



Blue Mounds Area Project

Promoting Ecological Restoration and Stewardship of Native Habitats

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Restoring and managing land with amphibians and reptiles, i.e. herpetofauna, in mind is not the same as doing so for birds or mammals. Birds and mammals are warm-blooded and tend to be rather mobile. On the other hand, herpetofauna are generally not very mobile. In Wisconsin, amphibians and reptiles are either dormant or very sluggish during the colder months (~Nov – Feb). The same techniques to restore and manage habitat can be used for any of these animals, but timing and application of the techniques will differ.

Restoring and Managing Habitat with Amphibians and Reptiles in Mind

Rebecca Christoffel, Christoffel Conservation

herbicide application, reduce the amount of herbicide used, and decrease the potential for herbicides to enter nearby surface waters or groundwater.

The following discussion of herpetofauna and prescribed fire is taken largely from the Midwest Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (PARC) website.

Conduct prescribed burns during winter, when herpetofauna are inactive. This period is from November 1 to March 15 generally, but varies based on fluctuations in annual precipitation and temperature conditions. When soil surface temperatures exceed deeper soil temperatures, it indicates the onset of activity for many species. But because some salamander species and Blanding's turtles emerge from hibernation very early, February burns may impact them. Burns should only be used in habitat with ornate box turtle during their winter hibernation period.

When burning after March 15, you can minimize harm for many species if cool (overcast, and under 50°F) conditions have persisted for many days.

Following are some general guidelines for using land management techniques when herpetofauna are present. It must be noted that any given technique can have effects that vary among species and can differ in how or when it is appropriate to use.

Avoid broadcast spraying herbicides. Spot treat using a foliar application or cut and apply herbicide to the stem, stump or bark. These techniques provide much greater control of



Pickerel Frog in a Mesic Prairie

Photo by Marci Hies

Hopefully this edition finds you well after a long winter. In the following pages you'll find information and maybe even inspiration to help you get ready for the coming warmer weather. Also marking the change of seasons this newsletter includes our Annual Report for 2017 – our 20th year of inspiring, informing and empowering private land conservation!

Spring Greetings from the Board of the Blue Mounds Area Project

Carroll Schaal, Acting BMAP President



Carroll Schaal

We just wrapped up another great winter talk series and plan to have another lineup of Thursday evening excursions this summer. That's where we tour a member's property and see the results of their management efforts and have a sunset potluck. There's a save-the-date schedule on page 13. There may be other workshops and events yet to be determined. Look for a post card or watch our websites for details. If you would like to host a property tour or some kind of event send us a note.

We also want to welcome our new Ecologist, Micah Kloppenberg. He's eager to get to work and we're glad to have him. There are several people waiting for a site visit and there's plenty of room in our budget for more on the list. If you have never had a site visit this year is the time to sign up.

Organizationally, the Board has had some changes this winter. Our President Paul Ohlrogge, who would normally pen this message, had to step down to help with his wife Lalay's sudden illness and recovery. Serving as President is a familiar role for me but it's only temporary. We want to thank David Cordray for serving a productive term as a Director. Too many other responsibilities prevented him from seeking another term now but we're holding out hope he'll be back in the future. While we were sad to see Amy go it's reassuring to know she will remain in the conservation neighborhood working for the Driftless Area Land Conservancy as Land Protection Associate. We appreciate her efficient and professional boost for the last 3 years. Gratefully, she has joined the Board as Secretary and *de facto* Membership coordinator. Amy says "It has been and continues to be an honor to be involved! I truly believe in the work BMAP is doing."

Currently, the Board consists of Amy Alstad, Michael Anderson, Anna Healy, James MacDonald Marie Raboin, Jennifer Thieme, and me. That's enough to run the organization but we can always use more help with events, writing articles or even serving on the Board. (Amy would really like help with membership.) Whatever your skills or interest are, we'd welcome them. The best way to contact BMAP is a through an email to info@bluemounds.org or ecologist@bluemounds.org. Watch the website, future newsletter, e-list and post cards for reminders and updates as the year unfolds. We're looking forward to it!

Welcome our new Ecologist Micah Kloppenberg

Micah is a Madison, WI native and is completing his Masters degree in Landscape Architecture and Restoration Ecology at UW-Madison studying prairie loss along the Kickapoo River in southwestern WI. Micah's professional experience has focused on the meeting of



Micah Kloppenberg

people and plants; ranging from organic farm work in British Columbia, Peace Corps Volunteer work in Nicaragua, and work as a community garden coordinator in Madison.

Most recently, he firmly planted his feet in the field of restoration ecology, working for a local restoration firm and for The Prairie Enthusiasts. In addition to his Masters' thesis, Micah has direct restoration experience working to protect and restore the prairie, savanna, and woodland of the Blue Mounds area. His favorite plants (of the moment) are an undervalued shrub, the hawthorn, and the exquisite spring bloomer, violet wood sorrel. He is excited to work with BMAP's board and members in their mission to preserve our natural areas.

20th Anniversary 2017 ANNUAL REPORT

Landowner Assistance

Ecologist Amy Alstad made 12 site visits and landowner reports that covered 1,080 acres; a few less than the year before but covering more acres. One was a revisit from a few years ago when Corey Raimond was our Ecologist. That brings total acreage that BMAP has visited in 20 years to over 20,000 acres or 1,000 acres a year! There are at least 10 folks waiting for a site visit in 2018.

In addition to member site visits we'll be aiding in a partnership effort to address declining Monarch butterfly populations. The DNR will provide BMAP funding for training 20 teams of citizen scientists to start collecting information on monarch populations. Under another grant BMAP will prepare monarch habitat management plans for various landowners. The goal of the project funded by the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation is to create 1,650 acres of new or improved monarch habitat in the Southwest Grasslands Area. Partners include The Prairie Enthusiasts, US Fish & Wildlife Service, UW-Extension, and Driftless Area Land Conservancy.

Community Outreach

Over 100 people attended our Winter Conservation Conversations series and learned about:

- The State Natural Areas program with local highlights from Thomas Meyer, DNR conservation biologist;
- Using canines to monitor ornate box turtles from Rori Paloski DNR conservation biologist;
- Prairie restoration and private land conservation efforts in Sauk County from Jeb Barzen, ecologist for Prairie Lands Conservation, LLC; and
- Aldo Leopold's land ethic from Steve Swenson Director of Conservation with the Aldo Leopold Foundation.

On three Summer Evening Excursions, we visited members' properties to see their restorations and management challenges and enjoy a beverage and a potluck at:

- Barbara Borns and Fred Townsend's 59 acres of prairies and woodlands near Black Earth;
- Dick and Kim Cates 402 acre sustainably grazed pastures and savannas near Spring Green; and
- Jackie and Jerome Helmenstine's 305 acre woodlands and restored prairie near Blue Mounds.

In addition, Dave Cordray led an intrepid group on a soggy day touring Muralt Bluff State Natural Area on May 20th.

Our newsletter, website, Facebook and the BMP-list, a free discussion and announcement email list serve are the other ways we share information.

Finances

Last year we had net income of \$10,420 with net expenses of \$8,003. Aside from a few sales our income was entirely from individual memberships and donations. We didn't receive any grants or foundation funding last year. The Ecologist made up most of our expenses. Going into 2018 we have \$21,862 in the checkbook. If you would like to see our 2017 Balance Sheet send us a request at info@bluemounds.org.

Membership

Membership continued its recent increase growing by 20% in 2017 with new membership nearly double over last year. While most members give at the basic \$30 level, those contributing over \$100 increased by 40%. Thank you. You are all very generous. As of last year we had:

- 170 active members
- 30 new members
- 101 out of 170 members (60%) donated beyond the basic membership level
- 50 members gave \$100 or more
- 2 members gave \$500 or more
- 2 members gave \$1,000 or more

Mary Trewartha was the 2017 recipient of our Bur Oak Award for outstanding stewardship on the 170 acres she has managed since 1972 for bobolinks and so much more.

Volunteers

Our Board of Directors puts a lot of time and energy into the administration of BMAP but so do several volunteers that are critical to our mission. Marci Hess is the editor of our newsletter working with Julie Raasch to layout and produce an informative newsletter 3 times a year. Julie serves as our photographer. Julie, John Raasch, and Marci manage our Facebook page.

cont. page 13, see REPORT

What the heck is a benthic macroinvertebrate? Benthic means “bottom of a body of water” and macroinvertebrate means you can see the insect with your eye and insect has no backbone. Benthic macroinvertebrates, in particular aquatic insects, can be used as bioindicators of water quality because this insect is sensitive to environmental changes and its presence or lack there of can determine clean water or polluted water.

Benthic Macroinvertebrates as Indicators of Water Quality

Dr. Hope Q. Liu, Biologist



Photo by Marci Hies

Cybister fimbriolatus: Dytiscidae (predaceous diving beetle) would have a tolerance score of 5

How can an insect like a dragonfly, which lives in the air, help us determine the quality of the water? Aquatic insect adults lay their eggs in the water. The eggs hatch and the immature form lives in the water, sometimes for years, before transforming into winged adults. The composition of the aquatic insects population (aka bioindicators) is used to ascertain water quality and reveal pollution impact. Much like plants are assigned conservation numbers, aquatic insects have a numeric designation, too. This designation is called a Tolerance score and

ranges from 0-10 with zero being the least tolerant to pollution.

Aquatic insects are a great starting point to get a sense of the water quality. To assess a body of water using water sampling would require repeated testing visits to the site. Aquatic insects are not highly mobile and reside in the body of water for long periods of time. This means monitoring and testing the water isn't needed as often.

For example, you are monitoring the water quality of Stream A. You sample the water for aquatic insects in June 2015, June 2016 and June 2017 and find diverse insect populations – stoneflies, caddisflies, beetles, dragonflies - and then you sample again in June 2018 and only find beetles and dragonflies. Generally, stoneflies and caddisflies are less tolerant to pollution when compared to beetles and dragonflies, so you deduce that somehow the water was polluted over the past year and wiped out those populations. You determine, based on talking to people along the stream, that the paper mill accidentally polluted the water in November 2017.

Now, let's imagine you are sampling Stream A using water samples and laboratory tests. You sample in January, March, June and September of 2015-2018. Based on the tests, you determine the water is clean. Because you didn't sample in November or December of 2017, there were no indicators showing the stream was polluted.

Now that you know WHY aquatic insects are great indicators of water quality, you may be wondering what they look like and how you can identify them. There is a great reference published by Purdue Extension (http://www.ydae.purdue.edu/natural_resources/Resources/BioindicatorWQ/Pubs,PDF/BioInd,WQ,4-H-1019.pdf) that provides detailed instructions for using bioindicators to determine



Photo by Marci Hies

Peltodytes edentulus: Haliplidae (crawling water beetle) would have a tolerance score of 7

the water quality. Using this guide, the insects and their conservation values (known as a Tolerance Value) can be identified and calculated to estimate the water quality. Remember, there are other factors that impact the ability of aquatic insects to live in water, such as temperature, sediment, etc. Generally, where possible, it's always best to collect other water data such as pH, temperature, and dissolved oxygen.

Additionally, the University of Wisconsin Extension offers citizen science training for monitoring water quality using benthic macroinvertebrates. For more information on that, check out the Water Action Volunteers (WAV) site: <http://watermonitoring.uwex.edu/wav/monitoring/index.html> These classes will teach you how to sample bodies of water using a combination of tests, including aquatic insects.

For more information, check out these additional resources:

<https://entomologytoday.org/2015/08/19/what-can-insects-and-mites-tell-us-about-water-quality>

<http://www.water.ncsu.edu/water-shedss/info/macrovinv.html>

<https://www.wpwa.org/documents/education/Biological%20sampling.pdf>

<https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2007/02/070201-water-bugs.html>

Management plans should be flexible, allowing you to respond to each year's conditions.

There is a common misconception among some land managers that if they stomp around a burn site prior to ignition, turtles and snakes will flee the area. This is untrue. Most turtles and snakes "freeze" when heavy machinery or stomping happens in an area rather than fleeing. Especially when herpetofauna have newly emerged from hibernation in the spring, and just prior to starting hibernation in the fall, they are likely to be very sluggish and unable to escape fire, mowers, predation, etc.

Spring burns in close proximity to snake hibernacula should be conducted well before the active season or NOT AT ALL.

Fire breaks and buffers constructed around known hibernacula may protect animals during a burn, but this isn't a given.

Fall burns should follow an approach that takes the above guidelines into consideration.

October is analogous to late March or early April, therefore many species may still periodically be on the ground surface and active. Burning prior to November 1 is discouraged.

Different kinds of fires and ignition patterns should be used when burning habitat with herpetofauna. It is important to know the species you are potentially impacting and their response to fire prior to using a particular burn method. In spring, sluggish herpetofauna are unlikely to be able to "outrun" a fire of any sort. Avoiding a ring or perimeter ignition pattern will allow snakes opportunities to escape a fire. Few herpetiles can "outrun" fires in any season. A rate such as 10 ft. per minute may allow time to flee for those species which evade fire.

However, faster fires will leave unharmed areas under logs and other cover objects, providing safety to species that tend to hide.

Avoid burns that completely expose soil over extensive areas.

Active season burns should be conducted when weather or site conditions (high humidity, green vegetation, low temperatures) will result in spotty burns, thus providing refugia for herpetofauna. Alternatively, fire breaks should be created around select snags, standing dead trees, and downed logs to provide places for animals to escape the heat and flames. Alternate burn periods and burn units among years to provide relief to vulnerable herpetofauna. In general, diversifying the burn units and burn periods will come closer to mimicking the natural burn regime that historically occurred on the land.

Wetland shorelines should only be burned when a management objective specifically requires it.

Detritus provides cover for amphibians as they migrate to and from wetlands to breed. Create burn breaks around these areas of at least 50 ft when possible, using a leaf blower or rakes.

Brush piles attract many amphibians and reptiles. **Avoid constructing brush piles if you plan to burn them, or burn the piles immediately.** Snakes and other wildlife will take advantage of new habitat like brush piles, creating traps during burns. If piles are left for more than a few weeks, disassemble them prior to the burn. Older brush piles with burn breaks around them provide refugia during a fire.

Repeated burns will have cumulative effects on population viability. Populations of turtles and many snake species cannot

persistently withstand even small increases in mortality. While only a few individuals may be lost during a single burn, repeated losses of a few individuals can quickly deplete populations of long-lived, slowly maturing animals such as turtles and many snakes.

It's important to leave cover for amphibians and reptiles, even those that are typically thought of as "prairie" specialists. For example, juvenile ornate box turtles that were radio-tracked for a season were found to heavily use patches of sumac and black locust rather than be exposed to the greater temperatures and lesser humidity in more open and sunny areas of the prairie.



Photo by Jim Hess

Blanding's Turtle with the Distinct Yellow under the Chin

Mow to restore or manage habitat when herpetofauna are least active. To reduce herpetofauna injuries and mortality, mow at high blade settings (8" or higher) and use mowing systems that do not create suction. If you must mow during the active season, do so once wildlife breeding season is over and turtle hatchling emergence has not begun (generally after July 10 but before August 15), mow during the warmest part of the day on sunny, hot days (>88°F), and mow only a portion of contiguous habitat at a time. Disking is discouraged as it causes direct mortalities and disrupts soil structure.

cont. page 9, see AMPHIBIANS

Land owners who have invested years of effort creating natural habitat got advice January 25 on how to ensure their land will not be split up and developed when they are no longer there to protect it.

At the first of this year's Blue Mounds Area Project (BMAP) Conservation Conversations, David Clutter, executive director of Driftless Area Land Conservancy explored how conservation easements can create a legal agreement to limit what future owners can do to the property and protect its conservation value.

Land Owners Learn about Conservation Easements

by Denise Thornton



Dave Clutter, Driftless Area Land Conservancy

Steve Thompson, who attended the lecture, is a landowner who has taken advantage of a conservation easement. "This farm has been in the family for generations," says Thompson. "When I retired from milking, it didn't seem likely the next generation would continue in the dairy business, and we didn't want to see the farm dissolve."

A conservation easement was an option to keep their 245 acres south of Daleyville away from

development and in agriculture and conservation. "It happens to be land with a wide variety of habitats. We have wetlands, pine relicts, prairies and oak savannas," says Thompson.

According to the Land Trust Alliance, every day the United States loses 4,000 acres to development.

"When I was a kid, you drove past dairy farm after dairy farm. Now you have to look hard to find one," said Thompson. "Given the price of the land, it's a real temptation many times to sell off 10 acres or whatever. Now that can't happen to this farm. We have the legal mechanism in place."

"Owning land is like owning a bundle of sticks," Clutter explained. "Each stick represent a right on the property - like the right to build, to do agriculture, any number of options. A conservation easement lets an owner take certain sticks out of the bundle and extinguishes those rights. A record of these restrictions then runs with the deed as a perpetual document, protecting the land.

Future owners will also be bound by the agreement's terms, and the land trust is responsible for making sure the terms of the agreement are followed in the future. Clutter gave an example of a land trust protecting a property.

"We have strong legal precedent on our side," said Clutter. "For example, someone bought a property in Maine and built a McMansion on the hill. The trust took them to court. They had to remove the house and restore the land."

This kind of monitoring has a cost, but Clutter noted that Congress has created an incentive to provide tax benefits to those who protect their land with a conservation easement.

"The main purpose of the conservation easement," Clutter said, "is

the peace of mind knowing that your property is protected. In the many years I have done conservation easement work, most land owners are less concerned about tax breaks than about doing what seems right to them for the long term."

"Driftless Area Land Conservancy has a legal responsibility to monitor and defend the property in perpetuity," said Clutter. "If problems occur in the third generation, or the property is sold to someone who knows nothing about the easement, it's our responsibility through annual monitoring to make sure the property is conserved."

Land owners with a conservation easement still own their land, control access, pay property taxes and can sell, lease, bequeath or transfer the property as they see fit.

"On our land," says Thompson, "the agricultural options are still open, but we hope someone interested in planned conservation will care for this land. We put in place the legal considerations for doing that."

Editor's note:

Easements are complex and unique to each piece of land. Landowners need to consider the following. The assessed value may change, which may change your property tax rate. Check with the assessor in your township and the state assessor to understand this. The land value may change, which may affect the property taxes and possible tax write offs and incentives. Check with your accountant to understand current laws and how this will affect your financial situation. The sum of money required by the land trust for monitoring does not cover management. If you have native habitat or other management requirements, you'll need to set up a specific management fund. Check with local natural resource foundations for info on this. Management agreements and plans need attention as well. Other financial considerations may include the cost of a surveyor, an appraiser, and a lawyer.

Jason Sable, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Tax Law Forestry Specialist, shared an overview of the Wisconsin Managed Forest Law (MFL) at the final 2018 BMAP Conservation Conversation March 8. He highlighted recent changes in the law and what landowners can expect if they enroll their property in MFL.

MFL has been providing tax breaks to land owners who agree to its stipulated timber management practices since 1987. MFL agreements are in place on about 3.3 million acres statewide. The average parcel size is about 65 acres.

“This program changes a lot” says Sable. “There has only been one legislative session since it started that didn’t make changes to the law.”

The purpose of MFL is the production of forest products, but each parcel may have up to 20 percent of its area in non-productive acreage which includes: food plots for animals (these crops cannot be harvested), prairie, savanna, ponds and marsh.

“The goal is individualized to the land owner, as long as that goal doesn’t compromise sound forestry,” Sable says. “Regardless of landowner goals, certain ecologic resources must also be managed. These include species that are endangered, threatened or of special concern; archeological and historical sites; water and soil quality, and ecological diversity.”



Photo by Julie Raasch

A Full House Learns about Managed Forest Law

In northern Wisconsin timber products are determined by the paper industry, and much of the land is owned by groups of shareholders, Sable notes, adding that in southern Wisconsin the lumber business is tied to the housing industry because we grow more quality hardwood trees.

An MFL agreement is a long-term commitment of 25 or 50 years and provides property tax reduction from 75 to 95 percent. The agreement obligates the land owner to: follow their management plan, pay taxes on time, usually open their land to the public, submit cutting notices before harvesting and permit field inspections.

To apply, a landowner must provide: a \$30 fee, a copy of recorded proof of ownership, a copy of a recent tax bill and a management plan.

Management plans are prepared by a Certified Plan Writer (CPW) that the landowner must hire. CPWs are private consulting foresters certified by the state. There is a Forestry Assistance Locator on the WDNR website, http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/ForestLandowners/documents/cpw_list_public.pdf. Select your county and it shows the DNR foresters who work in that county and the tax law specialists like Sable and then it lists private forestry consultants who work in that county.

Sable discussed recent changes to MFL. “Act 358 made big changes in 2016,” he says. “For years a yield tax was collected when harvesting. There is no more yield tax. When you cut timber, the state does not collect any revenue.”

Other changes include raising the minimum parcel size from 10 acres to 20 acres. Changes have also been made regarding

open land. It usually needs to be accessible to the public. To have land closed to the public, you must pay \$10.20 per acre, and that fee now goes to the townships. Another change is that leasing hunting rights is now legal on MFL land.

Managed Forest Law

Denise Thornton and Doug Hannsman



Photo by Julie Raasch

Jason Sable, Wisconsin DNR

Also, land owners can now withdraw land for the purpose of construction or land parcel sale. “It used to be if you had 40 acres in MFL and you decided there was a nice spot for a house on that land, you had to withdraw the entire 40 acres. Now you can withdraw 1-5 acres for a land sale or construction,” Sable says. “You are allowed to do it one time for a 25-year MFL or two times for a 50-year MFL.”

For more information about MFL in Iowa County, email Jason Sable at jason.sable@wisconsin.gov. For Dane, Green and Lafayette Counties, contact Matt Singer at matt.singer@wisconsin.gov.

cont. page 14, see FOREST LAW

We enter into a large open valley. A stream cuts through the center, bordered on both sides by sedge meadow, then grades into wet prairie, dry prairie, oak savanna and finally oak woodland on the upper slopes and ridge tops. A flock of wild turkeys suddenly appears ahead of us, arranged in a single file line, they maintain a perfect waddle cadence, running down the same two-track road we are traveling.

The Wedel Family - A Legacy of Conservation

David Cordray, BMAP Director

Two deer bolt and race across the sedge meadow in high-reaching, graceful leaps; the morning sun highlights splashes of water each time deer hooves and earth meet. I spot an adult pickerel frog basking near a spring, and resist my deeply engrained childhood instinct of “proving my speed” and let the frog rest in peace. A Henslow’s sparrow calls from the grassy ridge above us, only to be answered by another on the opposite ridge. Someone shouts

“over there,” and in unison binoculars meet eyes, and I find myself looking at our intended quarry – the adorable, charismatic Baltimore checkerspot butterfly!

Welcome to Wedel Oak Woods (WOW), I muse, and I feel fortunate to be able to participate on a guided tour on this ecologically rich property by this year’s Bur Oak Award winners Tom, Eva, Andy and Davin Wedel.

The Blue Mounds Area Project Bur Oak award recognizes member landowners who have undertaken or recently completed a project on their own land that makes outstanding progress in protecting or restoring native biodiversity. Excellence in private land stewardship is shown by the degree of leadership and innovation in the project’s approach, sensitivity to the local landscape, and enhancement of the habitat of threatened, endangered or special-concern species or plant communities. The bur oak tree was chosen as the award’s namesake because it represents both the dominant native plant community of the region, and symbolizes persistence in the face of adversity by having endured frequent fires in pre-settlement times.

In 1972, Tom, a commercial airline pilot, and Eva, a music teacher, bought a 380-acre farm in Lafayette County near Argyle, WI. Neither knew anything about farming, but they both felt strongly that they wanted a place to “connect” with nature, build family memories and have plenty of open space where their two boys, Andy and Davin, could run, get dirty, explore and discover.

Being remote landowners, and to offset expenses, the Wedels rented the crop and pasture land to a local farmer and the farmhouse to various tenants. They would visit the property often in the summer, tent camping near the big spring, which they utilized as a refrigerator, and tending fences to keep the cows contained. Eva vividly recalls being “gently” nuzzled though the tent at night by curious cows. Growing up, the boys spent their free time building tree houses, making mud holes and exploring every nook and cranny of the farm.

After five years passed, the Wedels stopped renting the house and furnished it with a hot plate and hand-me-down furniture. The “house” became the center point of activity, teeming with family, friends, and lots of kids on each visit to the farm. In the 1980s, the Wedels purchased an additional 17 acres of wetlands followed by another acre a few years later, bringing their acreage total to 398.

The big change in the Wedels’ focus came in 1987 when the local farmer stopped farming. Tom, locally known as the “Aviator” and often the subject of neighbors’ friendly jokes to Eva – “You let Tom out alone again?” - discovered prairie through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). They put nearly all their cropland, 120 acres, into CRP - 18 acres of prairie and the balance into brome grass. The CRP prairie only required warm-season grasses, but Tom, through his own research and a whopping budget of \$204, added forbs. After the prairie planting, the Wedel family searched on hands and knees looking for tiny prairie plant seedlings. They didn’t know it then, but the lure of the tallgrass prairie had taken hold. Soon the cows and fences would be gone and native plants and animals would become their passion.



Photo by Julie Raasch

Carroll Schaal, David Cordray, Tom and Eva Wedel



Photo by David Cordray

Davin, Eva, David, Andy and Adam (left to right)



Photo by David Cordray

Lucy, Tom, Stella and Davin (left to right)

Today, the former croplands are rich prairie reconstructions, the former pastures high-quality wetlands, and the oak-wooded uplands dotted with oak savanna and prairie remnants. Many rare plant and animal species are present. Davin and his spouse David bought a neighboring 150 acres bringing the total acreage up to just short of 550. WOW is now a 501 (c)(3) foundation with a mission to preserve and maintain the property's rich biodiversity into perpetuity.

Sitting on the Wedels' farmhouse deck with a stunning vista of their lifetimes' work, Eva shares her vision of WOW's future. "I want a place for rare species to live and be safe into perpetuity. I want to continue making WOW more valuable for plants and animals. I want a place where people can come and enjoy nature."

As Eva's words sink in, I suddenly see a vision of the future. The Wedel farmhouse is teeming with people. Andy, Davin, and their spouses, Adam and David, are old. A group of children are gathered

around and listening intently to a man (Aldo) and two women (Stella and Lucy) speak. The speakers, with passion and determination, tell the story of their grandparents, Tom and Eva. How they came to this land, accepted it as part of their family, and invested a lifetime of work in ensuring future generations have an opportunity to experience nature as they were able to experience it.

A legacy of conservation. I can't think of a better way to dedicate one's life.

AMPHIBIANS from page 5

If cutting down trees or clearing out shrubs, do not use heavy machinery. Use hand-operated tools, such as chain saws and brush cutters. Large machinery should be restricted to the overwintering period (Nov 1 to Mar 15), ideally when there is frost in the ground to minimize vegetation damage.

Consider structural needs of the species present. Although some habitats are not botanically rich, many such places support populations of herpetofauna. These species often associate

with structure or prey base rather than specific plant assemblages and can flourish in areas that are of low botanic quality. For example, population levels of some larger snakes, such as bullsnakes, are more dependent on availability of small mammals, their prey, than on the quality of the habitat. With a good prey base, they will frequent open areas with very little native vegetation. Consult local experts prior to initiating intensive restoration efforts in such areas as these actions may have greater negative effect on animal communities than no action at all.

For more information:

1. Midwest PARC Habitat Management Guidelines - <https://www.mwparc.org/products/habitat/>
2. Midwest PARC Prescribed Burning Guidelines - <https://mwparc.org/products/fire/plain/>
3. Restoring, Managing Habitat for Reptiles and Amphibians (Iowa NRCS) – https://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/ia/newsroom/factsheets/?cid=nrcs142p2_008529
4. Wetland Restoration Handbook for Wisconsin Landowners <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/Wetlands/handbook.html>
5. Protecting turtle nests in Wisconsin <http://dnr.wi.gov/files/PDF/pubs/nh/nh0939.pdf>

Brandon Soldner, conservation specialist for the Farm Service Agency in Wisconsin, gave a brief history of America's conservation programs and a snapshot of where they are today at the third of BMAP's Winter Conservation Conversations February 22, 2018.

Soldner's main job is program management of CRP, the Emergency Conservation Program and the Emergency Forest Restoration Program. "I provide state policy for national programs to be implemented here in our local landscapes," Soldner said.

zation to a three-pronged program of wildlife benefit and water quality and soil stabilization.

After a steep increase in enrollment in CRP starting in the early 1990s there has been a more recent decline. In 2014, it went from 32 million acres to 24 million. "We are coming up on a new farm bill and possibly Congress will add back some acres. There are a lot of wildlife groups out there with lobbying powers," says Soldner. "It will be interesting to see what the next farm bill will bring to the table for CRP."

Statewide enrollment peaked in 1993 at 713,000 acres. Current enrollment is down to around 300,000 acres. 2006 was the start of the decline because commodity prices went up and acres dropped to 214,000. People were paying hand over fist to get out of CRP, and enrollment numbers snowballed down. CRP acres are rising again. "We have climbed fairly quickly in the past two years, but we have hit the cap and now we can't enroll anyone," says Soldner. "People are still knocking on the door, we just don't have opportunities."

Soldner described both the general CRP and continuous signup processes. General CRP is announced by the Secretary of Agriculture for a specific signup period, but there has not been a general CRP signup since 2015.

Continuous Signup has a different set of rules. This program accepts offers all year long and looks at small acreage projects of resource concern. An example would be putting a 150-foot filter strip along a ditch to prevent sedimentation. Categories of work acceptable to this program include field windbreaks, grass waterways, shallow water areas for wildlife, living snow fences and wetland restoration.

The 2008 Farm Bill created State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement

(SAFE) designed to be a joint regional and local effort between federal government and wildlife groups. "Because it's wildlife-focused," says Soldner, "it's a great opportunity for a farmer to improve habitat on a larger scale. We can enroll the whole farm."



Brandon Soldner, Farm Service Agency

Photo by Julie Raasch

"The Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) is your best money maker," Soldner says. Focused on water quality, this partnership was formed in 2002 between the Farm Service Agency and the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). CREP grassland projects can extend out to 1,000 feet from a waterway. Most people enroll under a 15-year compliance agreement and have the option to re-enroll to extend that.

Are you eligible? You must be owner or operator for 12 months before submitting your offer. The land cannot be under a separate easement agreement. Your offer must meet CRP requirements, and the land must have a 4-6 year crop history during the years 2008-2013.

To learn more, contact Brandon Soldner at brandon.soldner@wi.usda.gov.

Overview on USDA Federal Programs

Denise Thornton and Doug Hannsman

"Within the US Department of Agriculture, you have agencies similar to the structure of the Department of Natural Resources," he continued. "We have FSA that provides farm programs outlined in the farm bill, and financial assistance through farm loans, we have the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) who provides technical service. We have other programs as well"

USDA was created by President Abraham Lincoln in 1862, designed to help farmers. Currently, the scope of Soldner's programs is in flux. "We are going through a reorganization," he said, "which I am not allowed to talk about."

Soldner described programs he works with. The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) was created by the 1985 Food Security Act to stabilize the commodity market by taking land out of production and providing annual rent payments. It has evolved from market stabili-



Mike Engel, US Fish and Wildlife

Photo by Julie Raasch

“If you want to do something on your land,” he says, “we can stretch your dollars.” The disadvantage is that his program does not have much funding, but the advantage is that “as with Darcy Kind’s DNR program, it’s more one on one. We go out to meet with you, and connect you with a contractor who can do quality work and provide real world numbers and real world solutions.” Engel says there is no

application deadline for the program he administers. It’s a rolling application process.

Engel does about 30 projects each year with an average size of 15 acres and a typical budget around \$10,000. He said it was hard to be specific about qualification and funding “Our answer is usually ‘that depends.’ I have 2 designated priorities: Southwest Grassland and stream conservation. People with remnants are a priority. Context is important.”

The best time to talk about projects, Engel says, is in the winter because he gets a new budget October 1. “If I talk to you in July, I might not have any money left, but that puts you at the top of the queue for when I do have money again.”



Darcy Kind, Wisconsin DNR

Photo by Julie Raasch

Darcy Kind is a Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) biologist with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Endangered Resources Program. “We have funding for management and restoration on private land,” she says.

The goal of LIP is to help private landowners create and manage habitat for species that are rare or declining through management advice, assistance with management plans and cost-share program funding to individuals and organizations on private lands, with a focus on the Driftless Area. The actual funds come from the federal government, and Kind applies for funds in cooperation with neighboring states.

Stewardship Fund Sources

Denise Thornton and Doug Hannsman

“Our funding is always in flux,” she says, “but since 2006, we have improved habitat for more than 12,000 acres and more than 240 at-risk species. We have provided over 600 one-to-one site visits and can help a landowner prioritize what might be worth working on and connect them with other programs if they are a better fit.”

LIP covers 75% of the cost of approved projects. The landowner pays up front and then LIP reimburses them. The 25% owner match is typically the value of landowner labor. It’s a competitive program and most projects are funded between \$3,000 and \$8,000. In 2016, the 227 acres that Kind worked on were mostly for prescribed fires and brush removal, herbaceous invasive control and inter-seeding.

cont. page 13, see STEWARDSHIP

Picture an 8-year old child, let's call her Sophie. One day, Sophie's teacher gives her the fun task of creating her very own bird. She lets her imagination run wild. Ooh, Sophie thinks, let's have the bird put on a backwards tuxedo! And a cute little blond wig too? Yes, and let's give it a song that sounds like R2-D2 from Star Wars. Hmm... what else... it should have magnetic stuff in its brain and be able to fly half-way around the world! Our Sophie sure has a great imagination, but she's actually just conjured something quite real – a bobolink.

fields, voraciously destroying rice crops. South American farmers protecting their livelihood have resorted to shooting, trapping, or poisoning birds in astounding quantities.

If a bobolink is lucky enough to survive all of that, it must then endure a perilous and physically-taxing 5,000-mile journey back to the Midwest. And that's where things can get really bad. Breeding habitat for many grassland-dependent bird species has vanished in the last century, with most native grassland ecosystems converted to other land uses. That means

and support of the Blue Mounds Area Project is so important. Bobolinks need more habitat. And they need good habitat. Private land-owners have tremendous power (and responsibility) to affect the fate of the bobolink and the many other critters that rely on healthy native habitat. Planting native grasses, controlling invasive species, keeping cats inside, altering haying schedules to jive with nesting, and spreading the good word are among a few things everyone can do to help.

There are lots of reasons to care about the fate of bobolinks.

Bobolinks - Year-round Struggles

Matt Reetz, Executive Director,
Madison Audubon

The bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*, Latin for “long-clawed rice-eater”) is a neotropical migratory songbird. It's a relative of blackbirds and orioles. It eats seeds and insects. But let's get beyond the basic facts. The bobolink, with its striking plumage and bubbling melodies, is a true highlight of the Wisconsin summer and a quintessential spirit of our grassy, open fields. Unfortunately, the bobolink's problems are also quite real.

The bobolink has a relatively widespread distribution in North America and once enjoyed robust populations. However, bobolink numbers have taken a nosedive. In Wisconsin, bobolink populations have plummeted nearly 80% since the 1960s. Why? Every spring, beginning in late April, bobolinks arrive here after spending half the year in South America. There, swarms of hundreds of thousands of birds may gather in agricultural



Male bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*)

Photo by Kelly Colgan Azar

there just aren't many places to raise a family. Fortunately, bobolinks have been able to rely on a few types of man-made fields for foraging and nesting. But, even if a bobolink catches a break and finds a hayfield of suitable size and quality, its eggs or nestlings may end up being chewed up by a mower or eaten by a predator.

Here's the good news– there is much that can be done. With so much of the deck stacked against bobolinks throughout the year, safe places to breed will be vital to their continued survival. That's precisely why your participation

There are ecological, economical, aesthetical, and even utilitarian motives for their conservation. But, let me ask you again to simply picture a young child. One who doesn't have to imagine something as magical as a bobolink, but simply go see it in real life. To me, that's the best reason of all.

Check out The Bobolink Project; it's an interesting website with some cool information on how landowners can. While it is specific to New England the themes are similar. <https://www.bobolinkproject.com>

We receive gratis payroll, tax and accounting services from Breunig Accounting in Sauk City and John Bird and Barb Parrell in Black Earth office. We can't thank them all enough for their support.

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STEWARDSHIP from page 11

Projects are chosen based on benefit to species at risk, level of site protection (lands with a conservation easement rank higher), the landscape around the site and the probability of success.

"We are flooded with good proposals," says Kind. "This round we only had \$50,000 for the entire Driftless Area. We asked for proposals starting in November and had to shut it down right before the new year."

Kind urged her audience to find other funding sources to continue management like working with volunteers and hunters. She suggested exploring options such as the WDNR Turkey Stamp, Natural Resources Foundation, and Wisconsin Conservation Endowment.

For more information, email Darcy Kind at darcy.kind@wisconsin.gov.

For more information, phone Mike Engel at 608-221-1206 ext. 21 or email him at mike_engel@fws.gov

EVENTS

Bobolink Hill Farm Field Trip

May 19, Saturday — 10:00 am - 12:00 pm

5129 Shophill Road, Highland, WI 53543
Phone 1-608-359-0779

We will be serenaded by dozens of bobolinks (assuming they return from Argentina) as we walk up a hill through a large grassy hay field. We may also see bluebirds and meadowlarks. From there we will check the progress made in a savanna area that was cleared of weedy trees and brush several years ago. Several pairs of red headed woodpeckers have set up residence here. We will then hike into a 25-acre hilly prairie and see a variety of early blooming species including a hillside of lupine, hoary puccoon, yellow star grass, prairie violets and many others.

(This Saturday event does not involve a potluck.)

Save the Date

BMAP Summer Excursions 2018

June 21 ■ July 19 ■ Aug 16

Come meet other BMAP members and learn about their restoration and management experiences. Each month we'll tour a different member's property, see their challenges and successes and then retire to lawn chairs for an old fashion potluck and enjoy the setting sun. All tours begin at 6:00 pm so come early. We're still working out the details but reserve these dates on your calendar and watch for a postcard or email announcement. Check our website for updates.

Paddle the Pecatonica: Identify Invasive Plants & Sample Microbrews

June 23, Saturday — 9:00 am - 1:00 pm

Learn to identify invasive species of concern during this scenic paddle with Southwest Badger RC&D and River Alliance of Wisconsin on the Pecatonica River. The paddle will feature the beautiful bridges and parks on the Pecatonica, as well as plenty of tree cover to shade the way. Stands of aquatic invasive species found during this paddle will be recorded to help inform future invasive species management plans for this stretch of the Pecatonica. This event is appropriate for beginning paddlers.

The paddle will end at Pecatonica River Trails Park, 400 Washington Street, Darlington, WI. From there we will walk to City Service Brewing in Darlington for refreshments.

Canoes will be available for a nominal charge. Feel free to bring a paddling partner or come by yourself--we will coordinate the event so that everyone has a partner.

Please register by June 16

For more information and to register: <https://bit.ly/2GuhKh6>.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

Common Lichens of Wisconsin

This 18-page booklet portrays the 30 most common lichen species of the approximately 800 species in Wisconsin.

<https://herbarium.wiscweb.wisc.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/205/2017/10/lichens-of-wi-web-20170515.pdf>

Bee Better Certified



Bee Better Certified is a program that collaborates with farmers to protect and restore high-quality habitat for pollinators. The goal is to give bees a healthy place to live. The science-based program standards are designed to reduce pesticide use and provide a high-quality restoration. To learn more about this program, check out <https://beebettercertified.org>

Lafayette County Water Quality Project

A group of partners have joined together to support farm conservation efforts that protect soil and water resources. Additional funding has been secured to assist in Lafayette County's Agriculture Enterprise Area to be used on a number of techniques designed to prevent contamination of our groundwater. Dana Lawrence with Southwest Badger RC&D can be contacted for additional information: dana.lawrence@swbadger.org or 608-348-7110.

FOREST LAW *from page 7*

Sable works with other regional integrated foresters who administer forestry grants on non-MFL forestland, including Tom Hill tom.hill@wisconsin.gov in Iowa County and Cody Didier cody.didier@wisconsin.gov in Dane, Green and Lafayette Counties.

Advertise in the Blue Mounds Area Project Newsletter

Deadline for ads in the summer newsletter is July 1, 2018

1/6 page vertical (2 3/8" x 4 7/8") \$35.00
1/3 page squarish (5 1/8" x 4 7/8") \$55.00
1/2 page horizontal (7 7/8" x 4 7/8") \$75.00

Contact editor Marci Hess, mhess5599@gmail.com, for more details.

Our Mission:

The Blue Mounds Area 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, nonnative 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 Area Project Newsletter is published three times yearly. We welcome your comments, submissions, and advertisements.

Deadlines for submissions for 2019 newsletters:

Spring Newsletter — March 1, 2019

Summer Newsletter — July 1, 2019

Fall Newsletter — October 15, 2019

Send submissions to: newsletter@bluemounds.org

Editor: Marci Hess, mhess5599@gmail.com — Designer: Julie Raasch, jul@creative-zoo.com

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If you are interested in assisting or volunteering for the Blue Mounds Area Project, please contact us:

info@bluemounds.org
608-561-2627
(or, 608-561-BMAP)

Blue Mounds Area Project Membership Form

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E-mail address: _____

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TOTAL _____

Make check payable and return to: Blue Mounds Area Project, PO Box 332, Mount Horeb, WI 53572

Yes, I would like to receive information about site visits.

All contributions are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

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“We often forget that we are nature.
Nature is not something separate from us.
So when we say that we have lost our connection
to nature, we have lost our connection to ourselves.”

— *Andy Goldsworthy*



facebook.com/BMAPcommunity

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Please check the address label for your membership expiration date.
If you're receiving a complimentary or trial copy, please consider joining.