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Message from the Project Coordinator

2010 has marked several milestones in both national and local conservation efforts, including the 10th anniversary of the State Wildlife Grant program (page 2), the 40th anniversary of Earth Day, and the 75th anniversary of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (page 3). It is also the year the MRPHA expanded its boundary and the Southwest Wisconsin Grassland and Stream Conservation Area began its implementation phase.

Looking back, we have come a long way in many areas. In others, we still have a long way to go. However, I am confident that if dedicated people like the landowners, volunteers, and organizations of the MRPHA partnership keep up their good work, we'll see many more success in the next 10, 40, and 75 years.

Happy New Year! -Katie Abbott, MRPHA Project Coordinator

Two Fall Events a Success

MRPHA partners held two fun events this fall. Iowa County UW-Extension and the Iowa County Recreation and Prairie Restoration group held a Conservation Field Day for all the 6th grade students in Iowa

Picnic. Despite the cold and windy day, about 50 MRPHA partners and landowners showed up at Brigham County Park to celebrate the year's accomplishments, socialize, and eat delicious food. As with the last two

County, which included Dodgeville, Barneveld, Mineral Point, and Highland Schools. About 200 students came out to the Iowa County Farm, a 430-acre prairie restoration near Bloomfield Manor, west of Dodgeville. Students were split into groups and rotated through eight different stations



Students learn about pollinators from Cindy Ramseyer, Blue Mounds Area Project

throughout the day. The students learned about prairie, game fish of Wisconsin, aquifers (including making their own edible aquifers), the history of Iowa County conservation, environmental ethics, animals of the grasslands, pollinators, and GIS and survey equipment. Everyone was exhausted after the full day outside, including the students and teachers who covered quite a distance walking around to all the stations. Luckily we had great weather and a really fun day overall!

years, one landowner was chosen to receive the MRPHA Landowner of the Year award. This year it went to Erik Goplin from Dane County. Erik volunteers hundreds of hours each year with The Prairie Enthusiasts (TPE) and The Nature Conservancy on weed control, seed collection and the renovation of TPE land management facilities. He established a seed orchard that produces tens of thousands of dollars worth of seed each year that he donates to restoration projects on protected land in the MRPHA, and has restored prairie on his own land. Erik and his wife Nancy also sold a conservation easement on 30 acres of their land and then donated the funds towards TPE's purchase of what is now the 62-acre Erbe Grassland in Dane County. This picnic and the award are just a small token of the partners' appreciation for the participation and dedication of landowners, without which the MRPHA would not be a success.

The weather was not so great at the third annual MRPHA Landowner Appreciation

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Check out our website!

www.militaryridgeprairie.org

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

Conservation Programs for Farm and Wildlife Lands Open

The Wisconsin sign-up for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) will be open until January 14 for 2011 funding.

EQIP is the primary program available to farmers for farmland conservation work, offering flat-rate payments for over 70 conservation practices. WHIP offers cost-sharing to restore wildlife habitat for targeted species.

EQIP was established to help all types of farmers: live-stock and dairy, grazing, or cash crop, including specialty crops, organic, and agro-forestry. EQIP also offers additional assistance for beginning, socially disadvantaged and limited resource farmers.

Several new practices are available in EQIP this year, including Composting Facility that can be used to help

reduce manure pathogens and odors as well as benefit water quality.

WHIP provides technical assistance and cost-sharing to restore wildlife habitat. Depending on the site, streams, prairies and oak savannas and other types of habitat, including habitat for pollinators, may qualify to be restored. Two practices, Wetland Restoration and Wetland Creation, are new for this sign-up and have multiple benefits, including habitat for migratory birds.

All eligible applications received by January 14 will be evaluated and ranked for funding.

For more information visit www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov or contact your local NRCS office: Iowa County, (608) 935-2791 x3; Dane County, (608) 224-3750; Green County, (608) 325-4195.

State Wildlife Grants Program Marks 10 Years of Success

September marked the 10-year anniversary of Congress' creation of the State Wildlife Grants Program which, for the first time, provided funding to state fish and wildlife agencies for the management of non-game species. Before the creation of this program, there was virtually no federal funding focused on preventing wildlife from becoming endangered. Congress addressed this need in 2000 when, at the persistent urging of the Teaming with Wildlife Coalition, they created the State Wildlife Grants Program.

In creating State Wildlife Grants, Congress recognized that providing funds for proactive conservation would prevent wildlife from becoming endangered, and therefore more costly to protect. The funding became available to states under the condition that each state develop a comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy. State Wildlife Grants strategically address conservation and management objectives outlined in these plans. For over a decade, this program has been an important source of funds to help keep America's common species common and to proactively conserve wildlife.

The grant program has allowed Wisconsin to take immediate actions to protect all wildlife in the places they live, starting with the animals most in need of help and those for whom we can do the most good. Funding in the program is provided for species with the greatest conservation need, species indicative of the diversity and health of the state's wildlife, and low and declining populations.

Since 2001, Congress has appropriated \$11.2 million in State Wildlife Grants to Wisconsin. This has been matched with at least \$7.8 million state and partner dollars. To date, the program has supported over 150 projects that have directly benefited Species of Greatest Conservation Need and their habitats. Projects have focused on a range of activities, including surveys, inventories, monitoring and research; on-the-ground management activities (natural community/habitat restoration, removal of inva-

sive species); and the development of methods, protocols, conservation action plans, and technical guidance.

In the ten years since its inception, the State Wildlife Grant Program has played an important role in the conservation of Wisconsin's wildlife. The following are some projects in the Military Ridge Area funded through State Wildlife Grants:

Restoring the Riparian Corridor of the East Branch of the Pecatonica River to Pre-Settlement Conditions: Years of erosion from uphill farming led to excess sediment in the Pecatonica River that degraded water quality, harmed native fish, and smothered habitat for rare and endangered wildlife. A project to restore a portion of the East Branch of the Pecatonica River has removed 37,000 cubic yards of accumulated soil. The stream bank was reconnected with its floodplain, a sedge meadow protected, and shallow ponds excavated. The benefits include improved water quality, conditions suitable for cool water fish, and improved habitat for grassland birds and rare species like smooth-sheath sedge, Blanchard's cricket frog, and Blanding's turtle. Focusing conservation efforts at the landscape level provides benefits for many priority wildlife, helping to conserve them for future generations.

Effects of Removing Wooded Fencerows on the Grassland Bird Community in the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area: The first phase period for this project included removing invading brush and trees from nine grass dominated fields to restore their value as nest habitat. Following this brush removal, researchers evaluated the effects of removal of wooded fencerows on density and productivity of grassland birds and their nest predators. The objectives of the entire project were to determine the impact of removing linear woody features on the density and productivity of grassland birds in idle grassland fields enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program.

NRCS 75th Anniversary



County, state, and national conservation leaders pose with the Peterson family.

On April 27, 1935, the Soil Conservation Service was launched to battle the intense soil erosion plaguing the nation's farmland. Hugh Hammond Bennett, the agency's first chief, wrote that "everything we do, all we share, even whatever we amount to as a great and enduring people, begins with and rests on the sustained productivity of our agricultural land." Today, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) continues to provide assistance to farmers and landowners to prevent erosion, protect water quality, and restore wildlife habitat.

To celebrate 75 years of conservation, a luncheon, tour, lecture program, and dinner reception were held on September 29th. The luncheon was held at the Mark Peterson farm in appreciation of the family's outstanding cooperation and participation in the Pleasant Valley Watershed Project, which lies within the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area. The tour was of the Pecatonica River and the Wisconsin Buffer Initiative Pilot in the Pleasant Valley Watershed. Presenters included USDA Deputy Secretary Kathleen Merrigan, NRCS Chief Dave White, and Dane County Conservationist Pat Sutter.

Pheasants Forever Seed Fundraiser

If you are restoring prairie or enrolling your land in one of the many Farm Bill programs like WHIP, SAFE, or CREP, you'll be needing native seed. Pheasants Forever has a new 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 Events

- **The Prairie Enthusiasts Work Days: Sunday January 9, Monday January 17, Sunday January 23, Sunday January 30, and Saturday February 12, 1:00- 4:30pm**
Activities will be brush removal & pile burning at Mounds View Grassland. Contact Rich Henderson, 608-845-7065
- **Blue Mounds Area Project Winter Lecture Series: Thursdays at 7:00pm at the State Bank in Mt. Horeb**
-January 20: Bears, Wolves, and Cougars, Oh My! Are they returning to the Driftless Area? Dr. David Drake, UW Assistant Professor of Forest and Wildlife Ecology, will lead a discussion about these large predators.
-February 3: Southwest Grassland and Stream Conservation Area The planning is over and implementation has begun. Wisconsin DNR staff will discuss an effort designed to protect 12,000 acres through acquisition and easements across 473,900 acres of southwest Wisconsin that includes the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area.
-February 17: Preserving Your Family Lands The Driftless Area Land Conservancy will conduct an introductory seminar on long-term land protection options for private landowners.
- **The Prairie Enthusiasts Work Day: Sunday February 20, 1:00 to 4:00pm**
Activity will be brush removal & pile burning at Shea Prairie. Contact Eric Preston, 608-257-1513
- **The Prairie Enthusiasts Annual Prairie Conference and All-Chapter Banquet: Saturday, February 26**
The theme this year is "Conservation in a Working Landscape" and is co-hosted by the Southwest Chapter of TPE and Nohr Chapter of Trout Unlimited. The conference will feature general session speakers as well as concurrent sessions on a variety of topics that illustrate that conservation and restoration of prairie ecosystems occurs within working landscapes. The opening speaker is Dr. Curt Meine, Senior Fellow with the Aldo Leopold Foundation and author of, "Aldo Leopold: His Life and Work". The closing speaker is Gary Zimmer, President of Midwestern Bio-Ag; he'll present his thoughts on best farming practices that stress working with nature, not against it. The conference also includes a raffle, a silent auction, vendor displays, and TPE items for sale. Following the conference is the annual TPE all-chapter banquet, which features noted conservation photographer Michael Forsberg as the speaker. Mike recently published the beautiful book, "Great Plains: America's Lingerin' Wild". Location: UW-Platteville Campus, Ullsvik Hall, Platteville, WI. For more information visit www.theprairieenthusiasts.org.
- **Introduction to Prescribed Burning: Thursday-Friday, March 24-25, 8:30am-5:30pm or Thursday-Friday, March 31-April 1, 8:30am-5:30pm**
The two-day course will cover the ecology of fire, fire behavior principles, and the elements of fire management planning, all particularly focused on prairie and savanna ecosystems. Participants will operate basic fire management tools, view the layout and preparation of a fire unit, and, weather permitting, conduct several real burns. This course will not prepare students to serve as a burn boss or conduct burns on their own. Location: Leopold Center, Baraboo. Cost: \$100 (\$90 members). Class limit: 24. Register at www.aldoleopold.org/woodlandschool/register.shtml.



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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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