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Message from the project coordinator

In mid-August I returned to work after a wonderful summer maternity leave. While it was great to be home with my new son, I missed getting out in the field, hearing the grassland birds, and seeing the prairies change throughout the season.

This fall brings many changes to the MRPHA project. Both DNR's Southwest Wisconsin Grassland and Stream Conservation Area project and DATCP's Working Lands Initiative were approved, which could bring new resources to this area. Several partner organizations had staff changes, too. Plus read about the many program sign-ups, our Landowner Appreciation Picnic, and an exciting event coming to Dodgeville next year.



Have a great fall season!

Sincerely, Katie Abbott

Don't Miss Out on these Program Sign-ups!

- **Landowner Incentive Program (LIP)** provides technical and financial assistance to manage and restore habitat for at-risk plants and animals, including practices such as prescribed burning, prairie restoration, and invasive species removal. For more information contact Heidi Nelson at (608) 267-0797 or visit the website at: www.dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/wlip/index.htm. **deadline: October 31**
- **Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP)** provides technical and financial assistance to producers to enhance soil, water, air, and related natural resources on their land in a comprehensive manner by improving, maintaining, managing, and undertaking conservation activities. Enrollment is competitive; the next ranking deadline is **January 15**. Contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service office for more information: Iowa County-(608) 935-2791 x3, Dane County-(608) 224-3750.
- **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** provides financial and technical assistance for conservation practices on agricultural land. Incentive payments are provided for certain practices. Just a few of the many eligible practices include grade stabilization, grassed waterways, prescribed grazing, nutrient management, and stream crossings. Application period will be announced soon. Contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service office for more information: Iowa County-(608) 935-2791 x3, Dane County-(608) 224-3750.
- **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)** provides financial and technical assistance to establish or manage non-game wildlife habitat. Practices include (but are not limited to) prairie planting, prescribed burning, invasive species control, and brush removal. Application period will be announced soon. Contact the Natural Resources Conservation Service office for more information: Iowa County-(608) 935-2791 x3, Dane County-(608) 224-3750.
- **State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)** Both of these programs are CRP off-shoots. Landowners with pasture or cropland within 150 feet of water may be eligible for CREP. Fields south of Highway 18 are eligible for extended CREP (within 1000 feet of water) and SAFE. Both of these programs provide cost-sharing and annual rental payments (between \$90 and \$176 per acre per year) to retire cropland and establish permanent vegetation. Fields that were once in CRP are likely eligible. Sign-up is continuous. Contact your local Farm Services Agency office: Iowa County-(608) 935-2791 x2, Dane County-(608) 224-3767.

DNR Project Approved, MRPHA Boundary to Expand

The Wisconsin Natural Resources Board unanimously approved the Southwest Wisconsin Grassland and Stream Conservation Area (SWGSCA) at their June meeting. This Department of Natural Resources (DNR) project expands upon the MRPHA partnership model. Over the next 15 years, the DNR plans to protect 12,000 acres (through fee title and easement) across the 473,900 acre project area that includes parts of Iowa, Dane, Green, and Lafayette Counties.

The primary goals of the SWGSCA project are to conserve and enhance functioning grassland, savanna and stream ecosystems across this landscape, and to establish three Bird Conservation Areas (BCAs) for declining grassland birds.

BCAs are large, open areas of at least 10,000 acres, each with a 2,000-acre core of permanent, contiguous grassland. Long-term sustainability of grassland birds like the upland sandpiper, northern harrier, and western meadowlark depends upon large, open landscapes with adequate grassy cover for nesting and feeding. While such landscapes are now largely absent from Wisconsin (and the entire Upper Midwest), they still are found in the SWGSCA region.

The many streams and rivers that drain the re-

gion's ridgetops and hillsides vary in quality and condition. "Impaired" streams (a federal designation), as well as Outstanding/Exceptional Resource Waters, are the priority streams for this project.

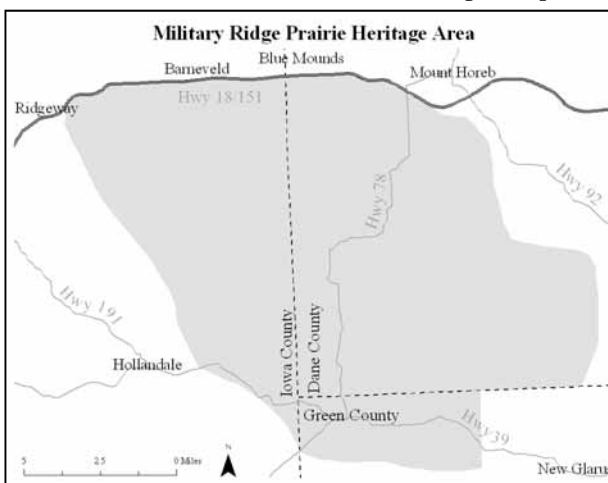
The project also will provide new public areas for hiking, birding, fishing, hunting and nature study. People living in the area have expressed high interest in such activities, yet the region currently offers very little public recreational land.

DNR has developed three Focus Areas by looking at areas on the landscape where resource opportunities and needs converge. As always, they will work only with willing landowners. For more information

visit the project's website at:

www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/land/facilities/SWGrassland.

Passage of this DNR program will bring changes to the MRPHA project. In order to mesh with the DNR project, build on our successes, and conserve additional important resources, the MRPHA partnership plans to expand its boundary to match that of the DNR's easternmost Focus Area. This will include additional areas in Perry and Moscow Townships and expansion into Springdale, Primrose, and York Townships, resulting in nearly double the area. We look forward to working with partners and landowners in this new area.



Future boundary of the MRPHA

Working Lands Initiative Approved

The Wisconsin Working Lands Initiative (WLI), a program of the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP), was passed as a part of the state budget. The goal of the WLI is to achieve preservation of areas significant for current and future agricultural uses. Three main components of the program include updates to the state's current Farmland Preservation Program, the ability for farmers and local governments to establish voluntary Agricultural Enterprise Areas, and a state program to help with the purchase of agricultural conservation easements.

DATCP is now accepting petitions from farmers and local governments to request designation of land as an Agricultural Enterprise Area (AEA). The designation of these areas identifies land that is locally targeted by farmers and local government for agricultural development and preservation. Once designated, these areas enable eligible farmers to enter into a farmland preservation agreement with the state to claim a farmland preservation tax credit. To be considered for designation, a petition must be jointly filed by at least 5 eligible farmers in the proposed AEA and by each county, town, or municipality in which any part of the AEA is located. **Petitions are due by February 26, 2010.** DATCP will evaluate petitions through a competitive process. For more information contact Coreen Fallat at (608) 224-4625 or visit www.datcp.state.wi.us/workinglands/aea.jsp.



The Wisconsin Towns Association is partnering with the DATCP to provide six opportunities around the state to learn about the new WLI and what it means to local government and landowners. The upcoming workshops are open to the general public as well as local town officials. Attendees will learn about planning for farmland preservation, updating/developing farmland preservation zoning ordinances, establishing an Agricultural Enterprise Area, applying for a Purchase of an Agricultural Conservation Easement grant, and claiming farmland preservation tax credits. Workshops are the last week in October and first week in November, including November 5 in Janesville. Registration is \$35. For more details see the latest WLI newsletter at www.datcp.state.wi.us/workinglands/newsletter.jsp or contact the Wisconsin Towns Association at (715) 526-3157 or www.wisctowns.com.

Landowners Recognized for Conservation Work

At this year's joint MRPHA-Blue Mounds Area Project (BMAP) Landowner Appreciation Picnic we had great weather, great food, and great company. Following the potluck meal, two landowners were recognized for their work restoring and maintaining native plant communities on their properties, after which Cindy Ramseyer led a nature hike.

Gary Karls, who owns 322 acres in Blue Mounds and Perry Townships, was named the MRPHA Landowner of the Year for 2009. Gary has converted 148 acres of cropland to native prairie, installed water and sediment control basins to trap sediment and provide water for wildlife, restored 21 acres of oak savanna, and improved cold water habitat on German Valley Creek. Gary is always looking for ways to ensure these practices will continue to be managed and maintained on a permanent basis for the overall health of the soil, water and wildlife and for everyone's benefit.



Bruce and Lisa Wachholz, who own 80 acres in Springdale Township, were honored with BMAP's 2009 Bur Oak Award. The Wachholz's property is characterized by a diversity of habitat, with forest, oak woodland and savanna openings in the uplands, and a 20-acre valley returned to native habitat. Creating this habitat was not easy, but Bruce and Lisa worked together, cutting down honeysuckle, collecting seeds to add to their plantings, targeting them for bare ground in the early spring, and tamping them in by foot. They have shown long-term commitment to their vision and stewardship and have well earned this award.

Congratulations to Gary, Bruce, and Lisa!

Dodgeville Chosen for Film Festival

Dodgeville was chosen as one of four communities to host a *Making It Home* film festival. The other communities are Baraboo, Milwaukee, and the Chequamegon Bay region (Ashland/Bayfield).

The community hosts and the Wisconsin Humanities Council (WHC) are working together to build festivals that reflect the people and spirit of Wisconsin, as well as the unique landscapes of the regional host sites. Festival events will draw people together throughout the weekend to enjoy new movies, relax amongst neighbors, and perhaps see the world through a different lens.

The films have not yet been selected for the festivals, but will tell stories from around the world that reveal connections between people and place, that explore questions of justice and responsibility, and that challenge assumptions about how we live on the planet. The films in the Making it Home festivals will be selected from the 2009 Tales from Planet Earth Environmental Film Festival.

The MRPHA partnership is working with the Dodgeville Chamber of Commerce, the WHC, and other local organizations to organize this free festival. Films will be shown at the Dodge Theatre in downtown Dodgeville March 12-14, 2010.



Partner Staff Changes

Many staff changes have occurred within the MRPHA partnership recently. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (FWS) Wisconsin Private Lands Office was short two employees this summer, since State Coordinator Jim Ruwaldt retired and Grassland Biologist Shawn Papon took a FWS job in Minnesota. Recently Kurt Waterstradt has started as the new State Coordinator. Kurt comes from the State Coordinator position in Ohio, but previously worked as the FWS biologist in Madison and was an active partner in the MRPHA.

Kevin Wallenfang is Pheasants Forever's new Wisconsin regional field representative. Wallenfang succeeds Jeff Gaska, who served as PF's regional wildlife biologist in Wisconsin for 10 years. A native of Green Lake, Wisconsin, Kevin has worked in the conservation field for over 20 years.

Amy Staffen recently finished up her last summer working as Restoration Ecologist with The Prairie Enthusiasts. She now works for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Amy will be missed, but she has promised that she won't be far away and plans to continue as a volunteer with The Prairie Enthusiasts.

Good luck to everyone who has moved on, and welcome to the new partners!

Upcoming events

- The Nature Conservancy Work Parties: Nov 14 & Dec 12, 9:00 am to noon**
 Help is needed clearing invasive brush. Contact Jim Lesniak at (608) 238-5187 or (608) 576-3310 (cell). Dress appropriately for outdoor, grubby work (long pants, long-sleeved shirt, sturdy footwear, work gloves); bring water and a snack. *Directions: About 0.5 miles east of Barneveld on Hwy 18/151, go south on Cty Rd K for about 2 miles. Meet at the parking area on the right, marked by a sign.*
- The Prairie Enthusiasts Workdays:** Help is needed with seed collecting/cleaning and tree/brush removal. Wear appropriate clothing for the weather and work (sturdy footwear, work gloves, no synthetic fabrics). Bring drinking water and pruners or loppers, if you have them. Call contact person the day before to confirm and obtain directions.
 - Erbe Grassland: Nov 28, 1:00 to 4:00, tree/brush removal. Contact Rich Henderson (608) 845-7065
 - Mounds View: Oct 31, 10:00-2:00, seed collecting, brush removal; Nov 7, 10:00-3:00, seed cleaning; Nov 14, 1:00-4:00, seed collecting, brush removal; Nov 15 & Dec 6, noon-4:00, brush removal. Contact Rich Henderson (608) 845-7065
 - Shea Prairie: Nov 8, noon to 4:00, tree/brush removal. Contact Eric Preston (415) 235-4182
- Woodland School classes: (see www.aldoleopold.org/woodlandschool/courses.shtml for details)**
 - Plant Communities of Southwest Wisconsin: Nov 14, Fire Behavior: Dec 12, Ignitions: Jan 9



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Newsletter for owners of land within the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area

The Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area is a cooperative project of the Blue Mounds Area Project, Driftless Area Land Conservancy, US Fish & Wildlife Service, Dane & Iowa County Land Conservation Divisions, The Nature Conservancy, Pheasants Forever, The Prairie Enthusiasts, Southwest Badger Resource Conservation & Development, USDA – Natural Resource Conservation Service, and WI Department of Natural Resources. Goals of the partnership include: 1. Provide and maintain viable prairie, savanna, grassland, and aquatic habitat, for the many plants and animals that depend on these habitats for their survival 2. Maintain an economically viable rural and agricultural landscape 3. Provide and encourage traditional recreational opportunities which are compatible with the conservation goals 4. Integrate best applied science through the use of continued monitoring and adaptive management.

Project Coordinator Katie Abbott helps landowners within the project area (see below) get help from these organizations to manage and protect their land. She strives to educate and empower landowners to be stewards of the natural resources in their community. Absolutely all work involving landowners and the MRPHA partnership is completely voluntary.

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