
THE BLUE MOUNDS PROJECT NEWSLETTER

Seeking to Inspire, Inform and Empower Private Landowners in the Southwestern Region
Of Wisconsin to Enjoy, Protect and Restore Native Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health

Fall 1998

Message From the President

Dean Lesser

I came to the board of the Blue Mounds Project as an interested lay-person rather than a prairie professional. I was a landowner excited about managing the land for long term health. The idea of meeting other landowners who shared my enthusiasm was exciting. In my mind, I envisioned visiting other peoples' land, getting together and working on projects, and supporting each other technically and emotionally in the joys and frustrations of land management. I looked forward to making this work a community effort.

I grew up in NYC and now live on a 200 acre farm. For most of the past 17 years I have lived in rural Wisconsin. My neighbors have told me endless stories of the days when planting and harvesting were a community effort. They would go from farm to farm helping each other get the work done. I have heard stories of the fantastic feasts that followed the day of hard work; the meal was also a community effort. The people who first farmed the land I now own have told me stories of the wonderful music they would play and of the dancing they would do on the farm. There were 15 kids in the family and everyone played an instrument. It all sounds like a lot of work and a lot of very memorable fun.

Part of my vision for the BMP is to regain some of the old-time, rural sense of community. It is my hope that the BMP can make this part of our restoration efforts. To do this we need your involvement. We need you to join committees and attend meetings and events. As a board we have been so busy with the nuts and bolts of administration that this part of our vision has not been our primary focus; as a board and as members

we need to take a closer look at this.

The BMP is sponsoring an event on November 7th to inform our members about the various cost-sharing programs available to Wisconsin landowners who are interested in prairie restoration, wildlife habitat improvement, woodland management, and habitat conservation (see the Calendar of Events for details). Come and benefit from the information this program will give to you. Come meet fellow landowners, kindred spirits, and neighbors. It is not enough to restore the land-we need to restore the connections among the people living on the land.

Mailing List Update--Important

If you responded to this request after reading the last newsletter, thank-you. Otherwise, please read on.

If you are a paid BMP member you automatically receive our newsletter and special events announcements. If you are not a paid BMP member and wish to continue to receive complimentary mailings, you must let us know by filling out the Mailing List Update form found in this newsletter and returning it to us. **If we don't hear from you, you will be removed from our mailing list.** We want all interested parties to receive our mailings regardless of their financial ability to become a member, so please take the time to fill out and return the form. Mailing costs are one of our largest expenses; returning the Mailing List Update will save us money that will then be available for other programs.

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Big Thanks To Donor\$

While grants and membership dues are the main funding sources for the project, private donations are important too! These unexpected gifts, often added to a membership contribution, can be real budget savers during tight times. We would like to acknowledge and thank our members who have gone "beyond the call of duty":

Jim & Barb Ballard, Winnetka IL
 Kathy & Tom Brock, Madison
 Beatrice Briggs, Blue Mounds
 Don & Karen Campbell, Dodgeville
 Steven Christianson, Lancaster
 Robert Cox, Madison
 L & M Crittenden, Cross Plains
 William Deronne, Elmhurst IL
 Patty Ellsworth, Stoughton
 Vicki Harris, Mt Horeb
 Julie Hayward & Donn D'Alessio
 Maggie Jones, Blue River
 Ray & Louise Kubista, Black Earth
 Dean Lesser, Ridgeway
 Judith Lovaas, Dodgeville
 Mound Vue Garden Club of Mt Horeb
 Ursula Petersen, Madison
 The Prairie Enthusiasts
 Kathy & Doug Robichaud, Mazomanie
 Roland Rueckert, Madison
 Jim & Rose Sime, Middleton
 Mary & Joe Skupniewitz, Madison
 Arnette Small, Dodgeville
 Ron & Paulette Smith, Verona
 David & Colette Sorgel, Mazomanie
 Ken Wade, Blue Mounds
 Percy Werner, Milwaukee
 Tom Wise, Verona
 Bill & Jayne Wisler, Dodgeville
 Hyuk & Gail Yu, Blue Mounds
 Jim Zerwick, Verona

Many thanks to all!

If you were inadvertently left off the list, please let us know.

Ecologist's Report

Bob Wernerehl, BMP Ecologist

With 15 site visits completed so far this year we have an additional 1,547 acres under our advice and counsel, almost all of which is being preserved or restored. There are a number of remnant prairies, some remnant oak savanna, and some very high quality sedge meadows, one with a small fen. (A fen is a special type of wet meadow with up-welling, usually calcareous water). Four owners actively burn, others are highly interested in doing so. Many are eliminating invasive species, such as buckthorn and honeysuckle. We have a member with a good population of a state threatened species, and another member in the adjacent 40 acres that reportedly has the same. (Site visit scheduled for spring of 1999). We have one member putting in a very high quality 15 acre prairie restoration.

Although most landowners know if they have some pockets of prairie on their land, each site visit led to many new discoveries, both for the landowners and for myself. On one site visit an owner pointed out to me the location of a hummingbird nest in the branch just above my head. It was no longer in use. But what an amazing site--so small, so delicate, and so very well blended in with the background so as to be almost invisible. This was a special treat indeed!

I also discovered that we have some of the world's nicest people as our landowner members. And that has really made the job very worthwhile. They are a dedicated, highly motivated and very intelligent group. No couch potatoes here. I really look forward to meeting more of you. If you would like me to visit your property please fill out and return the enclosed Site Visit Request Form; I still have time this fall to schedule more site visits.

Policy Committee Update

Rob Horwich and Ursula Petersen

The interest and determination to continue the mission of the Blue Mounds Project in a meaningful way is high. Since the reorganization of the Board, we have been raising policy issues at each board meeting and are in the process of developing a more formal organizational structure in terms of bylaws and policies. We could use the help of one or two people who have this type of expertise; please call Ursula at 274-1202.

Membership Committee Update

Vicki Harris & Jim Zerwick

So far in 1998 we have had 30 renewals and new memberships paid. However, in order to maintain the pace of 1997 we need at least another 50 renewals or new memberships. Ideally, of course, we must increase our funding in order to add to our services and build an emergency fund. You can help out by inviting a friend or neighbor to consider joining the BMP.

Beginning with this newsletter we have added a membership expiration date to your mailing label. Please check your expiration date and respond accordingly.

As noted in the last newsletter, we hope to begin sending out newsletters and notices by email soon. If you would like to receive information from us via email, and haven't already provided us with your email address, please send a note to jz212@aol.com.

Prairie Ants and Beetles

Wendell Burkholder, Entomologist

The value of the small brown mound-building ant, *Formica montana*, was noted in the last newsletter. Not mentioned, however, was the mound-building thatching ant, *Formica obscuripes*, a larger, black and red ant that lives in dry areas of Southwestern Wisconsin. The appearance of the mounds built by the two species is similar.

In 1990, Gregg Henderson and Robert Jeanne

reported a myrmecophilous Histerid beetle living in the nests of the prairie ant. This was a new geographic record of the ant/beetle association for this beetle symphile (true guest) which appears to overwinter with its ant host in southern Wisconsin. The beetle has morphological specializations that are probably adapted to its myrmecophilous habits.

BMP Library Update

Program and Education Committee

Mike Anderson, Wendell Burkholder, Marie Wilhelm

As reported in the last newsletter, we have started our very own library, which is located in **The Prairie Bookshop**, 117 East Main Street, Mt. Horeb. The 15 titles we've ordered are listed below. Some of the books will be on our shelf by the time you read this, others are on their way. Remember, the materials may not be removed from the Bookshop, but there are plenty of comfortable chairs for your browsing convenience and all of the books may be ordered from the Bookshop, if you want your own copy. Enjoy!

- The Tallgrass Restoration Handbook; Packard and Mutel
- Newcomb's Wildflower Guide; Newcomb
- A Field Guide to Wildflowers; Peterson and McKenny
- The Shrub Identification Book; Symonds
- The Tree Identification Book; Symonds
- Wetland Plants & Plant Communities of MN & WI; Eggers and Reed
- Wildflowers of the Tallgrass Prairie; Sylvan and Roosa
- Spring Flora of Wisconsin; Fassett
- Tallgrass Prairie Wildflowers; Ladd and Oberle
- Michigan Flora; Vols. 1-3; Edward Voss
- Tallgrass Prairie; Madson and Oberle
- Field Guide to Eastern Birds; Peterson
- The Prairie Garden; Smith and Smith
- Eastern Butterflies; Opler and Malikul

- Tree and Shrub Field Guide; Petrides
- Newsletters from various conservation organizations
- Your favorite title-we welcome your suggestions and donations

Calendar of Events

Landowner Cost-Sharing Programs

November 7, Saturday, 10:00 a.m. to 12 noon

Mt. Horeb Community Center

Free money? Well, almost. Come learn about four distinct state and federal cost-sharing programs available to assist Wisconsin landowners who are interested in conservation, preservation, and restoration. Peggy James, District Conservationist from the Iowa County NRCS office, will talk about the ins and outs of the Conservation Reserve Program (**CRP**). Tom Thrall, NRCS biologist, will talk about the Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program (**WHIP**) which helps landowners develop or improve wildlife habitat. Kurt Waterstradt from the US Fish and Wildlife Service will talk about the **Partners for Wildlife** Program which restores wetlands, grasslands, and threatened and endangered species habitats on private lands. And, just to make sure we have all of our bases covered, Steve Holiday, Dane County DNR Forester, will tell us how woodland owners can reduce their property taxes and implement good forestry management practices through the Managed Forest Law (**MFL**) program. Bring your questions to this informative event. **Directions:** The Mt. Horeb Community Center is located in the lower level of the Public Library, 107 N. Grove Street, Mt. Horeb, and is one block North of Main Street.

The Nature Conservancy Burn School November 14 or 15 (chose either date)

If you're interested in learning how to conduct safe and successful prescribed burns, plan to attend this class. You'll receive classroom instruction and hands-on, drip torch swinging field experience. Meets at the UW Arboretum, Madison. Limited space, \$30.00. Call Katie at (608) 251-4180 for more information.

Annual Membership Meeting March 1998

Stay tuned for date, location and topic(s) for the annual membership meeting.

What's in a Name??

What image does "Blue Mounds Project" paint in your mind? Concern has been expressed that our current name is confusing to people and agencies who are unfamiliar with our work. For instance, we've been mistakenly associated with Blue Mound State Park and the Village of Blue Mounds. Also, some landowners who live within our service region, but not near Blue Mounds (the village), have mistakenly assumed that we would not be interested in helping them because they live too far away. These concerns have led to consideration of a name change. Conversely, there is concern that a name change may result in confusion and loss of identity.

What do you think of our current name? Is it confusing? Perfect? Too geographically limiting? Can you think of a new name or a variation of our existing name which encapsulates our mission and our service region? Please take a moment to let us know. Your comments and suggestions will be printed in the next newsletter. If you're feeling extra creative how about designing a logo!? You can reach us at: BMP, PO Box 332, Mount Horeb, WI 53572 or via email at: burroak@itis.com.

I stopped my companions and pointed this out to them. This is what we are looking for in Wisconsin, I said. Here you can see it. This ponderosa pine savanna has a special group of plants adapted to this partial shade. We had this at one time in Wisconsin, although our trees were oak. But our landscape has been completely changed by past land use. Our open oak groves are no more.

Why What We Are Doing Is Important . .

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Bob Wernerehl, BMP Ecologist

My family and I had the good fortune to be in Colorado during early August. While hiking in the Rocky Mountain National Park we came to an open ponderosa pine savanna. It was a beautiful area of scattered trees with a nice cover of prairie grasses and a great abundance of flowering plants. Areas with the original trees and plants intact are often wondrously diverse. At that time of the year there were several species of the genus *Penstemon*, or beardtongue, in bloom. Some were dark purple, others a brilliant blue.

The trail led us past a very large, spreading ponderosa pine, casting its shade in a full circle on a bright, sunny day. The shade in an open savanna, where trees are at least 100 feet apart, is never the full shade of the woods because there is so much reflected light coming in under the spreading trees. What really caught my eye was that you could clearly see a circle of plants under that shade that were different than those out under the full sun. There were wild geraniums, both white and pink (*Geranium richardsonii* and *G. viscosissimum*), and other grasses and flowers as well.

Our soil was far too fertile to be ignored by the needs of a growing nation. After 150 years of statehood, we can only make educated guesses as to what these Wisconsin plants were that once flourished in our native oak savannas. We have reports that plants like columbine, Jacob's ladder, shooting star and New Jersey tea were once a sea of flowers under our spreading oaks.

I am excited and encourage by the enthusiasm of our landowners to Conserve, Preserve and Restore (CPR for the earth*), so that we may again see the striking beauty Native Americans and early settlers saw in the oak savannas around the Blue Mounds region. *borrowed from David Brower.

Help Us By:

Attending a meeting. Your board meets on the first Tuesday of each month at the Mt. Horeb Community Center, which is located at 107 North Grove Street, in the Mt. Horeb Library. (Beginning in December, we will end our "daylight savings" meeting time and the meetings will start at

6:30). Your voice is important; this is your organization and we value your input.

Joining a committee. Many hands make light work. We offer opportunities to get involved with: selecting guest speakers and workshop topics (Program and Education Committee); maintaining the membership database (Membership Committee); writing BMP policy and bylaws (Policy Committee); raising funds, our life blood (Fund Raising Committee). We need you!

Small, hairy, fertile fruits develop from both types of flowers.

Prairie Bush Clover had not been seen in Wisconsin for 90 years before being rediscovered by William Tans in 1969. Remaining prairie habitats in Rock, Dane, Green, Iowa, LaFayette, Grant, Sauk, and Pierce counties serve as the species' refuges today. More than half of these sites have been associated with grazing, and many border croplands. The plants seem to thrive on the lower portions of north-facing slopes in association with other dry-mesic prairie plants, but all slopes with prairie vegetation should be examined.

Protection for Prairie Bush Clover and its habitat can be extended through managed grazing or a combination of light-handed prairie management techniques, and the avoidance of chemical drift and run-off into the habitat. For more information, call the DNR, the Blue Mounds Project, or DATCP.

Prairie Bush Clover

Ursula C. Petersen, Endangered Species Biologist
WI Dept. Agriculture, Trade and Consumer
Protection

Prairie Bush Clover (*Lespedeza leptostachya*), a federally threatened plant, occurs on prairies in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and Illinois. This slender, silver-green legume, 2-3 feet tall, sports slim, hairy leaves that retain the plant's moisture under the windy and extreme temperature conditions of the prairie habitat.

Prairie Bush Clover expresses itself with two types of flowers: one plain tan, closed, and self-pollinating, the other pretty pink and open, and presumably pollinated by insects. Flowering time is from late July through August, but the plant's structure can be observed into winter and even early spring.

Lespedeza artist Gary Eldred is president of the Prairie Enthusiasts.

First Things First

Mike Anderson, BioLogic Environmental Consulting

The most common reason for the failure of prairie plantings is inadequate site preparation. Site preparation refers to the conditioning of the soil in preparation for planting and generally consists of two components-killing competing vegetation and preparing a quality seedbed. Never skimp or cut corners on site preparation unless you like growing weeds. Weeds compete with prairie seedlings for light, water, nutrients, and space thereby slowing the growth of the flowers and grasses you paid so much money for. This article will cover the weed control aspects of site preparation, seed bed preparation will be covered

in the next newsletter.

Most site preparation for weed control involves a combination of herbicide application and soil tillage, although it is possible to use only one of these methods. Also useful, but usually only on a small scale, is smothering. Smothering involves covering the ground with a thick layer of mulch (bark works well because it low in nitrogen), black plastic, carpet or newspaper (at least 15 layers thick, securely anchored). The smothering material should be left in place for a full growing season.

When using an herbicide, it is often helpful to mow or burn the site first to remove the dead vegetation so that less herbicide will be used. Burning or mowing will also stimulate the weeds to grow. When mowing, it is best to remove the cuttings, if possible, to prevent the weeds from reseeding and to remove the nutrients contained in the foliage. After burning or mowing, allow the field to regrow to three or four inches and then spray with an herbicide. An herbicide mixture of glyphosate (i.e. Roundup), which is nonselective, and 2,4-D, which targets nongrass species, is commonly used. Many co-ops will add ammonium sulfate to the mix to increase the amount of burn down. If possible, the ammonium sulfate should be omitted because of the nitrogen it supplies. If you're only using herbicides to control weeds you will need to reapply the herbicide each time the field greens-up, probably two or three more times during the growing season. Use of an herbicide involves risk to the applicator and to nontarget species. Take proper precautions, know what you're doing, follow all label directions, and clean your equipment properly.

If you're only using cultivation to control weeds, you will likely need to cultivate for an entire growing season or longer. If possible, begin by fall plowing the year before you want to plant. This will increase the mortality of many perennial species because their roots will be exposed to cold

temperatures and desiccating conditions. Fall plowing is not recommended for erosion prone sites, however. The following spring, cultivate with a disk to a depth of about 4 or 5 inches beginning as soon as the field greens-up. Repeat disking at two to three week intervals throughout the growing season. The cultivation depth may be reduced to one to two inches if perennial weeds are absent. A shallower depth will decrease the number of weed seeds that are stimulated to germinate, but will still kill recently germinated weed seedlings. Be diligent-too long of an interval between disking may actually increase the density of rhizomatous perennials such as quack grass because each rhizome fragment has the potential to grow.

As previously mentioned, most weed control plans combine an herbicide application(s) with soil tillage. Typically, one or two herbicide applications are used to control the actively growing vegetation, with special attention given to eliminating the perennial species. Then, the site is tilled at two to three week intervals, as outlined above, to exhaust the weed seed bank. If perennial weeds are observed during the cultivation process they can be spot-sprayed with an herbicide.

Remember, before you plant your prairie, you must control the weeds or they will control you. Never rush into a prairie planting and never, never skimp on site preparation.

Our Mission:

The Blue Mounds Project is a community based organization that seeks to inspire, inform and empower private landowners in the Southwestern Wisconsin region to enjoy, protect and restore native biodiversity and ecosystem health.

Our objectives:

- 1) Promote understanding, appreciation and conservation of native woodlands, prairies, wetlands and savannas and their special species in an economically viable manner, through community outreach programs and private contacts.
- 2) Act as a clearing house for information from people and organizations involved in preserving native biodiversity including information about plant, animal and habitat identification, management, restoration, seed sources, native plant nurseries and invasive, non-native species.

- 3) Encourage cooperative, volunteer restoration and management activities.
- 4) Identify public and private land use changes that may affect ecosystem health and promote community-based stewardship of the unique natural heritage of the Blue Mounds and the Southwestern region of Wisconsin.

The Blue Mounds Project Newsletter is published quarterly. Send your comments, suggestions, and submissions to Mike Anderson, BMP, PO Box 332, Mount Horeb, WI 53572.

MEMBERSHIP ENROLLMENT

NAME(S): _____

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____ Are you a land owner? If so, in what county and township? _____

MEMBERSHIP LEVEL

Please check if this is a renewal _____

General (individual or family); \$25.00 / YEAR _____

Student/limited income (individual or family); \$15.00 / YEAR _____

Additional contribution to further the BMP mission _____

TOTAL _____

Membership fee and all contributions are tax deductible

MAKE CHECK PAYABLE TO: THE BLUE MOUNDS PROJECT

RETURN TO: THE BLUE MOUNDS PROJECT, P. O. BOX 332, MT. HOREB, WI 53572

MAILING LIST UPDATE

____ I can't provide financial support at this time but, please keep me on your mailing list.

____ Please drop me from your mailing list.

____ Please correct my mailing address. The problem is: ____ duplicate mailings ____ typo

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