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Inside this issue:

<i>Burn Plan Workshop Planned</i>	2
<i>Winter Bird to Watch</i>	2
<i>Grant Money Available for CRP Mid-management</i>	2
<i>Film Festival needs Volunteers</i>	2
<i>Program Sign-ups: EQIP & WHIP</i>	2
<i>Upcoming Events</i>	3

Message from the project coordinator

It seems appropriate that the year begins and ends in the winter. Winter is a time to slow down a little, just like nature, when most plants are dormant and many animals hunker down. Like the white snow that covers the landscape, the New Year symbolically represents a clean slate, the chance to have a fresh start on the year. The reprieve from most land management work gives us time to plan for the year ahead, and while the bitter cold can be unpleasant, at least there are no mosquitoes, ticks, poison ivy, and wild parsnip in winter! Enjoy the season and have a happy and prosperous 2010.



Sincerely, Katie Abbott

A New Approach to Improving Water Quality

One of the challenges facing landowners and managers in Wisconsin is keeping sediment and nutrients on the land and out of streams. A coalition of farmers, UW scientists, public agencies, and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) are working together to find more efficient and effective ways to improve water quality in streams.

Known as the Wisconsin Buffer Initiative (WBI), the group hopes to improve water quality by targeting conservation efforts on those fields and pastures with the greatest potential for contributing nutrients to streams. WBI is testing this approach on two watersheds in Dane, Green and Iowa counties.

Using research by a UW-Madison graduate student and Dane County Land and Water Resources Department conservation staff, the partners have identified a handful of farms in one of the watersheds that contribute comparatively large amounts of phosphorus to the stream.

Dane County conservation staff are working with these farm owners to identify alternative management practices, including different types of tillage, crop rotations and manure handling, that will reduce the amount of sediment and nutrients entering the stream.

The goal is to identify conservation

practices that are compatible with the farm's current cropping and livestock system and, where possible, increase or don't significantly reduce profitability. Dane County has secured funding to help farmers implement needed changes that aren't financially feasible.

Over the next few years, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) will be gathering data on water quality and fish and insect populations in both watersheds. The differences between the watershed where management practices are being changed and the other watershed, where no action is being taken, will be compared.

Ultimately the partners hope to demonstrate that targeting conservation practices where most needed will result in significant water quality improvements and be the most efficient and effective use of limited resources.

"It seems straightforward," says Pete Nowak, WBI Chair. "But it's actually a very innovative approach to water quality improvement that is not currently being utilized in the United States."

Funding for the project is being provided by The Monsanto Company and the McKnight Foundation through gifts to TNC, USGS, the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service and the WDNR.



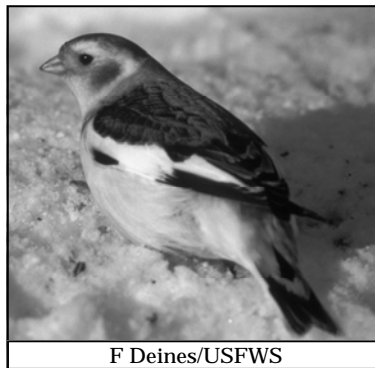
Burn Plan Workshop Planned for February

Prescribed fire, when applied properly, improves grassland habitat by reducing excess plant litter and dense sod formation, which creates open ground for wildlife movement, allows sunlight to reach the soil surface, encourages the germination and growth of forbs and legumes, and suppresses woody plants and other undesirable plant species. A good burn plan is necessary because it identifies the safest firing method, suitable weather conditions, and potential hazards associated with the prescribed burn.

USDA program participants (CRP, WHIP, etc.) are required to submit a prescribed burn plan for review at least 30 days prior to the planned burn date. A burn plan workshop is planned for Friday, February 19, 2010 from 1-3pm at the Iowa County UW-Extension classroom (lower level of the courthouse, 222 N Iowa Street in Dodgeville). Landowners will be provided with background information on prescribed burning and learn what components are included in a burn plan. Conservation professionals will be available to assist with developing burn plans and approve plans that meet standards and specifications. Space is limited so interested participants should RSVP to Ben Zweifelhofer at the NRCS field office at 608-935-2791 Ext. 123. We request that landowners bring contracts and maps for the areas planned for burning.

Winter Bird to Watch

While many birds migrate south to avoid Wisconsin's winter, for some birds Wisconsin is south. One such species is the snow bunting, a common bird that breeds in the Arctic tundra. In the summer months they nest in deep cracks and cavities in rocks to keep them safe from predators. However, it is very cold among Arctic rocks, so the nests are heavily insulated with fur and feathers, and the female stays on the nest nearly the entire egg incubation period. Adult birds burrow into snow to stay warm, helping them to



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withstand temperatures well below zero. In mid to late September food is already becoming scarce in the tundra,

so the buntings migrate south to winter in southern Canada and northern United States. They may be seen in Wisconsin from about November to April. Look for flocks of small, sparrow-sized birds in open fields, prairies, and roadsides, feeding on seeds on the ground. Snow buntings are light-colored, with brownish backs and faces, white undersides, and large white patches on the wings. The white wing patches are especially distinct during flight, when flocks fly and move in unison with a rolling effect that can re-

semble a snowstorm. Males molt their buff color as they migrate back north, arriving in stark white and black.

Grant Money Available for CRP Mid-management

The Iowa County Pheasants Forever Chapter has pheasant stamp grant money available for landowners completing mid-management on CRP (including SAFE and CREP) in Iowa County. Money is available until June 2011 and is first come first served. Eligible practices include disking/interseeding, spraying/interseeding, burning/interseeding, burning, and mowing. Landowners must submit bills to the chapter in order to get reimbursed. Interested landowners should contact Jeff Grady at 608-341-7142 for more information.

Film Festival needs Volunteers



The Wisconsin: Making it Home film festival that will be held in Dodgeville March 11-14 is moving along in the planning phase.

The films are almost finalized. We will have eight or nine that deal with issues including the prairie ecosystem, green building, renewable energy, local food, endangered species, humans' relationship with nature, recycling, and conflicting uses of natural resources.

Though some films will be thought-provoking or even inspiring for some people, the primary goal is to provide a fun weekend for families in southwest Wisconsin. There will be plenty of other things to do in Dodgeville that weekend besides watching the movies, too.

This is a free event, and to pull it off we will need help from many volunteers. If you are interested in helping, please contact Katie Abbott at (608)935-2791 x134.

Program Sign-ups: EQIP & WHIP

The sign-up periods for two voluntary conservation programs, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP), will be held January 19th through February 19th.

EQIP provides financial and technical assistance with conservation practices on agricultural land. Just a few of the many eligible practices include grade stabilization, grassed waterways, prescribed grazing, and stream crossings.

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.

Contact your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office for more information or to apply. In Iowa County, call (608) 935-2791 x3. In Dane County call (608) 224-3750.

Upcoming events

- **The Prairie Enthusiasts Work Days**

Be sure to wear appropriate clothing for the weather. Do not wear synthetic fabrics near burn piles. Sturdy footwear and work gloves are required. Bring drinking water and pruners or loppers, if you have them. *Check with contact person the day before to confirm and to obtain directions.*

January 17, 18, & 30: 12:00- 3:30 pm. Clear trees and brush (and burn brush piles if there is snow) at Schurch-Thomson Prairie (SW of Blue Mounds). Contact: Rich Henderson, 608-845-7065

January 24: 12- 4 pm. Brush & tree removal at Erbe Gasland, SW of Mt. Horeb. Contact Eric Goplin, 608-437-4879

February 20: 12- 4 pm. Burn brush piles at Shea Prairie (SW of Blue Mounds). Contact: Eric Preston, 415-235-6922

- **BMAP Winter Lecture Series: Prairie Insects and Plants: Thursday, January 21, 7:00 pm**

Dr. Andrew Williams, president of Prairie Biotic Research, Inc. will provide a fascinating talk on the interactions between insects and prairie plants, in particular milkweeds. His talk will reveal a bit about how a naturalist works, how science works, and provide some insight into the management of prairies with insects in mind. Location: Community Room of the Mt. Horeb Branch of the State Bank of Cross Plains, 1740 Co Rd ID (across from Norsk Golf Bowl).

- **Prairies and Grasslands of Southwest Wisconsin: Sunday, January 24, 2:00 pm**

MRPHA project coordinator Katie Abbott will discuss the prairies that early European settlers encountered, the remnants that still exist, and why prairies are important. The first of the Mineral Point Historical Society's 2010 lyceums, the presentation is free and open to the public. Location: The Old Royal Inn, 43 High Street, Mineral Point.

- **S130/190 Fire Classes: January 25-29**

Classes start at 8am in Room 367 of the Lenz Conference Center on the Southwest Technical College campus. Cost of the combined class is \$121.00 Contact Jenny Oyen at 608-822-2700 to register or contact Karl Sandry, Lead Fire Instructor, with any questions: 608-822-2703, mobile 608-632-7065.

- **BMAP Winter Lecture Series: Groundwater and Springs in the Driftless Landscape: February 4, 7:00 pm**

Madeline Gotkowitz, hydrogeologist, Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey (WGNS) will talk about the movement of groundwater and springs of "karst" topography and other insights into our area's geology. Location: WGNS's Research Collections and Education Center in Mt. Horeb, 248 S. Blue Mounds St (just south of the Military Ridge Bike trail). The presentation will be followed by a tour of the facility.

- **The Nature Conservancy Work Parties: February 13, March 13, & April 10, 9:00 am to noon**

Activities include cutting invasive brush and trees and cleaning up debris in the cleared areas. Dress appropriately for outdoor, grubby work. Long pants, a long-sleeved shirt and sturdy footwear are essential, and always bring work gloves. For more information contact Jim Lesniak, (608) 576-3310. Directions: About 0.5 mile east of the Barneveld on Hwy 18/151, go south on County Hwy K for about 2 miles. Meet in the parking lot on the right, marked by a sign.

- **BMAP Winter Lecture Series: Invasive Species Control-The state's approach: February 18, 7:00 pm**

Experts from the Department of Natural Resources will discuss new comprehensive regulations of invasive species, also known as WI Administrative Code NR 40. Location: Community Room of the Mt. Horeb Branch of the State Bank of Cross Plains, 1740 Co Rd ID, Mt. Horeb (across from the Norsk Golf Bowl)

- **Burn Plan Workshop: February 19, 1:00-3:00 pm** See page 2 for details.

- **The Prairie Enthusiasts Annual Banquet and Conference: February 27**

The conference will be held at The Peppercorn at Historic Ludlow Mansion in Monroe, Wisconsin. The conference consists of educational sessions, vendor and informational displays, raffle items, and much more! The annual banquet will be held after the conference. After the meal will be an awards ceremony and featured speaker Steven Apfelbaum, Chairman of the Board and Principal Ecologist from Applied Ecological Services, Inc. For more details or to register visit: www.theprairieenthusiasts.org/conference10/conference10.htm.

- **BMAP Winter Lecture Series: Bringing Nature Home: Thursday, March 4, 7:00 pm**

Susan Carpenter, native plant gardener for the UW-Arboretum, and Alanna Koshellek, stewardship coordinator for the Aldo Leopold Foundation, will bring nature home talking about decreasing your environmental footprint through native landscaping, and land stewardship strategies to increase wildlife and enhance biodiversity on your property. Location: Community Room of the Mt. Horeb Branch of the State Bank of Cross Plains, 1740 Co Rd ID.

- **Wisconsin: Making it Home Film Festival, March 11-14**

Come to Dodgeville to see films that will take you to some amazing locations and tell stories that are funny, interesting, touching, and thought-provoking. We'll also hold other events during the weekend, including discussions, a land-management workshop, taste of southwest Wisconsin, and gallery of local art and photography. The whole family is welcome. More details to come. Visit www.makingwisconsinhome.org.

- **Introduction to Prescribed Fire: March 25-26 OR April 1-2, 8:30 am to 5:30 pm.** Location: Leopold Center, Baraboo. Cost: \$100 (\$90 members). For more information see www.aldoleopold.org/woodlandschool/courses.shtml.

Fire on the Prairie: Introduction to Prescribed Fire in Land Management: March 30-31, 8:00 am-6:00 pm
Location: International Crane Foundation, Baraboo. Cost: \$100. For more information visit www.prescribedfire.org/training.html or contact Alison Duff: (608)356-9462 x157 or alison@savingcranes.org.



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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.

Inside this issue:

<i>Message from the Project Coordinator</i>	1
<i>A New Approach to Improving Water Quality</i>	1
<i>Burn Plan Workshop Planned for February</i>	2
<i>Winter Bird to Watch</i>	2
<i>Grant Money Available for CRP Mid-management</i>	2
<i>Film Festival needs Volunteers</i>	2
<i>Program Sign-ups: EQIP & WHIP</i>	2
<i>Upcoming Events</i>	3

