

THE BLUE MOUNDS PROJECT

Seeking to Inspire, Inform and Empower Private Landowners in the Southwestern Region
Of Wisconsin to Enjoy, Protect and Restore Native Biodiversity and Ecosystem Health

Summer 1999

Message From the Board

Carroll Schaal

Dear Members,

Hopefully, between summer vacations and other running around, more than a few of you were paid a site visit by Bob Wernerehl, BMP's ecologist. As you'll read in the Ecologist's Report, he's been very busy expanding the reaches of the Blue Mounds Project. And in case you missed it, over 30 people attended our summer picnic and outing with UW Wildlife Outreach Specialist Rebecca Christoffel, who acquainted us with the frogs, salamanders, turtles, and snakes that inhabit our area. While the unfortunate timing of the summer's hottest hot spell led us to wisely cancel the field trip portion of the event, we had a great time examining and learning about "herps".

The Blue Mounds Project continues to gain recognition. For example, we have been asked by the Sugar River Initiative to co-sponsor a field-based workshop for landowners on October 9th (see the Events Calendar for details.) This county, state, and EPA supported project recently completed a stream bank restoration project on the upper reaches of the Sugar River, and is looking "up the watershed" to work cooperatively with landowners to further protect this outstanding water resource. Other great cooperative ventures are being planned, partnerships developed, and grants written. I hope to tell you more about them in the next newsletter. The future looks so bright I gotta wear shades!

1999 Burn School

The Nature Conservancy will be conducting

its annual burn school on Saturday and Sunday October 16th and 17th at the Lulu Lake preserve in Walworth County. This class is an excellent, safe way to learn about the art and science of prescribed burns. Limited enrollment, call TNC for more information, (608) 251-8140.

Don't Forget About Our Library

Need to identify a plant, bird, or butterfly you saw this summer? Have a restoration question? Then head to the BMP library located in The Prairie Bookshop, 117 East Main Street, Mt. Horeb. Fifteen books and numerous conservation related newsletters await you. Remember, the materials may not be removed from the Bookshop, but there are plenty of comfortable chairs for your browsing convenience. Enjoy!

Board Meeting Schedule

Your voice is important; this is your organization and we value your input. Please attend a board meeting:

Oct. 5, 7:00 pm, Mt. Horeb Community Ctr.

Nov. 2, 6:30 pm, Mt. Horeb Community Ctr.

Dec. 7, 6:30 pm, Mt. Horeb Community Ctr.

Ecologist's Report

Bob Wernerehl, BMP Ecologist

Thanks to all of you involved in the Blue Mounds Project, the number of listed species being protected has increased from five plants in 1998 to 14 plants and three birds in 1999 (see table). I hope you share with me the strong feeling of the

great importance of our project when you see this list.

We were able to accomplish this because I was able to get in the field much earlier this year (mid-May rather than late July) and because I have a strong background in birding as well as plants. I was very fortunate growing up to have a mother who dragged me to the Madison School Forest with her bird watching friends very early in the morning. I was about 8 years old and I still remember it. (I also still remember the sweet rolls they shared with me.) Not that I learned all that much at that age, but it implanted in me the idea that it was a good thing to learn bird songs, as the birds aren't always easy to see.

The three birds on our list were all heard long before they were seen, and in some cases they were never seen. The Bell's Vireo, for example, has very tightly defined habitat needs and usually hides in very thick brush while singing. It has such a distinctive song, though, that observation isn't necessary.

It is always a thrill to find these rare birds on our site visits. Their songs enliven the otherwise beautiful but quiet landscape of plants. If we could see a satellite view of our region, we would see that the Driftless Area, most of which is in Wisconsin, is a large island in a sea of corn and soybeans. We are acting as a real refuge here to both plants and birds, as our landscape is too steep and rocky to farm all of the land. Add this thought, and you can agree, I'm sure, what we are doing here in this

region, with The Blue Mounds Project, is very important.

State Listed Plants And Animals Protected By The Work Of The Blue Mounds Project And Its Members. Categories Follow The WDNR.

Common Name	Scientific Name	Category	County
Plants			
American Beak Grain	Diarrhena americana	Endangered	Iowa
Nodding Rattlesnake Root	Prenanthes crepidinea	Endangered	Iowa
Fire Pink	Silene virginica	Endangered	Iowa
Yellow Giant Hyssop	Agastache nepetoides	Threatened	Iowa
Kitten Tails	Besseyia bullii	Threatened	Lafayette
Cream Gentian	Gentiana alba	Threatened	Iowa
Upland Boneset	Eupatorium sessilifolium	Special Concern	Dane
Twin Leaf	Jeffersonia diphylla	Special Concern	Dane
Butternut	Juglans cinerea	Special Concern	many
Violet Bush Clover	Lespedeza violacea	Special Concern	Iowa
American Gromwell	Lithospermum latifolium	Special Concern	Iowa
Christmas Fern	Polystichum acrostichoides	Special Concern	Dane
Pomme de Prairie	Psoralea esculenta	Special Concern	Green
Heart-leaved Skullcap	Scutellaria ovata	Special Concern	Iowa
Birds			
Bell's Vireo		Threatened	Dane
Henslow's sparrow		Threatened	Dane
Grasshopper sparrow		Special Concern	4 counties

As fall approaches, I would like to remind landowners of the need to firm up arrangements for a deer harvest on their land. The deer population in southwestern Wisconsin is very high, as anyone who drives the back roads at sunset knows. Densities are often more than 40 deer per square mile. Does are now

regularly having two fawns every year, and that leads to steep population growth. Deer browse has a great influence on our native vegetation, and is one of the most serious threats to our native plants.

One recent study, published in the Natural Areas Journal, documents dramatic losses of native plants attributed to deer browse. This study took place in an old growth forest in Pennsylvania that had been sampled in 1929. Botanists returned in 1995 and duplicated the sampling of 1929. During that interval the deer population of that area of Pennsylvania has skyrocketed to about the same level as it is here in southern Wisconsin. They found that a startling 80% of the understory species had disappeared-there had been 42 species and now there were eight. They attempted to explain this disappearance by other causes, but concluded that deer were primarily responsible.

One of the reasons deer had such a large effect in this study was that they do not eat hay-scented fern. Because it wasn't browsed, the fern greatly increased during the 66 year interval and crowded out other understory plants. This indirect effect is

a great example of ecology, how natural forces are connected to each other. We can always expect to see unexpected consequences from the disruption of a system that has been balanced for thousands of years.

One example of this effect in Wisconsin is that deer carry seeds of invasive species such as garlic mustard in their fur and in their digestive tract. As a result, we see a much higher rate of spread of these plants. Looking for a more direct effect on humans? The spread of Lyme disease is directly related to high deer numbers. Out here in Iowa County it is hard to find anyone who doesn't know someone who has had this serious illness caused by deer ticks. While we don't see hay-scented fern having the effect in Wisconsin as it did in Pennsylvania, you can bet that the selection of what deer eat is having a large effect on our native plants. Deer tend to favor certain plants such as orchids, trillium, and bellwort, and those will begin to disappear as our high herd numbers continue.

Deer also affect birds. Many people do not know that deer are not purely herbivores. Those who set up mist nets to catch birds in order to band them have seen deer come to an unattended net and eat small birds right out of it. Early this summer, scientists placed remote cameras on shrub nesting birds and deer were caught on film eating fledglings right out of the nest! In another study in Pennsylvania in 1994, intermediate canopy nesting birds declined 37% in abundance with a 27% drop in species diversity with deer densities similar to what we have here in Wisconsin. This was due mostly to the change in plant life brought on by the deer, rather than direct predation of nestlings.

What do we need to do to bring deer numbers down? Leasing out lands to hunting will help reduce the deer herd and brings in revenue at the same time. Lease rates vary from \$6 to \$30 per acre in our area. Hunters from out of state are likely to pay the higher amounts. What is important to stress, is that hunters now need to take at least two doe before they harvest a buck. Doe taken during the bow season can count

towards this goal. A doe-only harvest would be even better. Using this approach should begin to reduce our deer herd. If you live on your land and have concerns about safety during gun season, become actively involved in selecting deer stands and directions in which hunters will point their guns. Remember also that good hunters help patrol your land and keep off other hunters that might not be as careful. This may make it safer during gun season than not having any hunters at all.

We are a community-based organization. That means we benefit by sharing information with each other. Let us know your approach to deer harvest on your land, what works and what doesn't work, and we can help pass the word on to others.

Stable Hydrology A Good Sign For The Driftless Area

Carroll Schaal, WDNR, Bureau of Fisheries and Habitat Protection

In a recent publication entitled Streamflow Trends in Wisconsin's Driftless Area, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) reports some good news for the area's ecology. While many people are familiar with the topographic "quad" maps produced by the USGS, another mission of the USGS, a division of the Department of the Interior, is to measure, track and report the trends of the water resources of the nation. The USGS reports that since the turn of the century stream flow in the driftless area (the unglaciated landscape of SW Wisconsin) has become more stable. The "annual low flows have increased significantly, whereas annual flood peaks have decreased." Why is this important ecologically and to the landowner?

One of the impacts of humans on the landscape is increased runoff or drainage from storm events. This is a result of converting deeply rooted natural vegetation to row crops and lawns, covering the land with impervious surfaces like pavement and rooftops and draining wetlands.

When more water runs off, a minor rainfall can cause major stream flows and serious flooding

becomes more frequent. Contrariwise, less water is held on and in the ground reducing groundwater recharge. This causes quicker drying or drought-like conditions in streams that rely on shallow groundwater to sustain adequate flow over the dry periods of summer.

More frequent high flows cause stream banks to erode and assault our water resources with loads of sediment and polluted runoff. When followed by quicker low flows the stress on aquatic life can be devastating, especially to our native trout streams.

With so much of the food web tied in some way to the aquatic environment the impact has far reaching implications. Stable hydrology, the even flow of water through the landscape, is a sign of ecological health. Too healthy perhaps, say the residents of Fish Lake in far northwestern Dane County where lake levels are at all time highs.

The good news is the streams in the region have more stable hydrology than at anytime this century. Exactly why this has occurred is unclear. The phenomenon can not be explained by rainfall trends, says the report.

I believe it is because we have become better stewards of the landscape. Better farming and forestry practices and the conservation and restoration of wetlands, floodplains, and prairies “park” more water on the landscape and reduce runoff from storm events. This is the cumulative effect of everything from USDA farm programs such as the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to the individual efforts of folks like Blue Mounds Project members that ascribe to these ideals in the management of their lands. Together, our efforts do make a difference!

A. The Hunter’s moon. Watch for it September 25th, two days after the fall equinox.

Will Weed for Seeds

Members and friends of The Blue Mounds Project are invited to collect seed at a small prairie restoration in Mineral Point. Land manager Jen Stewart asks that in exchange for the seed you spend some time removing weeds.

This is a developing prairie, planted a couple of years ago with a high diversity, native eco-type seed mix. It is about two acres in size and is owned by the Alliant-Wisconsin Power and Light (WPL) Land Stewardship Trust. Funds for the maintenance of the prairie have been drastically cut, so the owners are unable to maintain it.

Right now only a few species are plentiful. These are wild bergamot, ox-eye daisy, yellow coneflower, and brown eyed Susan. If you are picking for your flower garden, you may also find sand tickseed (*Coreopsis lanceolata*) and purple coneflower (*Echinacea purpurea*). These are not native to Wisconsin prairies, so please don’t plant them in a prairie restoration, but they do look great in a flower garden.

The prairie is very easy to find and access: driving south into Mineral Point on Highway 151 there will be a large sign for Shakerag Street, which comes in from the left at a shallow angle, thus forming a triangle with 151. In that triangle are the buildings for Alliant Energy. The prairie planting is just west of the buildings within a large area of mowed lawn about 50 feet from Highway 151. Contact Bob at 608-795-4244 or by email at rvernere@midplains.net for more information. (*Editor’s note: whenever collecting seeds from the wild please practice good ethics:*

Q. The September full moon is called the “harvest moon”. What is the October full moon called?

always obtain landowner permission; take only a small portion of the available seed (<25% of perennials and <10% of annuals, biennials, and monocarpic perennials, which flower once and then die) so the plants can reseed themselves and so wildlife has a food source; make accurate species identifications; do not collect any seeds unless you will use them; process the seeds you collect properly so they don't spoil; do not trample; and do not collect listed species without a permit.

First Year Jitters

Mike Anderson, BioLogic Environmental Consulting

Many landowners plant prairie as an act of faith. They believe planting prairie benefits the environment even as a nearby prairie remnant is converted into a gravel quarry. They believe planting prairie helps grassland birds even if they have never seen a bobolink. They believe insects benefit from the wildflowers they plant even if they can't see the insects they're helping. Yet, many landowners lose their faith during the first year of their prairie's life because weeds seem to outnumber the prairie plants, nothing is in bloom, and where are the butterflies and bison, anyway? Consequently, I often receive calls from landowners who are absolutely sure their planting has failed. They wonder what went wrong, ask if they should replant, or cautiously suggest throwing in the towel and planting corn. My advice? Keep the faith.

Yes, a prairie is visually messy and frequently weedy during its first growing season. In fact, I refer to the first year as the "O-my-God, what have I done" stage. However, a close inspection of the planting usually reveals numerous prairie plants, albeit very small, hiding underneath the much taller and more visible weeds. The weeds are tall because they utilize the "James Dean" growth strategy-grow fast, die young, and produce lots of

seeds. The prairie plants are short because they utilize the "tortoise" growth strategy-slow and steady wins the race. For most prairie plants the majority of their first year growth is underground as they begin to develop the root system that will sustain them for the next 25, 50, or 100 years.

What should you do during this weedy, nerve-racking first year? You should relax, secure in the knowledge that what you and your prairie are experiencing is normal *and* temporary. (I've thought of starting a first year jitters support group to help landowners through this period of tall weeds and invisible prairie plants.) If you did a good job preparing the site prior to planting you will see significantly fewer weeds and many more prairie plants next year.

The best gift you can give your prairie during its first year of life is periodic mowing. In fact, mowing is crucial because it reduces weed seed production and prevents shading of the tiny prairie seedlings. Spot weeding may also be useful, but is only practical on smaller plantings or for select areas in a larger planting. The best way to spot weed is to cut the weeds off at their base with a hand-held pruner or to cut them off just below the soil surface with a trowel, shovel, or dandelion digger. Done properly, you can slice the plant off without disturbing the soil. Avoid disturbing the soil (i.e., don't pull or dig-up the weeds) because this invites more weeds and because you may inadvertently kill tiny prairie seedlings. Be sure to accurately identify plants before you remove them and concentrate on perennial weeds; the annual weeds will mostly disappear by the second year if you prevent them from setting seeds via mowing and if you don't disturb the soil. Keep the faith.

Websites of Interest to Conservationists

The Extension Toxicology Network. Extensive pesticide data base with search option, ace.orst.edu/info/extonet/.

University of Wisconsin Herbarium. A valuable resource for landowners interested in learning more about the plants on their property. Includes species lists for all WI habitat types, a check list of the vascular flora of WI, numerous photos, and useful links to other botanical sites, wiscinfo.doit.wisc.edu/herbarium/.

Calendar of Events

Program and Education Committee

Mike Anderson, Wendell Burkholder

5th Central Illinois Prairie Conference

Sept. 18, Saturday, 8:45 am to 3:45 pm

Parkland College, Champaign, IL

This **year's** theme is People and Prairies: Caring for Where We Live. Thirty individual sessions discussing the effects of large herbivores on diversity, savanna birds, soil microarthropods, native landscaping, restoring and creating prairies, burning, conservation education, and Native

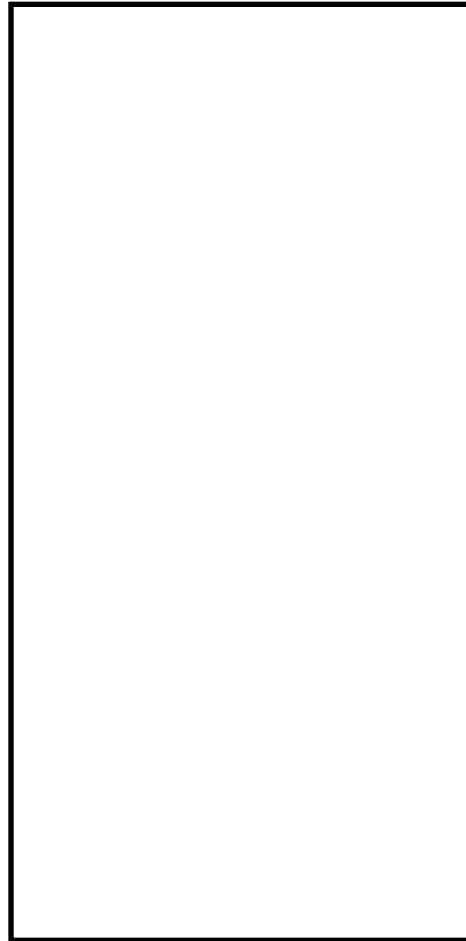
Calendar of Events, continued

American perspectives, to name only a few. \$25.00. Registration and information: Kristina Hubert, (217) 896-2455 or nature@net66.com.

Building on Leopold's Legacy: Conservation for a New Century

October 4-7, Monday to Thursday, Madison

A full-featured, national event with talks by: Bruce Babbitt, Secretary of the Interior; Theodore Roosevelt IV, the Wilderness Society; Curt Meine, International Crane Foundation; Joy Zeder, UW; and other national and local conservationists. Field trips to the Baraboo Hills, Leopold's Shack, Horicon Marsh, and other near and distant locations. \$250.00 for the full conference, some events are free or individually priced. Registration and information: Wisconsin Academy of Science,



Arts, and Letters, (608) 263-1692 or <http://www.wisc.edu/wisacad/landethic>.

Stewardship for the Land: A Field Based Workshop for Landowners

October 9, Saturday, 8:00 am to 12:30 pm

The BMP is proud to be one of the sponsors of this field based workshop to be held near Mt. Horeb. Participants will rotate among sessions discussing prairie identification and management, oak savanna management, woodland (deciduous and conifer) management, wetlands and ponds, stream bank protection practices, and the identification and control of invasive vegetative species. Limited enrollment due by September 28, \$15.00. Registration and information: Mindy Habecker (608) 224-3718.

SUPPORTER INFORMATION SHEET
Blue Mounds Project/CCC

NAME(S): _____

ADDRESS: _____ **CITY:** _____

STATE: _____ **ZIP:** _____ **E-MAIL ADDRESS:** _____

PHONE: day (_____) _____ **PHONE: evening** (_____) _____

MEMBERSHIP STATUS:

- _____ I am already a BMP member and wish to renew.
- _____ I am not currently a member, but I want to become one now.
- _____ I cannot join at this time, but please keep me on your mailing list.
- _____ Please drop me from your mailing list.

MEMBERSHIP LEVEL:

- General (individual or family) \$25.00 / Year _____
- Student/limited income (individual or family) \$15.00 / Year _____
- Other contribution to further the BMP mission _____
- TOTAL** _____

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

SITE VISIT REQUEST:

- _____ Check if you would like to receive a site visit from the BMP ecologist (we will contact you for additional information and to arrange the visit).

NAME/ADDRESS CORRECTIONS:

Please correct my mailing address. The problem is: duplicate mailings _____ typo _____ other (please explain) _____

Please provide the correct information at the top of this form **and** the incorrect information exactly as it appears on your mailing label in the space below, or tape the label in the space below.

NAME(S): _____

ADDRESS: _____ **CITY:** _____

STATE: _____ **ZIP:** _____ **E-MAIL ADDRESS:** _____

PHONE: day (_____) _____ **PHONE: evening** (_____) _____

MAKE CHECK PAYABLE AND RETURN TO:
BLUE MOUNDS PROJECT/CCC, PO BOX 332, MT. HOREB, WI 53572

Our Mission:

The Blue Mounds 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, non-native 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 Project is sponsored by Community Conservation Consultants (CCC), a nonprofit organization.

The Blue Mounds Project Newsletter is published quarterly. Send your comments, suggestions, and submissions to Mike Anderson, editor, BMP, PO Box 332, Mount Horeb, WI 53572.

**The Blue Mounds Project
PO Box 332
Mount Horeb, WI 53572**

Address Correction Requested

**TIME TO RENEW?? Please check the address label for your membership expiration date.
If you're receiving a complimentary copy, please consider joining.**