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Message from the Project Coordinator

I am back from a wonderful maternity leave, so I am once again available to answer any of your land management questions or provide a free site visit. Don't hesitate to contact me! Because I was on leave, we did not hold the MRPHA Landowner Appreciation Picnic that is usually held in the fall. We may plan an alternate (indoor) event for winter, however, so stay tuned.

If you have been thinking about projects on your land, there are many programs available right now that may be able to help with the cost (see page 2). A great way to figure out what you can do on your own land is to practice during volunteer work days (see page 3). Work parties are also a great way to meet other landowners, get to know local natural areas, and enjoy the outdoors. Have a great fall and upcoming holiday season!

Sincerely,
-Katie Abbott, MRPHA Project Coordinator

Badger Ecology Study Begins

by Dave Sample

This summer the first-ever American Badger ecology study in the Badger state began. It was started by the Wisconsin DNR Bureau of Science Services and professor Tim Van Deelen of UW-Madison Department of Forest and Wildlife Ecology. This study is a companion to the DNR-UW Milwaukee statewide investigation into Badger genetics, mentioned in a previous edition of this newsletter.



The ecology study will focus on southwest Wisconsin, specifically in the Southwest Wisconsin Grassland and Stream Conservation Area, including the MRPHA. This year is the pilot season of what will be a 3-year study looking into the habitat use, movements, home range, diet, population structure, and reproduction of badgers.

We are finding that badgers appear to prefer sites with sandy or light soils for their burrows and den sites, even if quite rocky (one rock excavated by a badger weighed in at 10 pounds!). They also seem to prefer burrowing into slopes. We

have been placing traps at burrow openings and have successfully caught 2 male badgers so far. Both were trapped in the MRPHA on land owned by The Prairie Enthusiasts. We developed a technique to surgically implant radio transmitters in the backs of badgers to allow us to track their movements throughout the year. To date, we have one adult male badger "on the air" and have been tracking his movements several times a week. He has moved about 5.5 miles from the location where we trapped him, and is now residing south of Ridgeway.

The DNR hired Jimmy Doyle as the lead field researcher on the project; Jimmy will be a graduate student in the lab of professor Van Deelen in winter 2012. You may be hearing from Jimmy regarding badgers on your property. **If you know of any active badger burrows on your land, please contact Jimmy Doyle or David Sample (WDNR) at 608-221-6351.** Thanks, and Go Bucky!

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Check out our website!

www.militaryridgeprairie.org

for more about the partners, natural resources, and ways to get involved.

Financial Assistance Available for Projects on Your Land

Grass or prairie plantings on former cropland:

Both the **State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE)** and **Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP)** 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. After enrolling all of the 4,000 acres originally allotted, *SAFE now has an additional 1,000 acres available*. Both of these programs provide cost-sharing and annual payments to retire cropland and establish perennial grasses (including prairie). Most practices also receive additional incentives, including up-front payments. Fields that were once in CRP are likely eligible. Sign-up is continuous. For more information contact your local Farm Services Agency office: Iowa County-(608) 935-2791 x2, Dane County-(608) 224-3767, Green County-(608) 325-4195.

Wildlife projects and prairie planting:

The **Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)** provides financial and technical assistance to establish or manage wildlife habitat. Practices include, but are not limited to, prairie planting, prescribed burning, invasive species control, brush removal, stream restoration, and pollinator habitat. The sign-up period is expected to last through the end of the year. All eligible applications will be evaluated and ranked for funding. For more information contact your local NRCS office: Iowa County, (608) 935-2791 x3; Dane County, (608) 224-3750; Green County, (608) 325-4195.

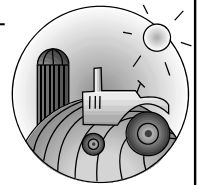


The **Landowner Incentive Program (LIP)** helps private landowners create and manage habitat for species that are rare or declining by providing management advice, assistance with management plans, and up to 75% cost-share funding. Eligible projects include, but are not limited to, conducting prescribed burns, restoring native vegetation, and removing invasive and woody species to benefit at-risk species. LIP is accepting pre-proposals (via a simple online form) for 2012 projects in the Driftless Area until noon on October 14. For more information visit the website at: www.dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/wlip or contact Dawn Hinebaugh at Dawn.Hinebaugh@Wisconsin.gov.

The **Nature Conservancy and Pheasants Forever** have funding available to help landowners who want to establish new prairie and improve the habitat on their property for grassland birds. This can include supplementing seed mixes on CRP, SAFE, or CREP plantings. The *project must be 25 acres or more* of a diverse, multi-species seed mix. Projects that are adjacent to existing grasslands/prairie are especially desired and will receive special consideration. Contact Kevin Wallenfang from Pheasants Forever for more information: kwallenfang@pheasantsforever.org.

Working farms:

The **Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)** is the primary program available for farmland conservation work, offering flat-rate payments for over 70 conservation practices such as nutrient management, grade stabilization, grassed waterways, prescribed grazing, and stream crossings. EQIP was established to help all types of farmers: livestock and dairy, grazing, or cash crop, including specialty crops, organic, and agro-forestry. The sign-up period is expected to last through the end of the year. All eligible applications will be evaluated and ranked for funding. For more information contact your local NRCS office: Iowa County, (608) 935-2791 x3; Dane County, (608) 224-3750; Green County, (608) 325-4195.



Voluntary public access:

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is announcing a new public access program aimed at preserving Wisconsin's hunting and fishing heritage called **Voluntary Public Access (VPA)**.

VPA provides financial incentives to landowners who allow public access on their property for hunting, fishing, trapping and wildlife observation. Counties within the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area (Dane, Green and Iowa) are eligible for VPA enrollment. Stream and fishing access will be the focus in Southwest Wisconsin. Priority will be given to properties along high-quality trout and small-mouth bass streams with at least 25% usable wildlife habitat, and those near existing public fishing or hunting grounds.



VPA lease rates are determined by land type: Agriculture land - \$3/acre/year, Grassland/wetland - \$10/acre/year, or Forestland - \$15/acre/year. Lease agreement lengths will be up to three years, with leases ending on August 31, 2014. An up-front payment will be made at the beginning of the contract. The VPA Program was funded through a grant as part of the 2008 Farm Bill. VPA Program sign-up will continue until the grant money allocated to Wisconsin has been committed.

Please contact Michelle Shivy, VPA SW focus area Liaison, at 608-535-0664 or michelle.shivy@wisconsin.gov if you would like more information or are interested in enrolling in VPA. Information can also be found on the DNR's website at <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/wildlife/vpa.htm>.

Update on Easement Funding Programs

In May the Wisconsin Legislature's Joint Finance Committee (JFC) voted on Governor Walker's proposed changes to the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund and Purchase of Agricultural Conservation Easements (PACE) programs. Many of the Governor's changes were reversed. These programs provide funding for local conservation groups to purchase development rights from landowners who want to protect farmland or natural areas.

The JFC reduced the Stewardship program's funding by \$26 million, but they reinstated the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program (for state-owned land) and the ability of the Stewardship Fund to be used for the purchase of conservation easements. These two provisions will increase the local support and flexibility needed to be an effective tool for land conservation in Wisconsin.

The JFC also voted 16-0 to keep the PACE program on the state statutes and honor the state's commitment to the 16 PACE projects approved during the first-ever statewide selection process (including some in the MRPHA project area). Gov. Scott Walker's budget called for eliminating PACE and the bonding authority to fund the first 16 projects. The committee also voted to require the state's Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection to undertake a year-long study of the program, future sources of funding and other details.

In the same amendment, lawmakers voted to eliminate controversial conversion fees that funded PACE. The fees were to be assessed when farmland is rezoned for development. Although the program remains on the books, PACE will most likely not accept new applications until the year-long study is finished and a new source of funding is found.

Pheasants Forever Seed Fundraiser

Pheasants Forever has a Wisconsin native seed program that offers dozens of native grasses and flowers. All seed has Midwest origins (many from Wisconsin) and can be purchased in any quantity, mixed or unmixed. All proceeds from the seed sales stay in Wisconsin and will be used to help fund more habitat work and land protection around the state. To discuss your project and receive a list of available seeds and mixes, please contact Kevin Wallenfang, PF Regional Wildlife Biologist, at kwallenfang@pheasantsforever.org or 608-798-2466.

Upcoming Work Days

•The Nature Conservancy: Saturdays, November 12 and December 10, 9:00am–noon

Volunteers will assist in clearing invasive brush and trees such as buckthorn and honeysuckle. Meet at the Hwy K parking lot south of Langberry Road. Dress appropriately for outdoor, grubby work (long pants, long-sleeved shirt, sturdy footwear, work gloves). Eye protection is always a good idea as well! *Directions:* Approximately 0.2 miles east of the village of Barneveld, turn south on County Road K. Follow K for 2 miles and turn into The Nature Conservancy's parking lot on the right. If you pass Prairie Grove Road, you have gone too far. Contact: Jim Lesniak, 608-576-3310.

•The Prairie Enthusiasts: Wear appropriate clothing for the weather (dress in layers). Do not wear synthetic fabrics near burn piles. Sturdy footwear and work gloves are required. Bring drinking water. For brush cutting, chainsaw operators with their own equipment are welcome, but must have safety chaps and headgear. Bring pruners or loppers if you have them. Always contact the leader before the work party to confirm the schedule and work site!



•**Sat. October 15 and 22**, 1:00-4:00pm, seed collecting at Mounds View. Contact Eric Preston at 608-257-1513.

•**Wed. October 26**, noon-4:00pm, tree/brush removal at Shea Prairie. Contact Eric Preston at 608-257-1513.

•**Sat. October 29**, 1:00-4:00pm, seed collecting at Mounds View. Contact Rich Henderson at 608-845-7065.

•**Sun. Oct. 30**, 9:00am-noon, brush removal at Schurch-Thomson Prairie. Contact Rich Henderson at 608-845-7065.

•**Sun. October 30**, 1:00-4:00pm, seed collecting at Mounds View. Contact Eric Preston at 608-257-1513.

•**Sun. November 6**, 11:00am-3:00pm, tree/brush removal at Shea Prairie. Contact Eric Preston at 608-257-1513.

•**Sat. November 12**, 1:00-4:00pm, tree/brush removal at Shea Prairie. Contact Eric Preston at 608-257-1513.

•**Sun. Nov. 13**, 1:00-4:00pm, tree/brush removal at Mueller Prairie. Contact Rich Henderson at 608-845-7065.

•**Sat. Dec. 3**, 9:00am-1:00pm, tree/brush removal at Mueller Prairie. Contact Rich Henderson at 608-845-7065.

•**Sun. Dec. 4**, noon-3:00pm, brush removal at Schurch-Thomson Prairie. Contact Rich Henderson at 608-845-7065.

•**Sat. December 10**, noon-4:00pm, tree/brush removal at Erbe Grassland. Contact Eric Goplin at 608-437-4879.

•**Fri. December 30**, 10:00am-2:00pm, brush removal at Schurch-Thomson Prairie. Contact Rich Henderson at 608-845-7065.

For more information and directions, visit www.theprairieenthusiasts.org/chapter/empire/workdays.html.



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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

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

The Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area is an area of statewide and regional importance for prairie and grassland conservation, and is a priority area for a coalition of non-profit organizations and government agencies. This partnership works together and with landowners to provide habitat for rare species and maintain an economically viable agricultural landscape.

Project Coordinator Katie Abbott helps landowners within the project area (see below) get help from these organizations to manage and protect their lands. 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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