

The PRAIRIE PROMOTER

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Grassroots Conservation at Work

Curiosity Leads to Discovery

By Marci Hess & MJ Hatfield

Often when we think of remnants and restorations, we think of the plants, sometimes we think of the birds or mammals that use them and occasionally we'll consider the "herptiles" that live there. Sometimes we create management plans to protect these species; sometimes we create inventories of these species. But what about the thousands of other inhabitants that reside in our ecosystems? What about the insects and their functions? What about those yet to be discovered?

It's a curious aspect of ecological restoration and management that insects are often ignored and when they are top of our minds, it's because we are complaining about them as being pesky and biting us. The irony of this is that insects could live just fine without us - probably even better without us - but we would not last long without them. Insects provide benefits that we take for granted. We might be more humble and considerate of them if we knew more about them and how they interact with our landscape. What benefits do they bestow on the plants? What purpose do they serve in the cycle of life? How many insects does one plant support?

Here is an example of an undescribed and unnamed insect living right under our noses, in a familiar savanna plant, Horse Gentian or *Triosteum perfoliatum*. Little was known about them until a curious prairie enthusiast with a keen interest in insects went looking. In May of 2009, while MJ Hatfield was bug hunting, she found several beautiful caterpillars that blended so well on *Triosteum perfoliatum* that one had to look very closely to see them.

After searching books and the Internet, MJ found one entry from the Brooklyn Entomological Society in 1921. The author, Charles Rummel, had published a brief account and description of a caterpillar feeding on *Triosteum*, which he identified as *Adita chionanathi* (now *Sympistis chionanathi*). The caterpillar description seemed to match the ones MJ found but wanting to be sure of the identification, MJ did some further research and learned that the caterpillar of *A. chionanathi* looks nothing like the caterpillar that she found feeding on *Triosteum*. MJ felt something was amiss, so she sent photos of the caterpillar to Dr. David Wagner, author of several Eastern North America caterpillar books, for a professional identification. Dr. Wagner identified the caterpillar as a new species.



Sympistis forbesi caterpillar
Photo by MJ Hatfield

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A New Season of Growth

Chris Kirkpatrick, Executive Director



In the last issue of *The Prairie Promoter*, Board President Jack Kussmaul report that in March, the TPE Board participated in a half day retreat. Over the past few years we have grown very quickly, so quick that some areas of the organization have moved forward quicker than other areas. It became apparent to me that we needed to get everyone on the same page, and call out the concerns and issues that inherently exist before we see about working on them together. At the retreat we ultimately came to the common ground, and had resounding agreement about what inspires all of us to be a part of The Prairie Enthusiasts; why do you care about fire dependent communities? What inspires you to be involved with your chapter?

As Jack reported, at the March retreat the Board anonymously elected a group of members to serve as an Ad Hoc Committee. They were charged with articulating our current issues and concerns, and to report back to the Board with recommendations on how to best address these concerns. Over the course of the spring the committee met weekly for two hours at a time. The group came up with a report that they presented at the May Board meeting. They made several recommendations, including a proposal to keep our current membership model the same for now. Another recommendation is for the Finance Committee to work on improving our financial system so that everyone clearly understands our processes. They developed a governance model which articulates the different roles in the organization, and how this relates to our program areas. The Board will continue discussing this subject, as well as the most important one: communication. The committee will soon be presenting a plan on how to improve communication between the central office and chapters, as well as between chapters.

At the July Board meeting we will discuss the core items of governance and communication face to face. This will be a tremendously important discussion to have together. It reminds me of the newly restored remnant or the young prairie planting. There is such a strong foundation, with so much potential for growth. With some hard work we can nurture and grow The Prairie Enthusiasts to become an even more established, developed, and diverse organization. We will be well poised for the future with a strong foundation of support that includes our volunteers, members, chapters, Board and staff to all move forward together and fulfill the mission that inspires all of us, and to collectively have a voice in what it means to be a Prairie Enthusiast.

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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. The Prairie Promoter is a quarterly publication of The Prairie Enthusiasts. No part of this periodical may be reproduced without permission. We welcome articles, announcements, artwork and photographs relevant to prairie and savanna ecosystems. Mail or e-mail submissions to local chapter editorial volunteers or to The Prairie Promoter editor. Deadlines for submission of material are Mar. 14 (Spring issue); May 30 (Summer issue); Aug. 15 (Fall issue); and Dec. 5 (Winter issue). If you would like to receive electronic notification of the newsletter, please e-mail Joe Rising at TPE@theprairieenthusiasts.org.

President's Message

By Jack Kussmaul

My message this time will deal with the TPE endowment funds. There are five separate funds. These are Land Management, currently with \$236,096, Operations with \$22,093, Thomson Internship with \$122,978, Easement Monitoring with \$67,720 and Legal Defense with \$28,691. All endowments are invested in series of Vanguard Funds and, shepherded by Jon Traver (who does not charge for his help) have done quite well for us.

Our policy provides that we can take an annual draw from each fund based on 4% of the value of the fund averaged over the last twelve quarters. For example, we could take \$4,000 if the average value of the fund had been \$100,000. This should allow an income stream to TPE while allowing each fund to continue to grow to keep up with inflation. While there is some range in the draw other non-profits take from their endowments, 4% is about average. TPE for the most part has actually taken nothing from the endowments so that they can continue to grow.

Endowments for non-profits are largely funded by legacy gifts, which are gifts provided in people's estate plans. This can be handled a number of ways, including use of a will, a trust or beneficiary designations. There may be tax advantages in naming TPE as beneficiary of a retirement account. While the proceeds may be taxable to a beneficiary, there is no income tax if a non-profit such as TPE is the beneficiary.

TPE has formed a Legacy Circle, consisting of people who have included TPE in their estate plans. We want to recognize all who have done so. If you have not already become a member of this supporting group, but are interested, either Chris or I, or any board member, would be happy to discuss your options with you. We also encourage you to discuss your plans with your own attorney or financial advisor. They would have a better picture of your total financial picture than we would and can provide you with totally independent advice.

In your estate plan you can provide what fund you want your gift to go to or that it be used for a specific purpose or a specific property. It is, after all, your legacy.

I am involved with another non-profit that has a large endowment. It is large enough so that the annual draw covers about one-third of the operating budget for the year. If enough of us who care about TPE provide for TPE in our estate plans, we can someday find ourselves in this happy situation. Endowments are particularly important as our land holdings increase more rapidly than our volunteer base. While we want to see TPE continue to be a boots on the ground, volunteer organization, it will be important in the future to be in a position where we can hire contractors to the extent needed to properly steward our properties.

Let me also add that the endowment for the other organization is managed by a nationwide investment company. Our investments, managed by Jon Traver, have outperformed these national, well paid, investment advisors. Thanks Jon!

TPE Picnic & Annual Meeting

The annual Prairie Enthusiasts picnic and annual meeting will be held this year on Sunday, July 19, 2014 at the Twining North Shelter of Twining Park in Monroe, WI. The agenda for the day is as follows:

8:00 am Tour of Muralt Prairie & Iltis Savanna

Meet at Muralt Bluff SNA parking lot on County F between Rechsteiner Road and Tin Can Road. Those who will not attend the Board meeting can take a longer hike to the far end of Muralt or visit nearby Vale Prairie or Oliver Prairie.

10:00 am TPE Board meeting

12:00 pm Potluck lunch The Prairie Bluff Chapter will be grilling hotdogs and hamburgers, have condiments, plates, silverware, and some drinks. Please bring a dish to share and additional items for the picnic.

1:00 pm Meeting of the Membership

2:00 pm Tour of Muralt South a separate unit (will offer 2:30 start to those attending board & membership meeting). We can truckpool all the way out to the start, where we have a short walk along a corn field to the 12 acre parcel that many consider more diverse

& richer than Muralt. This unit was burned last fall. Lots of coreopsis, silphiums, lead plant, needle grass, rattlesnake master, asters and goldenrods.

For those people who are traveling in the night before, a block of rooms for the summer picnic was reserved at the Monroe, WI AmericInn motel located on 424 4th avenue. Their phone number is 608-328-3444. The block was held under the name "prairie".

All are welcome to join us for this fun gathering!



Muralt Prairie

Photo by Thomas Meyer, WI DNR

Seeds of Discovery

By Marci Hess

Seeds are fabulously fascinating aspects of flowers. There are no two alike, even among similar genera. They vary in size, shape, color, transportation method, germination method, and the list can go on. They are an important life source for plants, birds, insects, and mammals. With such an important element, why don't we know more about what the seeds of the Driftless Area look like?

I began a collection of seeds and was determined to figure out how to create images of them that would further the curiosity of folks and further our knowledge of these seeds. I had no idea how this would come about but I was willing to try many options. The camera would work with the larger seeds, at least for creating an image of what the naked eye would see. I bought a microscope and although I could see much of the intricacies of the seeds, I wasn't able to capture that in a quality photo. Dr. Dan Young, an entomologist at UW-Madison, allowed me to use their Auto Montage equipment. This microscope creates various images at different planes, then merges these images together to create one clear, 3-dimensional image. Even this didn't create the detail I wanted. Talking with some friends who work in nano technology, they suggested a Scanning Electron Microscope (SEM) and said that UW allowed the general public to rent these. In my quest to find out how to make that happen, I was introduced to Dr. Yan Wu at UW-Platteville.

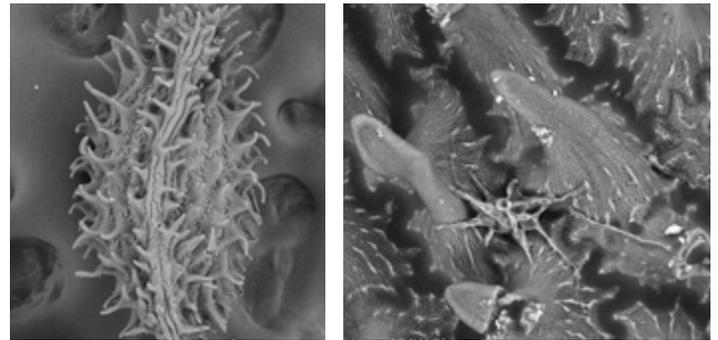
Dr. Wu and I exchanged numerous e-mails about the costs and how the SEM would work. Although their price was \$10 per hour, which is very reasonable, I realized this project would require thousands and thousands of dollars. I had to pause with that reality. This was a dream but it was only a hobby, too! Dr. Wu came up with the perfect solution...apply to the Pioneer Academic Center for Community Engagement (PACCE) program to fund this and allow the Engineering students to do the imaging as a learning experience. We wrote the grant together and it's been in place for 2 semesters now. It's been a great partnership!

On April 3, 2014, the college of Engineering, Math, and Science held their 43rd annual expo. This is where various aspects of the college are highlighted to middle school and high school students by using fun and creative methods. For example, the seed project was a demonstration of nano technology. A seed image was also used for the Science as Art contest where students took nanotech-related images to create art.



Rough false foxglove seed (Agalinis aspera) magnified 100x

SEM image courtesy Marci Hess



Prairie alumroot seed (Heuchera richardsoni) magnified 180x (left) and 800x (right) SEM images courtesy Marci Hess

As we've moved through this project we realize there is much more to be discovered than we originally thought. The designs and patterns of these seeds have a story to tell. Why do some seeds have elaborate structures and others do not? What purpose do these structures serve? Are there symbiotic relationships happening with these seeds and if so, how do those relationships benefit the seed? I hope these images will be a source of inspiration to someone; I hope they assist someone with their research into native plants; and I hope they provoke curiosity that will expand what we know about our native plants.



Dr. Yan Wu at UW-Platteville & students preparing seeds for SEM imaging. Photo by Marci Hess

Curiosity Leads to Discovery *continued from Page 1*

What followed was a nearly 5-year project describing and documenting the caterpillar and resulting moth, which were named *Sympistis forbesi*. This moth is nearly identical to and indistinguishable from the adult *S. chionanthi*, Fringe-Tree Sallow, but the caterpillars look very different and feed on different host plants. So, while Rummel's caterpillar description matched what MJ found, his identification was in error because it wasn't known there were two adult moths that looked alike. This is a highly unusual situation in that these adult moths are impossible to tell apart even when testing the genetic markers for each of them. In the cycle of an insect's life, the larvae are often host-specific, meaning they require a certain family, genus or species of plant or insect in order to survive. With many insects still not described and named, it emphasizes the importance of understanding the host plant needs of the insects.

Perhaps this new species has been acknowledged just in time to be saved. The official description and name weren't released until after the publication of David Wagner's book *Owlet Caterpillars of Eastern North America*, where he states, "We know of few recent collections of the *Triosteum* feeder and suspect the species may be in decline in the eastern part of its range, partly due to over-browsing of its food plant by white-tailed deer."

How fortuitous! A new species is identified before it becomes endangered. We, as ecological managers, need be aware that there is a lot we just don't know and we need to take that into account when we structure our management of plants. This is important because we need to view our

ecological systems from more than a few of the biotics that live there. Insects are a critical and often overlooked component of our habitats. Is this because of their small size? Their vast numbers? Their diverse appearance? What if every time we walked through an ecosystem, we spent a few more minutes and looked a bit closer? The next time you're out, let your curiosity take over. Challenge yourself to investigate at least 3 plants more thoroughly for insects or herbivory. It could save a life!

The results of this project are published in ZooKeys and can be downloaded for free at www.pensoft.net/journals/zookeys/article/5765/abstract/a-new-cryptic-sympistis-from-eastern-north-america-revealed-by-novel-larval-phenotype-and-host-plant-association-lepidop. More photos can be seen on BugGuide: <http://bugguide.net/node/view/897842/bgimage>.



Two *Sympistis forbesi* moths. Photography by MJ Hatfield

TPE Photo Library Project Underway

By Scott Fulton

Many Prairie Enthusiast members are avid photographers, and many wonderful pictures have been taken over the years of TPE sites, the rare and beautiful plant and animal species found on them and the many activities of the organization. However, it has been difficult for most of us to access these photographic treasures, especially given the geographic range of our membership.

In order to solve this problem, Diane Hills, the TPE Volunteer Coordinator, worked with the Badger Volunteer program at the UW-Madison campus to recruit student volunteers to help create an online photograph library for TPE. Working with Scott Fulton, a member of the Empire-Sauk Chapter, a group of three students (Mike Tecca, Yifan Li and Romi Castagnino) started the project last semester, and it is continuing with a new group of five students (Yicong Zheng, Nicole Rasmussen, Yidong Huang, Ellisa Kosadi and Maggie Davies) over the summer semester.

Summer 2014

The project has proven to be more challenging than originally expected. We felt that it was critical to maintain good control over how the photographs could be used, and to have a robust yet straightforward system for finding photographs in the library based on dates, photographers, sites, species shown and subjects. The project was started using the well-known website Flickr, but recent changes in Flickr's interface made it less suitable for this purpose, so we decided to switch to a website called Ipernity, which is becoming a platform of choice for professional photographers. The team is now starting to upload and catalog a large collection of photographs provided by Rich and Kathy Henderson in order to work out any remaining problems and document the process. We will then open the program to additional photographers. The plan for the future is to make the library accessible to TPE members through the new TPE website, which will be launched later this year.

Dedication Events for Two Prairie Sites

Double Oak Savanna

Join us on Saturday, October 4, 2014 for the dedication of the Double Oak Savanna, in Millville, Grant County, WI. Double Oak was gifted to TPE by Alice and Walter Mirk in 2012. This 23 acre parcel consists of remnant and restored prairie, oak savanna and oak woodland. Having been burned this spring for the first time in many years, it is in prime condition. October should be a beautiful time for a hike. The rugged terrain is home to a number of rare species including Purple Milkweed, Prairie Indian Plantain, Jeweled Shooting Star, Pickeral Frog and Prairie Ring-Necked Snake.

There will be a guided hike of the property at 10:00 am. The dedication will take place at 11:30 am followed by a potluck. Please bring a dish to pass and your own beverage. Be aware that the hike involves a steep trail which may not be suitable for some. The trip leader will be Walter Mirk, but call Jack Kusssmaul at 608-988-4309 with questions.

Directions: From the east, go to the intersection of Highway 133 and County Road C west of Woodman. Proceed west on County Road C 4.7 miles to the rock quarry on the right, where we will congregate. (Do not be fooled by another small quarry just over the crest of the hill also on the right. That is not the one.) From the west, go to the intersection of Highway 18 and County Road C, a few miles east of Prairie du Chien. Drive east County C for 7.8 miles. Just past the settlement of Millville you will come to the rock quarry on the left, where we will congregate.

*Prairie Creek Wildlife Management Area
Photo courtesy Craig Koester*

Prairie Creek Wildlife Management Area

The new Prairie Creek Wildlife Management Area is a 460 acre site that includes significant tracts of native prairie and oak savanna, located an hour south of Saint Paul, MN, just 8 miles southeast of Northfield. Notable species include the threatened Prairie Bush Clover and the endangered Henslow's sparrow. Restoration work has been ongoing for a number of years, and the site became part of the MN DNR system last winter.

A dedication event will be held on Saturday, June 28, 2014 at 10 am. Prairie Enthusiasts are all invited -- and if that date does not work, there is an open invitation to stop by the site any time. For more information, contact Craig Koester at 651-489-9124 or ckoester@luthersem.edu. Information about the site is also available on their website at <https://sites.google.com/site/friendsofprairiecreekwma/>.



CHAPTER NEWS

COULEE REGION CHAPTER

Funding for Hill Prairie Restoration

The Coulee Region Chapter has entered into a cooperative agreement with the US Fish and Wildlife Service titled "The Prairie Enthusiasts 2014 Bluff Prairie Initiative". As part of the agreement under the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, we have secured funding for 2014. The initial funding obligation to TPE for this initiative will be specifically targeted for hiring contractors to remove brush and cedars on remnant hill prairies. The initiative provides the opportunity to get funding for work on smaller remnants for which it is sometimes difficult to get restoration grants.

This is a cost-share program, but the shared cost will be covered by a combination of TPE and the landowner. The good news is that the cost-share is over the life of the project, which is 10 years. We hope that most of those choosing to join this initiative will commit to conducting a prescribed fire once or twice during that 10-yr period. Those burns alone would likely cover the cost-share requirement.

Another aspect of this initiative is that formal management plans will be developed for each site. These plans will guide future restoration in a manner that will help assure that these remnants are managed properly. These plans will be developed by TPE volunteer "experts" working with landowners. If you want more information on this initiative, feel free to contact Jim Rogala (therogues@charter.net).

Sugar Creek Bible Camp Hill Prairie Management

The Coulee Region Chapter has had a formal/informal agreement to manage a hill prairie at the Sugar Creek Bible Camp near Ferryville for over 10 years. Members of the chapter met there on May 17 to hike the prairie, assess management needs, and to demonstrate girdling techniques to novices. We are considering using some funds from the Bluff Prairie Initiative to conduct brush and tree removal at the site. The chapter has provided an outdoor hill prairie display for use along the road at the base of the prairie, as well as brochures describing hill prairies. Over 6,000 “campers” go through the camp each year, so it is a great opportunity for education!

Bill Kiser (USFWS) practices girdling at Sugar Creek Bible Camp using a sharpened leaf spring.

Photo courtesy Jim Rogala



EMPIRE-SAUK CHAPTER

By Rich Henderson

Summer Interns

The Empire-Sauk Chapter has a great crew of six student interns working with us this summer. They will be splitting their time among Mounds View Grassland (Schurch-Thomson, Shea, and A to Z units), Pleasant Valley Conservancy, Black Earth Rettenmund Prairie, West Dane Conservancy, Pleasure Valley Conservancy (including Parrish Savanna), Erbe Grassland, Powell Prairie, Kalscheur Savanna, and possibly a couple other locations. Support for the interns comes from TPE land management endowments, donations, and agricultural/CRP rental payments on our preserves. Additional support is coming from the Savanna Oak Foundation (Tom & Kathie Brock), West Dane Conservancy (Doug Steege & Kristine Euclide), and Pleasure Valley Conservancy (Ken Wade & Pat Trochlell). This is our 8th season of hosting interns.

The interns, while in the Mounds View and Erbe Grassland area, are headquartered out of the Schurch-Thomson Prairie barn. Rob Baller has been hired for the summer as a restoration ecologist for this area to direct, guide, and inform the interns. Rob is a naturalist and longtime TPE member active with the Prairie Bluff Chapter. He has much experience in natural area management, restoration, and environmental education. We are most pleased he was

able to join us for the summer. The crew’s work at Pleasant Valley Conservancy will be directed by Tom & Kathie Brock and Amanda Budyak, at West Dane the crew will be directed by Doug Steege & Larry Sheaffer, and at Pleasure Valley the crew will be directed by Ken Wade.

This summer’s interns come from various universities and backgrounds. They are Samantha Brunner, a recent grad from UW-Stevens Point majoring in wildlife ecology, Marcella Hebert, a senior in wildlife ecology at UW-Stevens Point (she is also a skilled archer), Bryant Luhman, a senior at UW-Madison majoring in biological aspects of conservation and zoology, Casey Menick, a recent grad from UW-Madison majoring in environmental sciences and biology, Michael Stelpflug, a recent grad from UW-Stevens Point majoring in wildlife ecology, and Richard Wheeler, a recent grad from UW-Stevens Point majoring in wildlife ecology. We are most pleased to have such an engaged and enthusiast group of interns for the summer.

If you would like to work alongside the interns and share you experience and knowledge with them, and learn how they became interested in conservation, contact Rich Henderson (608-845-7065 or tpe.rhenderson@tds.net).



Empire-Sauk summer intern crew - Bryant Luhman, Sam Brunner, Casey Menick, Marci Hebert, Rick Wheeler and Michael Stelpflug.

Photo courtesy Rich Henderson

Delayed Burn Season

Another late spring made for another condensed burn season. In addition, un-cooperating winds and weather conditions at times also hampered our burn efforts this year. Even so, the Empire-Sauk Chapter still managed to get done most of what we had planned to burn; we were able to get to 88% of the sites, did 86% of the planned units, and burned 74% of the acres scheduled. Thanks to dedicated volunteers, multiple burn bosses, and mechanized equipment, we completed 56 burns on 15 properties for a total of 508 acres. This was accomplished by 65 volunteers putting in nearly 1,000 hours. Thank you to all. You’re helping keep our prairie, savanna, and oak woodland heritage alive and well. Special thank you to those who generously let their trucks be used for towing and hauling pumper units and trailers.

GLACIAL PRAIRIE CHAPTER

By Alice Mirk

Chapter Provides Educational Opportunity for Frank School in Kenosha

In February, we were contacted by a 2nd grade teacher in Kenosha. She wanted to provide her students with an educational unit on the great prairies that once covered the land in pre-settlement times. She researched prairies on the internet, came up with the name of The Prairie Enthusiasts and found out there was a chapter “responsible” for Kenosha County.

Frank School is a cash-strapped urban school where 95% of the children qualify for free or reduced lunches. They have little or no money for enrichment experiences and indeed school supplies are bare bones. Caroline Howe visited with us and we loaned her several books on prairie and oak savanna to get her started, and we offered to come to the school with a resource for the kids who would engage them and make prairies come alive for them. We recruited Rob Baller from the Prairie Bluff Chapter to be the main speaker. He is a natural with kids and frequently teaches at Beloit College. He rose to the challenge with alacrity and rustled up giant scenes of the prairie for the children to color, a bison robe, partial skulls of bison, deer and assorted other skeletal remains, a stuffed prairie chicken and other touchable items. He also put together a dynamite PowerPoint to which we added great sound effects such as bison mating sounds, bird sounds etc. and we were ready for the road trip. It took two cars to get all the equipment there but it was worth the haul!

On March 31st we set off for Frank Elementary School and got there at about 11:30am. We took over the library and Rob did the presentations, Walter set up and manned the exhibits and coloring stations and I operated the PowerPoint and sound effects. We did the presentation three times so the entire 2nd grade of Frank School could participate. Walter and I donated big boxes of fresh crayons and colored markers for each class for coloring the prairie



Rob Baller explains the food diversity pyramid at the Frank School in Kenosha WI. Photo courtesy Alice Mirk

murals. The children had great questions and were very impressed by the pictures of the prairie burns that Rob presented. The legacy we left behind was a lot of goodwill for The Prairie Enthusiasts, a lot of information on prairie eco-systems and what seemed to stick the most (apart from the bison hide robe) were the 2 slides that Rob put together of what he called the food pyramids - one with the diversity of life in it, including prairies, one with just corn and cows and people. It was a new thought for the kids, and it was obvious they preferred the pyramid with diversity!

2014 Glacial Prairie Work Cooperative Off to a Great Start

The Glacial Prairie Chapter has no purchased land but is rich in members working very hard to foster and maintain prairies and oak savanna of their own. Last year we came to the conclusion that the best way to foster cohesion and cooperation among the membership was to work on each other's prairies. This would enable us to get to know each other and to pool our resources for the work that needs to be done. Our first work party of the season was at the Bill Webb residence. Six members in addition to Bill turned up to help stack and burn branches and brush. They worked for a solid 2 hours, accomplishing what Bill had on his list for the morning and had a good time in the bargain.

If you are a member of the Glacial Chapter Prairie and are interested in the work cooperative, contact Chapter President Alex Handlos at handlosa@gmail.com for more information.

MANY RIVERS CHAPTER

By Deanna Pomije

Our Many Rivers Chapter has a wonderful core group of dedicated volunteers, who make our chapter what it is today. I'd like to continue to thank all our board members for their dedicated work as well as the many volunteers that have stepped up this spring to assist in prescribed burns. Our board members are as follows:

- Chair:** Deanna Pomije
(507-600-9900, prairie4moon@gmail.com)
- Vice-Chair:** Jim Lynch (flapper_t_ball@yahoo.com)
- Treasurer:** Naoko Meyer (brownie-meyer@yahoo.com)
- Secretary:** Susan Chambers
(schambersmediator@yahoo.com)
- TPE Board Member:** Henry Panowitsch
(henrypanowitsch@yahoo.com)
- Field Trip Coordinator:** Bridgette Winkels
(bmwinkels@hotmail.com)

Our spring burns this season have been very productive. We've burned 5 prairies thus far. They've included 3 of our member's restored prairie sites as well as a small pollinator site and a large 75-acre restored prairie. The 75-acre prairie is actually part of the St. Peter Arboretum

site just on the outskirts of the city of St. Peter. This was a complex burn to take on and we were glad for the expertise of the MN DNR once again as well as the volunteer staff of the local St. Peter Fire Dept. and Arboretum staff. I was personally not able to partake in the event, but a friend described it as uneventful. These are exactly the type of burns we like to see. He said there were so many people and suppression equipment on site that he was surprised the fire had any courage at all to burn. The burn was a bit on the smoky side, but the wind was in the right direction to take the smoke out of town without too much concern. We may yet continue to burn a few sites in order to control cool season grasses or they may also wait for fall. There's never a shortage of fun activities that give us an excuse to get together and share our love of all things prairie. Harriet Mason also deserves a great thank you in her coordination efforts for both the St. Peter's Arboretum and Treaty site for the burn that was completed and the continued work on these very public prairie restoration sites. She's been the main TPE contact in harmonizing the groups together toward the common goal of prairie restoration for these sites.

This winter we had a couple of great training opportunities. For our annual burn refresher training we once again had the MN DNR provide us some intense burn training one evening. Three very knowledgeable DNR staff shared with us their expertise in conducting prescribed burns. We were given many prescribed burning references; saw first-hand some burn equipment and clothing. They were wonderful presentations with burn plan writing practice for a large complex upcoming burn we were planning. It couldn't have been more practical. The event ended with a very interesting presentation on burn ecology. The MN DNR has graciously provided this as well as other burn training for our chapter annually, and have been a great resource.

A separate training opportunity entailed a 'Stihl' chainsaw representative providing us an amazing chainsaw safety course free of charge in the beautiful Eagle Nature Center at Rasmussen Park. Typical of any safety training there were great detailed pictures and stories to inform us and in some cases alarm us to the importance of safety. The stories and photos of those florescent plastic helmets just doing their job were amazing to see. The 'Stihl' representative did a great job answering our many questions, even expanding his talk to include added safety precautions for our chapter's own brush saw. This training event would not have taken place without the coordinated efforts of our Mankato's local 'C&S Supply Store', another great resource in assisting our group with equipment needs and questions.

This summer we will continue to work restoring the 3-acre prairie in the Rasmussen Woods, City of Mankato Park. It is still in its early ugly phase with mowing and weeds to overcome, but there are signs of hope afoot. We will also continue to work on enhancing the Kutz Prairie remnant. We will continue our battle with the woody vegetation and keep our eyes open to the treasures that bloom every week throughout the summer. We may also work toward enhancing a nearby prairie also in need of woody control. All work and no play is no fun, so this summer we are also coordinating a field trip or two. Stay tuned for more details.

A special thank you goes out to Jim Lynch for researching and aiding our chapter in purchasing our new safety and burn equipment. Another thank you goes out to Randy Schindle with the DNR for stepping up not only in teaching us further about prescribed burning, but also in aiding, coordinating or leading burns this spring. A grand thank you and farewell goes out to Naoko Meyer for her hard work throughout her time as our treasurer.

Stay tuned for further prairie activities throughout this summer. Activities may include field trips, work days, a burn or two, our annual summer picnic and other prairie adventures in the month of August, our prairie promotional month. Early fall I'm hoping to coordinate a landowner burn plan writing workshop. Enjoy your prairie summer.

NORTHWEST ILLINOIS CHAPTER

By John Day

Winter has finally given way and released its grip on the Midwest. The spring of 2014, however, kept a firm hold as chilly temperatures were the norm. Occasionally, there were flakes of snow drifting through the air as NIPE made ready to enter the burn season.

NIPE volunteers along with the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation and the Jo Daviess Burn Co-Operative conducted prescribed burns on a number of prairies, large and small. Burning was done at locations such as Casper Bluff, Horseshoe Mound, Hanley - Savanna, green spaces within the Galena Territory as well as private properties owned and maintained by some of our members. In each and every case these burns were done successfully without any incidents of injuries to volunteers, loss of equipment or flames burning out of control and spreading across unintended areas. This being done in a season where many local Fire Districts were called upon on numerous times to extinguish fires that had to be reined in because of threats to homes, structures and fields.



NIPE-conducted prescribed burn at Horseshoe Mound, Galena, IL.

Photo courtesy John Day

NIPE was recently made the beneficiary of a donation from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in the form of a greenhouse. This structure had been used by USFW on their site at Lost Mound which was once the location of the Savanna Army Depot. NIPE will be using this 20' X 24' hoop type structure for additional seed drying and seed storage space at Lone Tree Farm, the home of Jim and Rickie Rachuy. We'd like to take this opportunity to thank USFW for this donation. It will go a long way in helping us with this coming year's commitment to provide native prairie seed for NIPE projects.

With each passing year the amount of seed that NIPE has made available for others, as well as our own plantings, has grown. Last year NIPE harvested more than one thousand pounds of seed. Enough to plant in excess of one hundred acres of prairie restoration. This year, we expect to harvest even more seed in order to restore an even greater number of acres.

NIPE will be hosting an open house at Lonetree Farm this year that will include prairie tours, an opportunity for the public to participate in seed picking and refreshments. Be sure to check our website, www.nipes.org for seed picking schedules and other information.

PRAIRIE BLUFF CHAPTER

By Tom Mitchell

PROTECTION -- During the past year Rob Baller and John Ochsner found a population of native plants in an unused portion of St. Patrick's Cemetery in the village of Albany. In early spring they began to count the numbers of the prairie thistle, *Cirsium hillii*, a state-threatened plant, and found over 100 plants. This discovery led the chapter to contact the Reverend Michael Moon, pastor at St. Patrick's Catholic Church, who set up a meeting with the parish board at St. Francis of Assisi in Belleville. We asked for permission to fence off a small portion of the cemetery, where there are no graves, to allow the prairie to grow without the usual lawn mowing, to see what else may come up. Ironically, across the street from the cemetery is a new project of the Albany public schools -- a planted prairie.

EDUCATION -- John Ochsner and Tom Mitchell represented the chapter at the Green County Conservation School Day, an event at Honey Creek Park in Monroe that attracted over 200 fifth and sixth graders from Monroe, Juda and New Glarus, who heard about our native prairie landscape and watched a demonstration of our prescribed fire equipment. Steve Hubner talked about biodiversity to 300 school kids in Lafayette County at an Earth Day event at Blackhawk Memorial Park near Woodford. Mike Davis led a Master Gardeners tour of Abe's Woods and Muralt Bluff Prairie. We led UW researchers, who are looking into models for sustainable grazing on private lands, to woods and savannas in our area with various histories --grazing and no grazing, management and no management. John led his usual informative tour at Abe's Woods during the peak flowering of spring ephemerals, and Jim Freymiller hosted

a hike at his Skinner Prairie that combined natural history with early mining history. Bill Kuenzi, a prairie enthusiast and president of the Green's Prairie Cemetery Association, put together another excellent program for the sixth annual Memorial Day at the pioneer cemetery.

MANAGEMENT -- Prairie Bluff Chapter ended the spring season for prescribed fire by burning 15 times on 188 acres, including two late May burns to set back brome grass in plantings at Vale Prairie. On one sunny Saturday we sent burn bosses and crews to three separate prescribed fires. The garlic mustard season is nearly over with chapter efforts concentrated on our members' woodlands, Abraham's Woods in Green County and the Trillium Timber in Lafayette County.

PRAIRIE SANDS CHAPTER

TNC's Page Creek Preserve Attacked by Prairie Sands Chapter

By Shelley Hamel

Spearheaded by Prairie Sands' member Laurel Bennett, our chapter continues its collaboration with The Nature Conservancy to help manage the 600 acre TNC preserve in Marquette County. With some management tools provided by TNC and labor provided by us, we have had a series of work parties starting in 2013. Spotted knapweed, garlic mustard, and other usual suspects are on our radar. In May, 2014 we pulled garlic mustard that remained after Nature Conservancy's contracted herbicide application. Whereas last year we found large developed plants, this year there were mostly small plants under bramble which made for a bit more difficulty. Small Scotch pines, mostly under 5" diameter, invading a well-establish lupine field, also got the axe. This is on-going collaboration, so look for work party announcements on the chapter's webpage.



Photo courtesy Shelley Hamel

SOUTHWEST WISCONSIN CHAPTER

by Linda Lynch

On Saturday, May 17, the Southwest Chapter hosted the Bad Axe Chapter of the Wisconsin Woodlands Association at the Borah Creek Prairie. Most of the woodland owners had purchased property because of the woodlands and found they have some type of grassland as well. Many have decided they like the grassland because of the birds present and are interested in learning more about the plant species that provide the necessary habitat. Jesse Bennett gave a short presentation on the types of management techniques for both woodlands and grasslands and how those techniques vary depending on the goals and challenges of each particular property. The group had a lot of good questions and it was apparent they are interested in promoting the grassland habitat as well as the woodlands on their respective properties.

Jesse led a hike through the northern portion of the site and we looked at the prairie plants in various stages as well as the tree clearing that has occurred over the past couple years. The group was also entertained by the herd of goats that were grazing in a large paddock, eating some of the brushy species with which many woodland owners admitted to having problems.



Goat herd at Borah Creek Prairie. Photo by Linda Lynch

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

The following people have joined TPE during the period March 15 – May 31, 2014

Brooke & Aaron Haycraft, Broadhead, WI	Glenn Burgmeier, Oak Creek, WI	Heidi Schmalz, Mineral Point, WI
Sharon Jaffe, Minneapolis, MN	Ann Marie Gullickson, Rochester, MN	Summit AG Fund II, LLP, Alden, WI
Annette Jenson, Hopkins, MN	Gary Tameling, Burr Ridge, IL	LuAnn Greiner, Madison, WI
Carrie & John Matthews, Oregon, WI	Mary Jo Clark, Melrose, WI	Brady Frederick, Eagle, WI
Thomas Marcouiller & Roberta Voss, Hudson, WI	Ralph Keil, Palmyra, PA	Lois Batker-Steckelis, Belleville, WI
Ellen & Charles Peck, Webster, WI	Andrew Heimdahl, Chatfield, MN	Margerat Bassett, Viroqua, WI

THANK YOU DONORS

We thank everyone who made a donation to The Prairie Enthusiasts during the period March 15 – May 31, 2014.
These gifts above and beyond membership dues and the annual appeal are truly generous and appreciated.

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