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**BMAP**  
BLUE MOUNDS AREA PROJECT

October 2024: Blue Mounds Area Project eBulletin  
*Conservation and Community. Together.*



## IN THIS ISSUE

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- BMAP's Updates
- Workshops, Trainings, & Events

- Naturalist's Note:
  - Prescribed Fire in the Fall

## Outreach Ecologist's Updates

*Sam Anderson*

Hello BMAP!

With our dry August and September, our grasslands have started senescing and some of our trees have begun to change color. October marks the slow end of our productive summers as plants prepare for dormancy, migratory birds prepare for their long flights, and many creatures stock up to survive yet another Wisconsin winter. It's been a busy summer, with over 24 site visits spanning 5 counties and over 1000 acres. BMAP members are tacking Reed Canary Grass in their wetlands, Garlic Mustard in their woodlands, and making significant progress!



*Wild Ginger (Sam Anderson)*

Thank you to Mary Michal & Dave Haskin, Jerome and Jackie Helmenstine, and Taliesin for inviting us to enjoy and tour their properties and all of the hard work they have done to support native habitats. Thanks as well to Kevin Doyle and Zach Kron for leading our Natural Communities of Southwestern Wisconsin classes and Pat Trochell and various Wisconsin Master Naturalists for leading our Walk with a Naturalist events in Spring Green and at Shea Wetland. We greatly appreciate our collaborators and community in putting on such events!

I've stopped accepting new requests for 2024 Site Visits, but I'm available to BMAP members throughout the year! If you have a restoration or land management question, reach out to me directly at [ecologist@bluemounds.org](mailto:ecologist@bluemounds.org). There is always an

The BMAP community continues to grow and attract land owners in our area, and we receive a large amount of new members that were introduced to us by our current members. Thank you for continuing to spread our message to the broader southern WI region.

*If you have appreciated any of our summer Site Visits, Property Tours, or Walks with a Naturalist, consider an additional [donation to BMAP](#). Donations allow us to continue to offer the events and support BMAP members through my work as the Outreach Ecologist.*

As always, I'm happy to respond to any questions, comments, or feedback at [ecologist@bluemounds.org](mailto:ecologist@bluemounds.org)

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## Upcoming BMAP Events

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*Photo by Brooke Lewis*

## **BMAP 2025 Winter Lecture Series**

Look ahead to 2025, when we will be meeting to hear from local scientist and land stewards about various aspects of local ecology and restoration

Mt. Horeb Community Center, 107 N. Grove Street.

**Thursday, February 6**

**Spongy Moth 2024: What to expect and management advice**

Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance

Hear from a representative of the Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance about their efforts in the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant

**Thursday, February 20**

**Coyotes in Our Grasslands**

Carl Anderson

Learn about coyotes' behavior and impacts on grassland communities in southern Wisconsin. Gain a better perspective on the importance and complexity of Wisconsin's most abundant wild canine.

**Thursday, March 6**

**Garlic Mustard: Natural History & Management**

Greg Jones - BMAP President

Sam Anderson - BMAP Outreach Ecologist

Here about the natural history and the biology behind one of Wisconsin's most persistent invasive species. Learn about on-the-ground experiences and techniques in managing and controlling Garlic Mustard in southern Wisconsin forests.

## **Other SW Wisconsin Events & Resources**



*Photo by Brooke Lewis*

*Know of a local event that might be of interest to BMAP Members? Send the information to [ecologist@bluemounds.org](mailto:ecologist@bluemounds.org)*

## Dane County Parks: Seed Collection & Cleaning

Dane County Parks does an excellent job collecting, cleaning, and eventually growing native plants from seed that is locally source from dane county. See there calendar for a multitude of opportunities to volunteer and learn!

## Mountain and Prairie Podcast

Listen to a recent interview with Curt Meine, Senior Fellow at the [Aldo Leopold Foundation](#) and Biographer of Aldo Leopold **Podcast: Mountain & Prairie**

## **Naturalist's Notebook** **The Seasonality of Prescribed Fire**



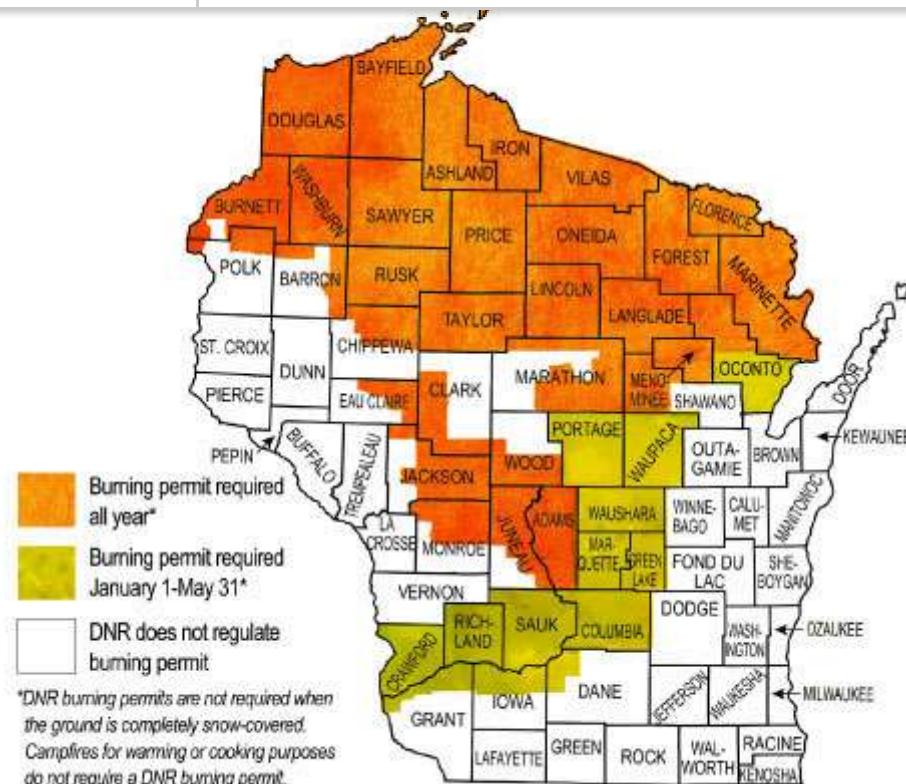
*Photo Credit: Brooke Lewis*

Most of us are aware that fire is essential to managing our grasslands and woodlands. Many of the plant species found in these communities are well-adapted to fire, and the diversity of these natural communities can decline when fire is removed from the landscape.

That being said, applying fire to your property can be tricky to navigate, and I've been getting quite a few questions about **when** you should consider burning and how the timing of a burn might affect the habitats you manage.

## Safety First

When considering timing your burn, you should always know exactly **who** you need to involve in the burning process. In many parts of the state, you are required to have a burn permit through the [Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources](#)



This can add another layer of communication, planning, and logistics to your burn, but it also allows you to create a more safe and effective plan that benefits your property. If you are considering burning and you live outside of the areas that require a burn permit, contacting your local sheriff's office and informing them of the burn is standard practice.

If you are enrolled in state or federal programs like the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) through the USDA - Farm Services Agency (FSA), you may have contractual obligations that require you burn at regular intervals. Make sure you are keeping in contact with involved agencies and managing according to your outlined plan.

**The Wisconsin Prescribed Fire Council** has an excellent series of resources for landowners considering burning. They go into detail about liability, have contact information for potential contractors, and offer educational resources to help you feel comfortable and confident in burning your property

## Historical Fire Timing

While we don't have much hard data on historical fire seasonality, we do have quite a few cultural resources that support significant indigenous and settler fire regimes impacting plant communities in our region. From these accounts, the fire season primarily occurs from early spring (March-May) and late summer-early fall (August-October)

southern Wisconsin. By locating charcoal in the growth rings, she determined that most of these oaks were exposed to fire in the early growing season and late growing season. Many of the fire events also took place during the dormant season, likely occurring in the late fall and early spring. Given that lightning strikes would occur primarily in the growing season, we can assume that most dormant season fire activities were facilitated or caused by humans.

Wolf's work took place in an oak savanna in Pleasant Prairie, WI, located near Kenosha. By looking at growth ring width and known meteorological data, she determined that only 50% of burns occurred during known drought/heat events. All of this evidence supports a long history by both Native and European communities of utilizing fire, primarily near the dormant season and during both dry and wet years. These fall/spring fires allow humans to avoid more dangerous fire conditions while still maximizing the ecological impacts of prescribed fire. Wolf even identified anecdotal local history of settlers allowing railroad-caused fires to burn their pastures to foster fresh growth for livestock. While fire is absolutely a natural part of the disturbances of southern Wisconsin, humans have undoubtedly have shaped how fire occurs on the landscape.



*photo credit: Brooke Lewis*

## The Effects of Fall vs Spring Burns

study out of Manhattan, Kansas at the [Konza Prairie Biological Station published 2014](#). Researchers conducted 20 years of burns in upland and lowland prairies during either the spring, autumn, or winter. Timing of burns had no overall effect on the productivity of prairies, but there were differences in species composition. Spring burns tended to favor Milkweeds and Side Oats Grama, whereas winter and fall burns favored Asters (*Sympioticum*) and White Prairie Clover (*Dalea candida*), and Cream False Indigo (*Baptisia bracteata*). This study also highlights that fall/winter burns generally favor forbs and cool season grasses, while spring burns favor warm season grasses.

For Wisconsin, [Prairie Nursery's Ecologist Neil Diboll](#) supports the view that spring burns can promote warm-season grasses like Big Blue Stem, while spring burns favor our flowering prairie forbs. He also notes that we should be mindful of variation within seasons as well. Dry prairies with early flowering species like Prairie Smoke (*Geum triflorum*) or Pasque Flower (*Pulsatilla patens*) may be vulnerable to late spring burns, meaning a dormant season burn in the fall or early spring may be preferable.



*Pasque Flower - Peter Gorman*

## **The Take Home - Any Burn is a Good Burn**

All grassland species are well-adapted to fire, but the response of each species to fire is complex, involving biology, weather conditions, and fire intensity/frequency. Given the

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more experience and familiarity with your property and fire, consider how you'd like to time your burns in the future to best promote the biodiversity of your property, and keep track of how your property responds to each prescribed fire.

**Make a donation**

The Blue Mounds Area 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.

Thanks to all our members for your support!

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