

2017 Annual Report



The  
Prairie
Enthusiasts

Mission Statement of The Prairie Enthusiasts

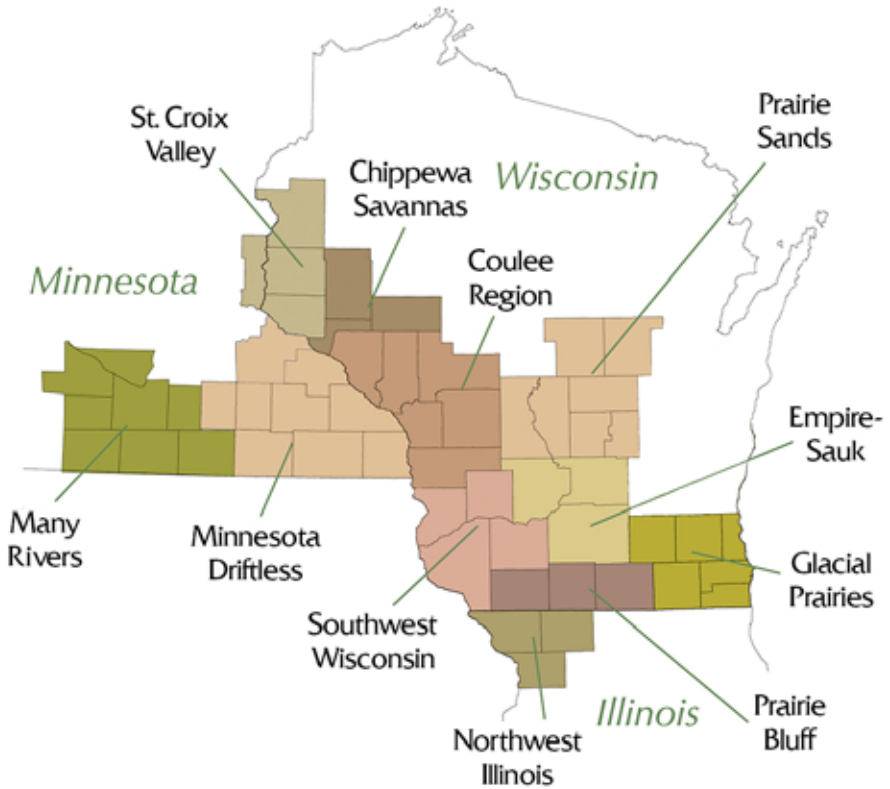
Adopted September 13, 2001



We seek to ensure the perpetuation and recovery of prairie, oak savanna, and other associated ecosystems of the Upper Midwest through protection, management, restoration, and education. In doing so, we strive to work openly and cooperatively with private landowners and other private and public conservation groups.



Chapters



- **Chippewa Savannas Chapter** (Dunn, Eau Claire, Pepin Counties in Wisconsin)
- **Coulee Region Chapter** (Buffalo, Jackson, La Crosse, Monroe, Trempealeau, Vernon Counties in Wisconsin)
- **Empire-Sauk Chapter** (Columbia, Dane, Sauk Counties in Wisconsin)
- **Glacial Prairie Chapter** (Jefferson, Kenosha, Milwaukee, Racine, Walworth, Waukesha Counties in Wisconsin)
- **Many Rivers Chapter** (Blue Earth, Nicollet, Brown, Faribault, Freeborn, Martin, Waseca, Watonwan Counties in Minnesota)
- **Northwest Illinois Chapter** (Carroll, Jo Daviess, Stephenson Counties in Illinois)
- **Prairie Bluff Chapter** (Green, Lafayette, Rock Counties in Wisconsin)
- **Prairie Sands Chapter** (Adams, Green Lake, Juneau, Marquette, Portage, Waupaca, Waushara Counties in Wisconsin)
- **Minnesota Driftless Chapter** (Dodge, Fillmore, Houston, Mower, Olmstead, Steele, Wabasha, Winona, Goodhue Counties in Minnesota)
- **St. Croix Valley Chapter** (Pierce, Polk, St. Croix Counties in Wisconsin and Washington County in Minnesota)
- **Southwest Chapter** (Crawford, Grant, Iowa, Richland Counties in Wisconsin)

Executive Director's Message



In 2017, The Prairie Enthusiasts (TPE) celebrated its 30th anniversary. We spent time remembering our first infamous burns in the 1970's that gave rise to TPE becoming incorporated in 1987, and the purchase of the 11 acre Thomas Wet Prairie. Over these thirty years, TPE has grown to protect over 3,000 acres of remnant prairie and savanna. We continued this work in

2017, utilizing the WI DNR's Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program by adding 37 acres to Rattlesake Ridge near Arena, WI. The Empire Sauk Chapter also successfully completed the purchase of the Hauser Road Prairie near Waunakee, WI and paid off the loan used to help finance the original purchase.

TPE Chapters manage the sites we own as well as public and private sites in need of management. This includes our ongoing work with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and their Partners for Wildlife Program. We spent much of the past year completing a monarch butterfly cooperative agreement that is managing and restoring prairies for the benefit of this species across Wisconsin.

Chapters are also doing some amazing land management activities. The Minnesota Driftless Chapter initiated a new burn program this past year while the Empire-Sauk Chapter made videos with the help of BadgerCams at their Mounds View Grassland. Chapters are conducting a wide variety of outreach and communication activities as well. The Prairie Sands Chapter held several events touring high quality remnants, and the Chippewa Savannas Chapter hosted their annual Tiffany Bottoms Train Tours.

All chapters share the amazing work we do managing and restoring the prairies and savannas of the upper Midwest with the public by hosting dozens of field trips and work parties throughout the year.

Sincerely,

Chris Kirkpatrick,
TPE Executive Director

Prairie Roots

During the 5,000 years preceding European settlement, much of the upper Midwest's landscape was dominated by prairies and oak savannas. The 150 years following settlement have witnessed the destruction of all but 0.15% of these communities. Prairies as small as half an acre are worth saving and can be restored to be a healthy and vibrant ecosystems. TPE works with area chapters to support them in their direct land protection efforts, with TPE staff assisting as needed.

Prairies at Risk

The annual losses of prairie and savanna remnants are small as measured in acres and often go unnoticed. A few more decades of such losses will leave little to preserve outside of the precious few public and private preserves that exist today. The Prairie Enthusiasts, in cooperation with other conservation groups, is working to reverse this trend.

Benefits of Prairies

Restored prairies are very good for many reasons—no matter how small an area—but they are never as biologically diverse or physically complete as original prairie sod. Whenever possible, we encourage landowners to first conduct plant surveys, identify the prairie remnant, then add buffer zones using locally collected seed or a reputable seed source.

What Prairies Need

Prairies need ongoing management that includes weed removal, seed generation and suppression of non-prairie plants to remain vibrant and healthy and support the related wildlife that depend on this habitat. Short-term and long-term community support (conceptually, financially, politically, and from a participatory perspective) is important to sustain necessary management levels over time.



Land Protection Articles

Hauser Road Prairie

The 45-acre Hauser Road Prairie is the largest remaining remnant of the original 100-square-mile Empire Prairie, which stretched from Waunakee to Columbus, WI. 148 native plant species have been found on the site, including a viable population of the state-threatened Hill's thistle and woolly



milkweed. TPE originally acquired the site in 2014 with grants from the WI DNR Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund and the Dane County Conservation Fund. TPE had to take a loan from The Conservation Fund to cover the rest, which was due by August 2017. The chapter hosted a fundraiser on June 4th which featured great weather and was a real success. The event was held on the preserve, and included a field trip, an auction and music provided by Scott Weber and Kurt Meine. More than 30 people attended, and between the event and this spring's outreach project, a total of \$40,000 was raised which helped the Empire Sauk Chapter complete the acquisition and pay off the loan to The Conservation Fund. Our sincerest thanks to all who contributed both their time and dollars to this effort.

Rattlesnake Ridge Addition

This addition adds 37 acres to the original 42 acre Rattlesnake Ridge purchased in 2015. The property is almost entirely wooded and is a combination of remnant oak savanna and oak woodland. The site includes many large and intact open grown oak trees, and covers most of the ridgeline facing north to the Wisconsin River valley. The property is contiguous to the dry-mesic prairie remnants on the original Rattlesnake Ridge site. It includes species such as big bluestem, little



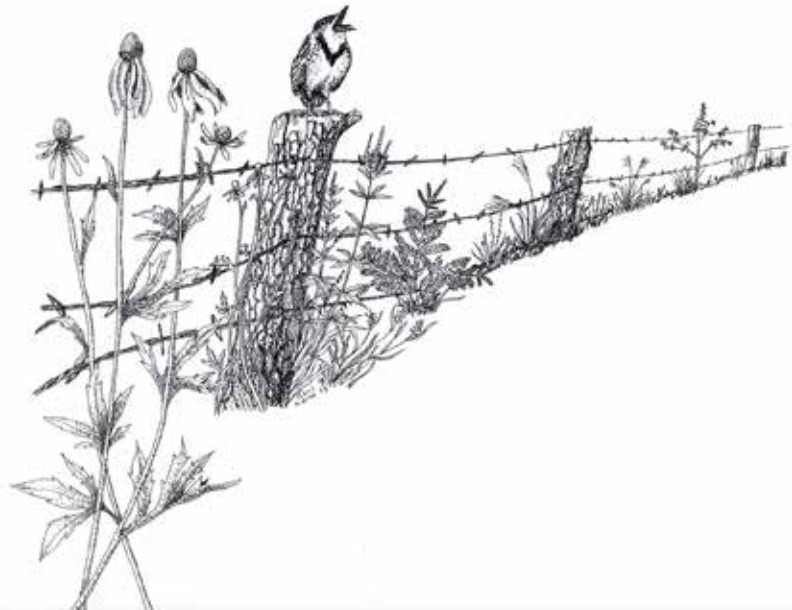
bluestem, sideoats gramma, rock sandwort, skullcap, false boneset, flax, purple prairie clover, flowering spurge, false sunflower, yellow coneflower, and spiderwort. The site also includes some extensive limestone outcrops that may be possible rattlesnake hibernacula. The site has not been logged in recent history, largely due to its inaccessibility, which has helped maintain some of its natural features.

Land Protection



Facts and Figures:

The Prairie Enthusiasts owns 34 natural area preserves totaling 2,087.93 acres and holds conservation easements on an additional 1,075 acres spread over 11 sites for a total of 3,452.77 protected acres. The appraised value of this land is \$12.985 million. TPE has transferred 290.3 acres of property to partner organizations and has informal management agreements on an additional 1,500 acres that are actively managed by our chapters.



30th Anniversary of The Prairie Enthusiasts

The Formative Years – a Brief History

History, like rivers, meanders. There's no one story that tells the origin of TPE. One could say TPE had its origins in the 1980s with a local businessman. Or in the '70s with twenty-somethings on a mission to save the planet. Or it began with scientists from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Probably, all are true, and more were left out.



TPE began with the Green County Conservation League (GCCL), a nonprofit conservation group in southern Wisconsin, which was a hunting and fishing club in the 1980s. Many of our earliest Prairie Enthusiasts associated with this club.

A decade before TPE, Gary Eldred of Green County, crossed paths with classmate John Ochsner. Both were interested in a prairie remnant owned by the Muralt family. Eldred had hunted on the bluff and was entranced by the beauty of rough blazing star and Indian grass; Ochsner hauled milk from the Muralts for his family-run cheese factory. Eldred, Ochsner and others from the GCCL would participate in a movement to have the Green County government buy and conserve the prairie bluff. On Sunday, April 13, 1975, ten people, including fellow League members and future Prairie Enthusiasts Reynold Zeller (WI DNR), southern Wisconsin wildlife artist Jonathan Wilde, Ochsner and Eldred, set fire to a small patch of the Muralt pasture. The fire escaped, but with a little help it eventually died out. The subsequent August flush of rough blazing star impressed the Green County Parks Committee, who recommended the site be saved. The first 64.2-acre parcel was purchased by Green County in 1976. The bluff has become the Muralt Bluff Prairie State Natural Area and transferred to TPE on Sept. 13, 2013.

Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts

A small cadre of friends met sometime in 1986 at Turner Hall in Monroe, Wis. They schemed how to form a land restoration and advocacy group. “Whoopie!” This exclamation inspired the acronym for the new group. - Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts. On Jan. 22, 1987, WPE held its first official meeting. A week later the Monroe



Evening Times reported: “The organization of local efforts to preserve native landscape through education and restoration was formalized recently with the selection of a governing board of the Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts. WPE incorporated on Dec. 30, 1987. The initial WPE burn school was appropriately-named Olympic Flame Restaurant. Eighteen pyros received expert instruction from UW-Stevens Point forestry professor and burn boss Andrea Koonce.

Southwest Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts

Gary Eldred was often on the road prowling for prairie remnants. Eldred began forming another prairie group in Grant County in 1987. At first he considered it a subset of WPE. Eldred met with David MacGregor, an attorney who owned land in Grant County. He wanted the group to incorporate so it could purchase and preserve land. Eldred enlisted fellow nursery employees on the first board of directors: Gail and Gary Adams, Ruthie Bierwirth, Mary Bremer and Kate Eckert. MacGregor finalized the incorporation after an initial effort by Alice Mirk. The new group became the Southwest Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts, Inc. on July 14, 1987. SWWPE purchased its first prairie parcel in summer 1988 - the 13.66-acre Thomas Wet Prairie



That same year, prairie news was carried by a newsletter titled *The Prairie Promoter*. The new logo, as voted on by the readers, became Gary Eldred's meadowlark-on-a-fence-row illustration. *The Prairie Promotor* flourished under the efforts of Walter Mirk and consummate chef Alice Mirk, who made suggestions to "Eat Your Local Alien." The next year the first combined WPE and SWWPE prairie banquet was launched. Soon a fund-raising auction was included in the banquet and \$10 admission was charged. Thus, the two clubs came together informally to enjoy laughter and needling barbs. Dozens of comrades viewed slides of prairie antics from the previous year. **It was time to consider becoming**



the local chapter of a single, larger organization. Some members rejected joining a larger group for fear of losing local autonomy but, by winter of 1992, Eldred's meadowlark logo included the words 'The Prairie Enthusiasts.' According to the Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions, the SWWPE name was changed to TPE on Aug.

6, 1993. The upshot of this history, skeletal and incomplete as it is, has caused me to wonder if there are alternate birth dates for The Prairie Enthusiasts. Presently, the TPE anniversary is the incorporation date of Southwest Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts but, without the other groups, there is no TPE. Thanks to all who helped bring the organization about through many great and untold stories.

Land Management

Chapter Smitten with Badgers

We've been aware of badger diggings at Mounds View Grassland; we can now see them thanks to trail cameras placed by Eric Preston. Here's his story: "I noticed a huge mound of sand on the hillside near the barn. I thought it might be a badger den, so I put a trail camera on it. I found great footage of a badger lounging, scratching, and rolling around. I recorded raccoons, rabbits, deer, opossums, mice, weasels, minks, and more than 20 species of birds. Many of the birds used these sandy areas as a place to take a dust bath; some of the footage is quite hilarious. The Brown Thrashers are the masters of the badger den dust bath, but the best recording was of a Great Horned Owl that spent at least 10 minutes bathing." Eric has put together some delightful short videos of the footage that can be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cHAXQMX-9eI>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iK54uzod47>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rPcHMOxVP8&t=135>



Land Management

Minnesota Driftless

Chapter expands prescribed burns program

Our chapter greatly expanded prescribed fire work this spring. Eight burns were planned on more than 300 acres. Chapter members and volunteers had a chance to try new burn equipment and hone their planning, organizational and implementation skills. The chapter has four experienced burn leaders. They are George Howe, Kevin O'Brien, Stephen Winter and Scott Leddy. More than a dozen volunteers contributed to these burn successes. The prescribed burns included 12 acres of public land owned by Winona County - the Apple Blossom Overlook Park just north of La Crescent. MDC volunteers partnered again with Winona County staff and the La Crescent Fire Department to lead this burn. Also noteworthy was the chapter's 200-plus-acre prairie and woodland burn at the Zephyr Land Cooperative in Wiscoy Valley, where 15 volunteers split into four teams to successfully manage a large burn.



Education

Choo Choo through the Chippewa

In May, the Chippewa Savannas Chapter led a nearly full mini train car through Tiffany Botoms State Natural Area. The trip was guided by an ornithologist and botanist. We found flora and fauna through extensive prairie and mixed hardwood forest along the lower Chippewa River.

Kathy Stahl participated in the Dunn County Environmental Field Days at the Menomonie Environmental Center. She and other federal, state and local officials taught Boyceville and Colfax 5th Graders about native plants and non-native invasive plants. The chapter joined with the NRCS, Wisconsin DNR, Dunn County Land & Water Conservation Division, and Red Cedar Monitoring Group staffs to provide two days of environmental, hands-on learning.

Mark Leach led a two-part “vision quest” meeting to assist the chapter in developing plans for the future. Mark also led the participants working to become Master Naturalist Volunteers on field trips to identify prairie, savanna plants, and various ecosystems.

Wild Food Author and expert Sam Thayer gave a four-hour, energetic presentation on edible plants found in prairies. Sam urged participants to consider the concept of “prescribed grazing” of non-threatened species.

Jack Phillips, author of [The Bur Oak Manifesto](#), gave a presentation on native oaks at the Simply Dunn shop in Menomonie.



Education

Prairie Sands

The Prairie Sands Chapter tour of John Shillinglaw's Mekan Prairie was a success. John Shillinglaw explained how transects are set for annual Karner blue butterfly counts, which occur weekly during late July and early August. John gave a brief overview of the restoration work he has done on the 230 acres since the 1990s. There was the sharing of prairie stories and getting to know new friends at a picnic lunch after the hike.

The chapter also sent a group of Prairie Sands members to prescribed burn training. The trained burn crew will partner with Jeb Barzen's project "Healthy Grown Farms," where he has been working with Waushara potato farmers to plant and maintain prairie buffer zones.

We also discussed US Fish and Wildlife's Karner blue butterfly grant, our future plans with The Nature Conservancy and Page Creek, our new Facebook page, Golden Sands Research & Development firm and their efforts to form a new invasive species' management region, ongoing efforts to partner with UW-Stevens Point's Land Conservation Society, and finally, a date for our annual Christmas Party and Seed Exchange.



Consolidated Statement Of Activities

For the Year Ended December 31, 2017

	Temporarily Permanently			Total
	Unrestricted	Restricted	Restricted	
Revenues, Gains and Other Support				
Contributions	\$193,181	\$111,728	\$248,433	\$553,342
Membership	58,786	-	-	58,786
Grants	61,306	6,002	96,814	164,122
Special events	30,979	-	-	30,979
Fee for services	60,973	-	-	60,973
USDA program income	65,877	-	-	65,877
Sales and rents	76,321	-	-	76,321
Investment income (loss)	3,608	100,037	-	103,645
Other	316	-	-	316
Net assets released from restrictions	137,861	(134,073)	(3,788)	-
Total Revenues, Gains and Other Support	689,208	83,694	341,459	1,114,361
Expenses				
Program services	466,964	-	-	466,964
Supporting activities:				
Operations and grant administration	89,858	-	-	89,858
Fundraising	38,437	-	-	38,437
Total Expenses	595,259	-	-	595,259
Change in Net Assets	93,949	83,694	341,459	519,102
Transfer to permanently restricted net assets	-	(26,199)	26,199	-
Total Change in Net Assets	93,949	57,495	367,658	519,102
Net Assets - Beginning of Year	448,493	355,081	9,390,843	10,194,417
Net Assets - End of Year	\$542,442	\$412,576	\$9,758,501	\$10,713,519



Consolidated Statement Of Financial Position

For the Year Ended December 31, 2017

ASSETS

Current Assets:	
Cash and cash equivalents	\$ 533,202
Other assets	<u>13,168</u>
Total Current Assets	<u>546,370</u>
Property and Equipment:	
Land and improvements	8,932,006
Equipment	224,395
Ruth Hine Collection	1,500
Less: Accumulated depreciation	<u>(227,844)</u>
Net Property and Equipment	<u>8,930,057</u>
Other Assets:	
Restricted cash and investments	1,264,682
Investments	<u>29,911</u>
Total Other Assets	<u>1,294,593</u>
TOTAL ASSETS	<u>\$ 10,771,020</u>

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

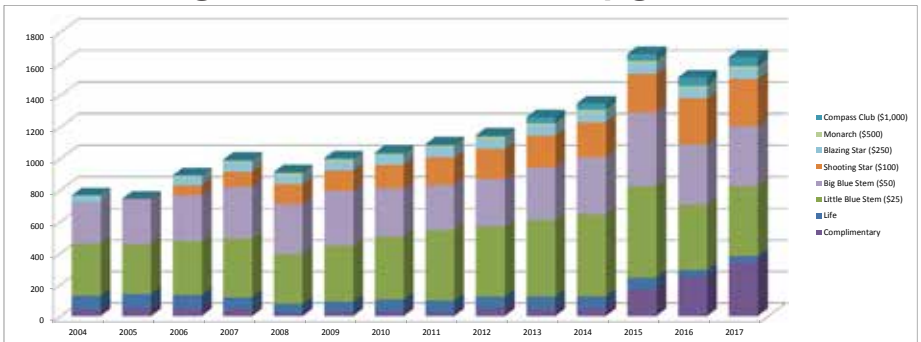
Current Liabilities:	
Accounts payable	\$ 2,536
Deferred revenue	35,802
Accrued salaries and expenses	<u>19,163</u>
Total Current Liabilities	<u>57,501</u>
Total Liabilities	<u>57,501</u>
Net Assets:	
Unrestricted	542,442
Temporarily restricted	412,576
Permanently restricted	<u>9,758,501</u>
Total Net Assets	<u>10,713,519</u>
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS	<u>\$ 10,771,020</u>

2017 Compass Club Members

Our Board President issued a successful call to the Board of Directors for 100% participation in the 2017 Board Giving. We know that we cannot ask our members and friends to donate to the organization over and above their dues without setting an example. In 2017 the Compass Club saw a growth in giving with 51 members contributing \$100,924. This program recognizes our members who contribute \$1,000+ in unrestricted income.

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Anonymous | Roma Lenehan |
| Jennell Ballering | Mike Miller & Susan Goode |
| Chuck Bauer & Chuck Beckwith | Gerd & Ursula Muehlechner |
| Kathie & Tom Brock | Richard Oberle |
| Willis Brown | Paul O’Leary & Julia Borodin |
| Susan & Jim Cargill | Ron Panzer |
| Stephen & Susan Carpenter | Jim & Ulrike (Rickie) Rachuy |
| Dennis & Nancy Connor | Jeff & Debbie Ralston |
| Ronald and Sheila Endres | Bill Ramsden & Doreen Lynch |
| Nick & Linda Faessler | Cary & Dr. Scott Reich |
| Thomas Ferrella | Keith Rodli & Katharine Grant |
| Patrick & Madeleine Fleming | Ted Ross & Kathie Ayres |
| Gary Gates | Penny & Gary Shackelford |
| Patrick Handrick | Marvin & Colleen Smitherman |
| Charles & Ann Heide | Doug Steege & Kris Euclide |
| Rich & Kathy Henderson | Marilyn & Marc Thwaites |
| Brende Hofer & Dennis Steadman | Peggy & Jon Traver |
| Jeff & Erin Huebschman | Gail Van Haren |
| Evanne Hunt | Willi Van Haren |
| C. Lynne & Dr. Paul Jacobsen | Denise Wachter |
| Maggie Jones & David Linton | Ken Wade & Pat Trochlell |
| Gary Konkol | Charles & Chris Wellington |
| Kimberly Kreitinger & Eric Preston | Gary Werner & Melanie Lord |
| Susan Kuczynski | Beth Whitaker |
| Jack Kusmaul | Telle Zoller |
| Max & Shelley Lagally | |

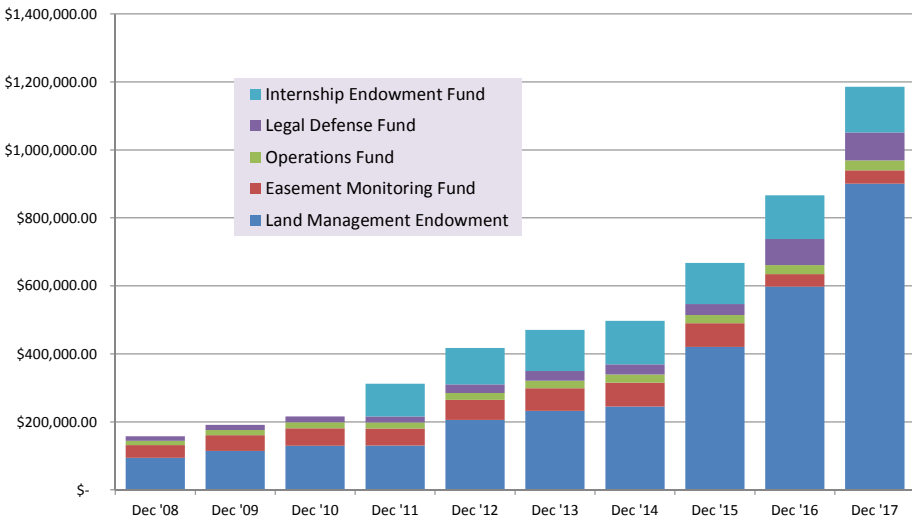
The following chart reflects membership growth since 2004:



TPE memberships were 1,640 as of December 2017, including 227 new memberships. Membership dues help spread the word about the dire predicament of prairies and oak savannas, but also broadcast our successes. In addition they support our chapters—30 % of dues goes directly to your local chapter.

TPE Trust & Investment Earnings Report

The endowments and restricted funds are managed by TPE's Investment Policy. The funds are composed of 60% stocks and 40% bonds and are re-balanced every January back to the 60%/40% ratio. In 2017 TPE moved its investment portfolio to TIAA-CREF, and have maintained the same investment policy, which has served us well. Investments as of December 31, 2017 of \$1,185,508 are restricted to the funds described as follows:



TPE Land Management Trust \$900,507:

This formal trust has its own trustees, separate from TPE. The funds TPE receives from the Trust are to be used solely for land management activities. In 2017 there were several donors who gave significant donations that totaled nearly \$250,000.

Easement Monitoring Endowment \$39,274:

This endowment is restricted to costs of monitoring easements granted to TPE.

Legal Defense Fund \$82,328:

This fund is set aside in case the need ever arises to litigate or defend any TPE held easement or fee owned property.

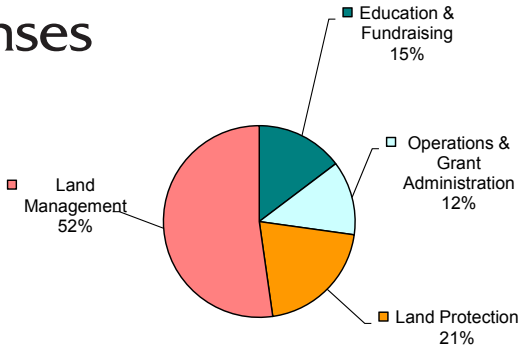
Operations Endowment \$29,141:

This endowment will eventually provide proceeds to help cover the costs of TPE administration.

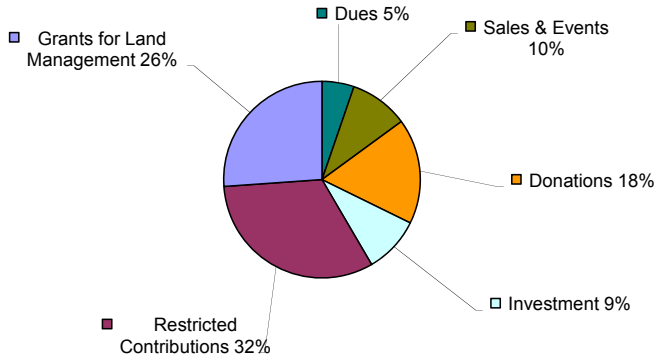
Olive and John Thomson Internship Endowment \$134,258:

This endowment provides annual proceeds to help cover the costs of internships for students doing land management, inventory, protection, education or outreach. In 2017 this fund was used to cover the costs for one intern with the Empire Sauk Chapter, working primarily at the Schurch-Tompson unit of Mounds View Grassland.

Expenses



Income



2017 BOARD OF DIRECTORS



2017 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

President Scott Fulton
Vice-President. Caroljean Coventree
Past President. Jack Kussmaul
Treasurer Alice Mirk
Secretary Jim Rogala

Many Rivers. Deanna Pomije
Chippewa Savannas. Caroljean Coventree
Coulee Region. Jim Rogala
Empire-Sauk Richard Henderson
Glacial Prairie Alice Mirk
Southwest Wisconsin Linda Lynch
Northwest Illinois. Jim Rachuy
Prairie Bluff Jerry Newman
Prairie Sands David Hamel
St. Croix Valley Evanne Hunt
Minnesota Driftless. George Howe
Emeritus. Gary Eldred

2017 COMMITTEES/CHAIRS

Executive Committee Scott Fulton
Communication. Caroljean Coventree
Outreach & Education
Finance. Alice Mirk
Fundraising Jack Kussmaul
Land Management. Richard Henderson
Land Protection Mark Martin

2017 CHAPTER PRESIDENTS

Chippewa Savannas. Joe Maurer
Coulee Region. Jim Rogala
Empire-Sauk Karen Agee
Glacial Prairie Alice Mirk
Northwest Illinois. Laura Dufford
Prairie Bluff Chris Roberts
Prairie Sands. Mary(Ray) Goehring
Many Rivers. Henry Panowitsch
Minnesota Driftless George Howe
Southwest Wisconsin Linda Lynch
St. Croix Valley Evanne Hunt



Cover Photo Randy Schindle
 2018 Photo Contest Winner Title..... “Rusty Patched Bumble
 Bee on Anise Hyssop”
 Photo page 2..... Jonah Westrich - Ancient River Valley
 Photo page 4 Chris Kirkpatrick - Executive Director
 Photo page 5Contributed Photo - Prairie Smoke
 Photo page 6Scott Fulton - Hauser Road Prairie fundraising event
 Photo page 6 Chris Kirkpatrick - Rattlesnake Ridge Addition
 Photo page 8 .. John Ochsner - Vale Prairie in Green County, Wis., 1991.
 Photo page 9John Ochsner - original Muralt burn crew
 Photo page 10..... Eric Preston -
 Badger Cam photo from Mounds View Grasslands.
 Photo page 11..... George Howe -
successful burn by Minnesota Driftless Chapter
 Photo page 11..... George Howe - from burn training
 Photo page 11..... George Howe - from burn training
 Photo page 12..... Joe Maurer, title: “Oak Savanna Dream”
 Photo page 12..... Joe Maurer,
 title..... “Rusty Patch Bumble Bee advises Prairie Turnip”
 Photos page 13..... Ray Goehring - Prairie Sands Field Trip
 Photo page 18..... Chris Kirkpatrick - 2017 TPE Board of Directors
 Photo page 20Chris Kirkpatrick - Iris Drive Prairie
 Drawings Page 2, 7, 10..... Gary Eldred



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