to develop lower level training courses that meet NWG requirements but which are also tailored so they are useful for doing prescribed burns in the Midwest. WPFC has plans to develop a burn boss course (non-NWG standard) that will meet the needs of non-profits and small contractors. I do not know what is happening in Illinois and Minnesota regarding training opportunities. If there is nothing in place or being planned, TPE volunteers from Illinois and Minnesota may be able to get training through WPFC. FYI, technical colleges are starting to offer introductory level NWG standard course. Be advised that they may not be modified to have greater applicability to prescribed burns and Midwest conditions, but at least they will meet that formal training requirement.

Now what about the coming burn season? There is no requirement for volunteers to have formal prescribed fire training to participate in TPE burns this spring, **but it is highly recommended that volunteers have formal training**. Having experience is even more desirable. At least three-quarters of the volunteers on a burn **must have** experience with five or more burns, and those with less experience must be paired with an experienced burner.

In anticipation of training requirements in the future, I encourage all TPE burn volunteers to get formal training, even if it does not meet NWG standards. Even if you end up having to take a NWG course later, you will not go wrong in taking the other classes. When it comes to prescribed fire, one can always use more training and more experience.

Be careful out there, and pay close attention to the fire weather.

TPE burn bosses, don't forget that we have a TPE burn policy with procedures that must be followed.

Volunteer Spotlight: Tom and Kathie Brock

The Brocks retired 10 years ago. Tom was a professor of microbiology and Kathie worked as a microbiologist. Once retired, they wanted to restore their Dane County property to an oak savanna, but they needed to develop the skills and knowledge to do so. To learn about restoration, Kathie volunteered for The Nature Conservancy for several years and attended burn school. They conducted the work parties at the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Lakeshore Nature Preserve and worked at Mazomanie Bluff and Madison Audubon's Goose Pond. They passed Black Earth Rettenmund Prairie (then managed by The Nature Conservancy) on a frequent basis and volunteered to remove the sweet clover from this outstanding prairie remnant. Soon they were organizing the volunteer work parties at the prairie. The Brocks continued the work parties when management was turned over from the

Conservancy to The Prairie Enthusiasts. Tom is now on the Empire-Sauk Chapter's Board of Directors.

Over time, the Brocks learned plant identification, prairie/savanna ecology and management techniques. They applied this knowledge to their own property and are very happy with the results. The address of their web site is: www.savannaoak.org.

Tom and Kathie hold work parties at Black Earth Rettenmund Prairie once a month. The prairie is located west of Black Earth in Dane County. If you wish to volunteer, contact Tom or Kathie at 608-238-5050 or tdbrock@charter.net

Experience with Incidental Takes by Jim Sime

According to the Secretary of Transportation Frank Busalacchi, many comments were received by the DNR call in October, 2005 for the takings of Endangered and Threatened species in the reconstruction of Hwy 133 between Boscobel and Blue River in Grant County. The DOT plans for this project were first introduced at a public meeting in March 2001 where no comments were received regarding potential impacts to the prairie, nor were any received at a second meeting Jan. 2002. The DOT was conducting an Environmental Report not an Environmental Assessment or an Environmental Impact Statement. Environmental Reports do not require official comment periods. The DNR decided to hold the request for public comments to within one year prior to the start of the construction "due to the potential for changing project or environmental conditions that could subsequently affect the jeopardy and incidental take determination". You translate that - I'm too old.

You can see that the Takings Comments were very late in the process and they don't affect the DOT. As far as I can determine, no DOT plans were altered in any way as a result of any public comments. The DOT already had plans to transplant some individuals of the threatened Cream Gentian (*Gentiana alba*) to nearby habitat. Several plants will remain in their original location. Transplanting this robust plant seems reasonable to me. The DNR has authorized this incidental take of this species.

This is the only site where the very rare and Endangered Pink Milkwort (*Polygala incarnata*) has been seen in Wisconsin in the past several years. *Polygala incarnata* is a late summer annual, dropping its seeds daily as they mature over an extended period so no one knows specifically where it will germinate on this site. This uncertainty and the difficulty in collecting seeds from a few isolated plants results in a non-authorization of incidental take of this species and the statement, "it will require additional conservation measures that will strengthen the protection of the rare plants and the prairie and their conservation post construction". This means that construction will proceed with no takings permit required for this species. Construction is presumed to cause no harm to this

population. Evaluation will come later. A silt fence 40 feet from the highway was already in the DOT plans to separate the construction zone from most of the prairie. Past mowing practices have probably eliminated any plants that sprouted nearer the highway.

The Endangered Rough White Lettuce (*Prenanthes alba*) present within the *Polygala* population was not addressed in any part of the proceedings except in the comments from the public.

Comments suggesting reduced mowing to protect the site were addressed to the extent that a Vegetation Management Plan will be developed by the DOT sometime in the future. DOT policy 74.10 C2 sets a statewide standard that mowing on State and Federal 2 lane highways be limited to "Fifteen (15) feet maximum or to the bottom of the ditch whichever is less" and cautions "Do not mow up the backslope (beyond the bottom of the ditch)". Policy 74.10 H3 states "Fragile slopes on sandy soils shall not be mowed if equipment causes scalping, rutting or other damage". A Vegetation Management Plan (Policy 74.10 A3) permits modification of these policies. We hope that modification will call for less mowing in a narrower strip and not so close to the ground on this sandy site. Safety and sight lines should be a minimal problem in the prairie areas. Counties and Towns may have adopted these or similar policies. Check them out. You might use them to save some listed species.

This Highway 133 Project is a done deal except for the construction. Our comments had little impact. The greatest hope lies in the future. The DOT has agreed "to include the incidental take mailing list for public announcements early in the project process for all projects that have the potential to impact any listed species. Check with the DNR to see that your organization is on the list. Search for, identify and report to the DNR Bureau of Endangered Resources any listed species or ecosystems on highway rights of way. These locations will be mapped so the DOT will know where these areas of potential impact are located and give you a chance for a real voice in project design. Addresses of pertinent officials can be found on the website.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

EMPIRE-SAUK CHAPTER		
MEETINGS		
Tue.	Jan. 10	Chapter board meeting at 6:45pm at the Middleton Public Library. All members are welcome.
SOUTHWEST CHAPTER		
MEETINGS		
Sun.	Mar. 19	Chapter board meeting at Montfort Community building 4pm. All members are welcome.
Sun.	May. 21	Chapter board meeting at Montfort Community building 4pm. All members are welcome.
Sun.	Jun. 18	Chapter board meeting at Montfort Community building 4pm. All members are welcome.
WORK PARTIES		
Sat.	Mar. 25	Eldred Preserve.
Sat.	Apr. 1	Heather's Prairie
Sun.	May. 7	Heather's Prairie
Sun.	Jun. 4	Eldred Preserve
Sun.	Jun. 11	Heather's Prairie
For details on Heather's Prairie contact Gary Adams at 608-624-5791.		
For details on Eldred's Preserve contact Jesse Bennett at 608-794-2724 or jjess@tds.net .		

EMPIRE-SAUK CHAPTER

Winter Work Parties Provide Match to Grants

By Rich Henderson

Volunteer turnout at winter work parties (December, January, and February) was exceptional this year, and the hours put in are helping TPE earn grant dollars from the US Fish & Wildlife Service's (FWS) Private Stewardship Grant, FWS Challenge Grants and WI DNR Pheasant Stamp Grants. We have been awarded these grants for 2005/2006 for prairie, grassland and savanna habitat recovery work, but they require match of either dollars or "in kind" contributions. Your volunteer hours are providing most of that "in-kind" match. Thank you one and all.

Over the winter, volunteers participated in 14 work parties that cleared invading trees and brush and burned many brush piles. The work was done at Underwood & Schurch-Thomson Prairie Complex, Schluckebier Sand Prairie, Smith Drumlin, Mazomanie School Section Bluff, Ripp Prairie – Madigan Road, Shea Prairie, Steege-

Euclide Prairie and Savanna Hill. A total of 45 volunteers put in 373 hours worth of hard work. This is a 35% increase over last year. Way to go volunteers!!



Steege-Euclide Work Party

By the way, if you were not at the Steege-Euclide Prairie work party, you missed out on the most outstanding sit down lunch of curry lentil soup, chili, corn bread, and flat fry bread that was hosted by Diane Smith and catered by the Penguin Bistro of Mazomanie. Also, Carla Wright served up another great spread, as always, of veggie chili and many other goodies at the Savanna Hill work party. And of course, there were homemade cookies, apple cider and soda at nearly all the other work parties.

If you wish to get involved with TPE's hands-on, land-healing activities, be on the lookout for fliers, e-mails and other notifications of work parties this summer and next fall, or simply check the Empire-Sauk Chapter page of the TPE website (www.ThePrairieEnthusiasts.org) for work party listings. If you wish to be put on notification lists, contact Empire-Sauk Chapter volunteer coordinator, Kathy Cartwright (608-839-5148 or kcartwright@charterinternet.net). With the challenge grants we currently have in place, every hour you put in can generate from 3 to 9 hours of hired contract work.

Spring Burn Season is Upon Us

We have approximately 30 burns scheduled for this spring. If you wish to help on these and have not yet been contacted by card or e-mail, contact Empire-Sauk Chapter volunteer coordinator, Kathy Cartwright (608-839-5148 or kcartwright@charterinternet.net). Experience and training is desired, but not a prerequisite. Novices will be paired up with experienced people. Protective personal Nomex clothing is also recommended, but not required.

Garden Expo

Eight volunteers staffed the TPE display at the WPT Garden Expo, held February 10-12 in Madison. We had hundreds of people stop by the table to see what we do, and many TPE members from other chapters stopped to introduce themselves. It was good to meet all of you—we even got a new membership. Thanks to all those who volunteered: Rich Henderson, Rosie Meinholz, Richard Oberle, Kathy Henderson, Scott Sauer, Amy Staffen, Bryan Huberty and Dennis Connor. We couldn't do an event like this without your help.

Email Address Change?

If you change email providers, please make sure to let us know your new address. You can send it to kcartwright@charterinternet.com or tpe@tds.net

Recent Donations to Empire-Sauk Chapter

The following contributions were made to the Empire-Sauk Chapter during November 2005 through January 2006. These are unrestricted cash donations made above and beyond membership dues.

Jim Elleson	\$15
Carla Wright	\$50

Thank you for the contributions. Each one helps us find, protect, and care for the remnant prairies, sedge meadows, savannas and open oak woodlands of our area.



PRAIRIE BLUFF CHAPTER

The Parsnip Predator

by Robert Baller

Wild parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*) is an irksome pest in southern Wisconsin. Parsnip juice causes blisters on skin, especially when mixed with perspiration and sun. Hikers often learn the hard way from the watery blisters on their arms and legs came from wild parsnip; until then the rash is often blamed on poison ivy.

The evil Parsnip favors open sunny areas like roadsides, pastures and fallow fields. The monocarpic perennial (flowers once, then dies) grows rosettes about six inches tall the first year. It develops a long, thick edible taproot, which is edible. It may flower the second year, or endure up to five years before flowering, depending on root energy. The single, thick (one inch diameter) stem may rise up to five feet and produce hundreds of little yellow carrot-like flowers. [source: WDNR - Invasive plant species - Wild Parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*) via website].

Parsnip normally blooms and rapidly produces seed in July. Fields and roadsides that are mowed in May, left in midsummer, and mowed again in August are exactly what promote great quantities of parsnip. The early mowing inadvertently lowers the competition around the rosettes. Plants that have begun sending up stalks will re-sprout. Stalks that are mowed later in August will have their ripe seeds dispersed by the mower. The result is a field bristling with parsnip.

The optimum time to mow parsnip in southern Wisconsin to break its seed production cycle is the first two weeks in July.

Some years ago I learned through conversation with Mark Martin, WDNR State Natural Area Program, that one of the best ways to control parsnip (where you do not wish to mow in midsummer, such as prairie remnants) is by slicing the taproot and removing the rest. WDNR did this with garden spades. They angled a sharpened spade near the plant so the blade would slice the root a couple inches below ground, stepped on it, and pulled the severed root stub up by the stem. (Gloves are required to avoid the blister-producing sap.) The root fragment left in the soil lacks mass and crown buds to re-sprout, and dies.

We at Prairie Bluff chapter sought a narrower shovel for eradicating parsnip on our remnants and plantings. We wanted less cutting resistance, lighter weight, and less potential injury to non-target species. Unable to find a suitable model on the market, I tried flat stainless experiments mounted on old snow shovel handles. These homemade weapons worked well but were unfeasible for mass production. So our chapter located a 'ladies' type spade (six-inches wide) in a commercial market. We choose a 40-inch long model with a D-handle, and modify it in three ways:

- 1) We cut away the sides of blade leaving about 3 inches in the middle.
- 2) We cut the tip so it was concave ("notched") for easier centering on the root.

3) We remount the D-handle so it is perpendicular to the blade, making it more ergonomic, like a saw.

We leave the footrest alone. We sharpen everything else. We call it the **Parsnip Predator**.

After using the new Predators on our plantings we began getting requests for more. We bought a batch of commercial spades, hired a local sheltered employment facility to cut the blades to our design and remount the handles, and began selling them at a price to cover our costs.

I am not aware of any studies testing the success of controlling parsnip with this modified design or with any other spade. Removing the root stub by shovel seems to be a popular method. Reports from our users since we began experimenting in 1998 have been very encouraging.

The tool theoretically can address any tap-rooted plant in any soil. The key is to slice, never to pry. The reduced blade is not strong enough for prying.

The Prairie Bluff Chapter offers the Predator for about \$30 at conferences. Or you can go to our website. We occasionally mail them. Proceeds entirely go to The Prairie Enthusiasts. The Predator was created for the singular purpose of surgically removing parsnip from prairies. Any handyperson can buy a small shovel and replicate the tool at home.

We are presently tinkering with mounting a Predator blade on one-handed medical crutch. We hope to offer one of these unique weapons at the 2006 banquet raffle. An athletic person can jab the ground with one arm and lift the plant out with the other at a rapid pace. Rich Henderson of WDNR Bureau of Science Services conceived the adaptation; we gave him one of these last year for field-testing and as an accolade for his service to TPE. He says, "It works great! It is the cheetah of Parsnip Predators."

Our chapter salutes Julia O'Reilly for championing the Predator early on and becoming our first production and vending manager. The same is gratefully foisted upon Nick Faessler now that he has taken the post.

References

Wisconsin Natural Resources Magazine June 2000 *Wild Parsnip II* by David J. Egan. found at <http://www.wnrmag.com/stories/2000/jun00/parsnip.htm>

WDNR - Invasive plant species - Wild Parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*) [fact sheet] <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/invasives/fact/parsnip.htm>

(Robert Baller currently serves as chair of the Prairie Bluff Chapter of TPE, serving Rock, Green, and La Fayette Counties in Wisconsin.)



One Chapter's Trash

by Rob Baller 2/3/06

One bright sunny Saturday (Jan14, 2006) a dozen Prairie Bluff volunteers descended (elevated actually) onto the hill prairie at Ittis Savanna in Green County, WI. Their mission: search and recycle scrap metal from the old farm pit that came with the site. For nearly four hours they up-heaved bedsprings, bicycles, appliances, sheet metal, flatbed frames, farm equipment, barbed wire, and assorted plumbing. The scraps were loaded onto a couple of pickup trucks and ferried downhill to a rented recycle dumpster. A cracked iron bathtub was demolished by sledgehammer and added to the bin. Nick Faessler, who orchestrated the party, cut some pieces down to size with his chop saw and portable generator.

Ittis Savanna was purchased by TPE in 1999. The 21.5-acre site is adjacent to State Natural Area Muralt Bluff Prairie off CTY F in Green County. Thanks to brushing and burning activities by chapter members, Ittis grows slightly more than seven acres of remnant dry prairie now, and ten acres of oak savanna are slowly transitioning towards recovery.

It seems likely that after the recyclables are salvaged the remaining broken debris will be bulldozed into the pit and closed over with soil, though certain hobo-type members prefer the pit should be left for a small, nostalgic outdoor amphitheater.

THE PRAIRIE ENTHUSIASTS
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EAT YOUR LOCAL ALIEN

Garlic Mustard Pesto

from the kitchen of Kathy Gruentzel, Superintendent,
Governor Dodge Park.

2-3 handfuls of garlic mustard leaves
1 teaspoon salt
1 cup olive oil
1 cup parmesan cheese
2 tablespoons chopped walnuts or pine nuts

Puree all ingredients thoroughly in a blender or food processor. Makes approximately one pint.

Usually only the leaves are used. However, the entire above-ground portion of the plant may be used if it is young and tender. Serve tossed in with pasta or spread on fresh-baked bread. It is also good with boiled potatoes.

Garlic mustard pesto is a pleasant alternative to the more traditional basil pesto and can be made in early spring when fresh basil is not available.

GET OUT THERE AND START PICKING!

TPE Needs You

TPE is in need of a new formatter for the newsletter. Alice is no longer able to do this volunteer task four times a year, (after more than a decade on the job), due to personal reasons. Please consider volunteering for this highly creative and important task, *The Prairie Promotor* is one of our major vehicles of communication and recruitment to not only our membership but the public at large. **If you are interested please contact Renae Mitchell at tpedirector@idcnet.com**

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