

BMAP NEWS



BMAP
BLUE MOUNDS AREA PROJECT

Conservation and Community. Together.

Winter 2024 • Volume 27 Number 1

Ron Endres Receives Bur Oak Award

By Linda Millunzi-Jones

At BMAP's annual picnic earlier this year, we were pleased to present the Bur Oak Award to Ron Endres in honor of his many contributions to prairie restoration in our area.

Ron, who is a member of BMAP, began to learn about prairie and woodland restoration 30 years ago when he and his wife Sheila purchased land. He began volunteering with The Prairie Enthusiasts, Dane County Parks and the Ice Age Trail Alliance to learn how to restore his 21.5 acres. In the process, he learned that the seeds of native plants were very expensive.

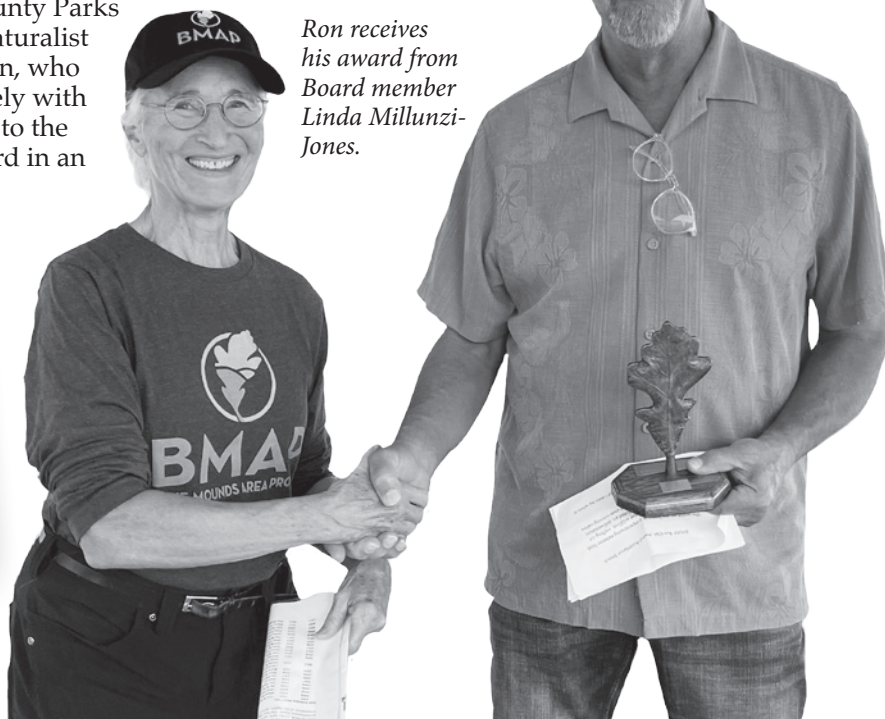
Ron instead began to collect seed

from the wild, after getting permission from public and private landowners. He has now collected and processed seed from early spring through November for the last 13 years. He has distributed tailor-made seed mixes to many different land trusts, school groups and nonprofits in the region. Over 100 organizations have benefited from his volunteer work.

Dane County Parks botanist/naturalist Lars Higdon, who works closely with Ron, wrote to the BMAP Board in an email:

"Ron goes above and beyond what is typically expected from volunteers. He's worked tirelessly, on his own time, to support restoration projects in a multitude of ways, most significantly through his seed charity. The expense of native seed is often a barrier for volunteer-powered restoration efforts, but Ron recognized he could be an asset for overcoming that obstacle. He's provided seed for countless organizations and will leave a lasting legacy on this landscape in the form of the many prairies and woodlands he's helped restore. More significantly, Ron's efforts encourage us to look inward and ask the question, 'What more can I do with my time to help this world?'." 🌱

Ron receives his award from Board member Linda Millunzi-Jones.



Ron presented one of our 2023 Conservation Conversations. The slide lists some of the organizations who have received free prairie seed thanks to his tireless efforts.

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Greg Jones

By the time you are reading this, winter will be in full swing and in our face. First thing is some housekeeping: all BMAP memberships are due at the first of the year. Unless you joined for the first time after September, your dues are due. If you are not a member, now is the time to join!

A lot of folks will do some removal of invasive woody species this time of year. I have done my work on them for the year by the time the snow comes. You could also do some inter-seeding in your prairies now; I hopefully have that job finished as well. I like to put the seed down after the first light snowfall. With that light snow, I can see where I have been as I sow the seed. And when the snow melts, it will carry the seeds down to lower levels and help seat them there.

What I do now is reminisce and plan for the next year. I remember the first time an ecologist came to visit our property years ago, before we'd planted any prairie. They were here to help advise me. As we walked past our vegetable garden, they made the comment that it was a good start that I have a "green thumb". This made me feel good, as I've been growing vegetables most of my adult life.

It didn't take me long to realize that establishing a prairie is nothing like growing vegetables. In my vegetable garden, everything is in rows of one species at a time. I tend them so they are not too crowded yet still close together as possible for good production. I will pull and discard the weak or damaged plants. There are no weeds or anything else between the rows. Then as soon as they have borne the fruit I desire, I can remove them. They are mostly annuals anyway.

I go down a row visiting each plant and making sure everything is alright with each one. In the garden, it is all about the individual plants. In the

prairie, on the other hand, I pay little attention to any one plant. If I see plants that are crowded or maybe not so healthy, I simply wish them well and walk away. Last year, I saw a white Baptisia sprouting up in the middle of a leadplant. I just asked them to play well together and wished them both good fortune as I walked away.

When I first planted the prairie, I sowed the seed evenly everywhere and chose to let the plants decide who lives where. It has been over ten years since then. The community will change from year to year, but I can see how different species picked out different places to live and flourish. I can see their decisions based on angle of repose, soil quality, sun and moisture. For example, I have groups of species on the south-facing slope that don't exist on the north-facing slope.

In the prairie, it isn't about any individual. It is about the prairie as a whole, one single entity that you are raising. This entity includes all the plants, microbes, fungi, insects, birds and animals that call the prairie home. 🌱

ECOLOGIST'S REPORT

By BMAP Board of Directors

Our Outreach Ecologist, Josh Pletzer, resigned from his position at the end of 2023 due to some health issues. We will miss his kindness and curiosity. Josh also fielded many questions and made new discoveries in the course of our events and his site visits. It has been good to work with such a passionate ecological educator.

Says Josh, "Thank you for all the opportunities I've had to grow and foster community while at BMAP. I wish you and BMAP the very best in the future."

Thank you for your hard work, Josh. We know your future is bright!

At the time of this writing (mid-December), we are trying to fill the staff ecologist position. Please consider sharing our website, BlueMounds.org, with anyone who would be interested and a good fit. 🌱

Bur Oak Award Acceptance Speech

By Ron Endres

The world we are living in is experiencing extreme heat, drought, floods, massive wildfires, melting ice caps, dying coral reefs, polluted air and land and water, deforestation, mass insect extinctions, invasive species over-running native species.... What can one person do? Why should I even try when it all seems so hopeless?

I keep trying because I am not alone. Organizations like the Prairie Enthusiasts, Dane County Parks, Driftless Area Land Conservancy, Groundswell, and BMAP along with many others are all working on making positive environmental changes. They show us that groups of like-minded individuals CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE. When we work side-by-side with other volunteers or when we support their efforts financially, we ALL feel a sense of hope.

Even though the Bur Oak award is presented to an individual, it reinforces the idea of what we can accomplish when we all pull together. I humbly accept this award and want to tell you all "thank you". Not just for recognizing my contribution, but for giving my work as well as my life meaning. For helping me see that when I wake each morning, what I do — what WE ALL DO — truly can make a difference.

Thank you, Ron, from all of us at BMAP! 🌱



Ron and his wife Sheila.

BLUE MOUNDS PHENOLOGY

By Pat Trochlell

What does a plant enthusiast do in winter? Flowers and leaves are mostly gone. Some plants, like jewelweeds (*Impatiens* spp.) have completely senesced (gone dormant) and disappeared from the landscape. If you have collected plant specimens, you can catalogue, press or mount them. But if you're an outdoors type of person, you may want to keep botanizing!

One way to do this is to work on your winter plant identification skills. There are a few nice winter botany books that can help you get started, like the pocket-sized book *Winter Weed Finder* by Dorcas S. Miller. Another very good tip I received from a botany mentor is to become familiar with plants you see in the spring or summer on your everyday hikes. Mark their locations and note the changes in the plants through the seasons. If you do that, you will learn to identify these species in winter wherever you go.

Another way to continue to botanize in winter is to learn to identify trees and shrubs using bark, buds and leaf scars. Sometimes the leaves even persist, which is especially common with oaks. Oak species are best identified by their acorns, which may still be present under the trees if they haven't been buried by snow or eaten by hungry squirrels. If you have never tried to identify trees in winter, there is another small pocket book, *Winter Tree Finder* by May T. and Tom Watts. This book is a good way to get started.

There are many other ways for nature enthusiasts to enjoy the outdoors in winter, such as going birding. With most leaves gone, it's much easier to find birds with your binoculars. Now is a great time to see both resident species and winter migrants. Look for Red-headed Woodpeckers in

open oak savannas and woodlands that have been burned. Pileated Woodpeckers are found in larger denser woods. Listen for their loud call or the resonant drumming on hollow trees. American Tree Sparrows and Dark-eyed Juncos are common in open fields and at the edges of woods and

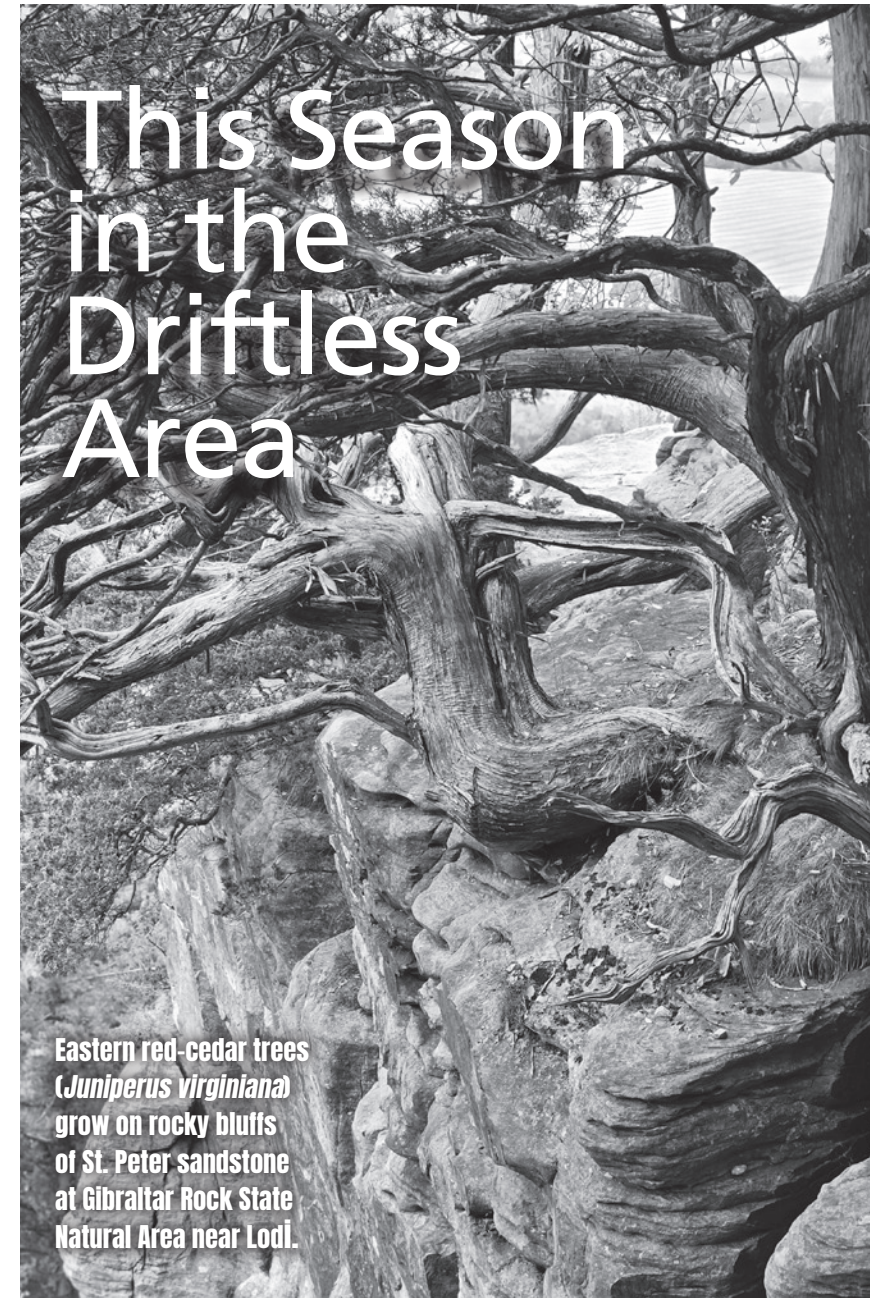
roads. And here in the Driftless, we often have birds like American Robins and Eastern Bluebirds remaining all winter. Look for them near springs or open water. If you're lucky, you may also see a Wilson's Snipe, Belted Kingfisher or even a Great Blue Heron.

For those who are not able to be outside (or not interested in venturing out) but still want to enjoy nature, a great opportunity arises in traveling local roads. Birding from a car (with a designated driver!) is very satisfying. It's especially fun to look for and identify raptors, which often can be seen and identified even at highway speeds. You might see Rough-legged Hawks and — if you are in the right place and especially lucky — catch a glimpse of a wintering Golden Eagle.

You may also enjoy taking a tour of Driftless geology. Glaciers never directly touched this landscape, allowing for the development of

steep hills and deep valleys. It's easier to see these spectacular views in the winter with leaves down.

Knowing a little about the geology of an area makes it more interesting. For instance, near Blue Mounds we can see outcrops capped by resistant dolomite and underlain by more erodible sandstone forming the sheer bluffs of the hills. For more information about your local geology, check out UW-Madison's Rockd app. 🌱



Eastern red-cedar trees (*Juniperus virginiana*) grow on rocky bluffs of St. Peter sandstone at Gibraltar Rock State Natural Area near Lodl.

Photo by Pat Trochlell


2024 BMAP Conservation Conversations


All events take place from 7:00 - 8:00 PM at the Mount Horeb Community Center, 107 N Grove St.

Thursday, February 15 Spongy Moth 2024: What to Expect and Management Advice

Michael Hillstrom
Forest Health Specialist, Wisconsin
Department of Natural Resources


Spongy moth populations rose dramatically in 2023, defoliating a record 374,000 acres of forest in Wisconsin. We'll

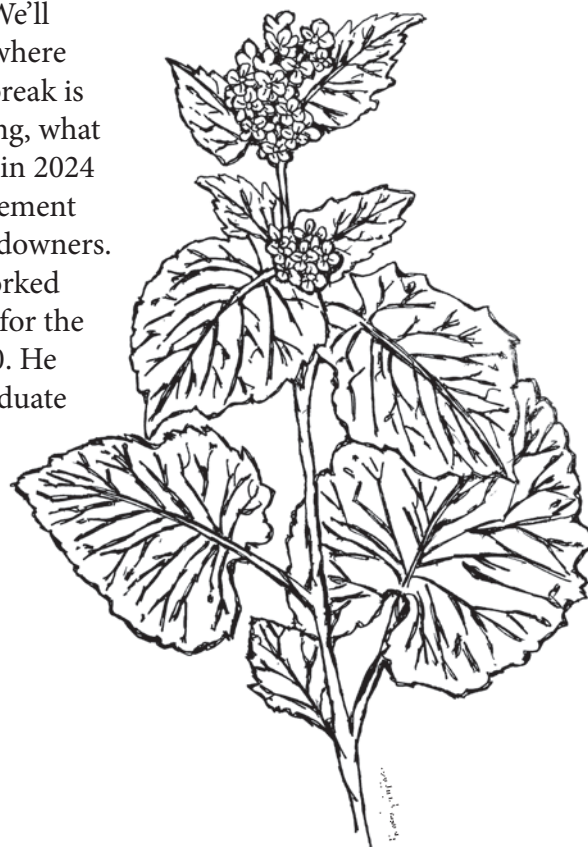
 discuss where the outbreak is occurring, what to expect in 2024 and management advice for landowners.

Michael has worked as a forest health specialist for the Wisconsin DNR since 2010. He has undergraduate and graduate degrees in Entomology from UW-Madison. 

Thursday, February 29 The State of Invasive Species in Wisconsin

Matt Wallrath
Coordinator, Wisconsin First
Detector Network

Join us to look at the big picture of invasive species in Wisconsin, including mapping, management and new threats. 



Thursday, March 21 Fostering Native Pollinators

Susan Carpenter
Native Plant Garden Curator,
UW-Madison Arboretum

Although sometimes small or hidden in plain sight, native pollinators have key roles in landscapes. Through several examples, we'll explore the importance and diversity of pollinators. Learn how to find, document and foster pollinators in your garden or restoration.

Susan Carpenter is the Native Plant Garden curator and gardener at the University of Wisconsin-Madison Arboretum. Since 2003, she has worked with students and community volunteers to install and manage a four-acre garden representing the plant communities of southern Wisconsin. She also leads students and the public in documenting and studying native bumble bees, including the endangered Rusty-Patched Bumble Bee. 



The view from the overlook along the Phoebe Point Trail.

Two New Driftless Trail Segments Now Open

Photo by Barb Barzen

By Barb Barzen, Driftless Area Land Conservancy

After opening the re-routed Weaver Road Segment of the Driftless Trail (just north of Governor Dodge State Park) last year, Driftless Area Land Conservancy is excited to announce the opening of two additional pieces of the Driftless Trail: the Knobs Road Segment north of Ridgeway and the Phoebe Point Trail on the Taliesin estate near Spring Green.

The 2.7-mile Knobs Road Segment can stretch to a four-mile loop by walking Knobs Road in between the ends of the trail. This segment crosses a property where Dave and Ann Zimrin raise grass-fed beef, which is sold under the Butler Family Farm label. Hikers will pass through an old orchard, woods, prairies, a wide valley where cows are rotationally grazed and a mile-long ridge with impressive views and perennial crops. The relatively short hike offers a lot of variety. This brand-new trail officially opened on January 1.

Last year, DALC and the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation agreed to co-brand the Phoebe Point and Welsh Hills trails on the Taliesin estate as part of the Driftless Trail. Natural landscapes were integral to Wright's designs, and both of these trails provide sweeping views of a landscape that, in his words, "picks you up in its arms and so gently, almost lovingly, cradles you."


The 1.1-mile Phoebe Point Trail opened in October. It traverses a slope where prairie and savanna restoration is in progress, then follows a ridge with views up and down the Wisconsin River and across much of the Lowery Creek

watershed. This fall, we also began to construct an extension of the Welsh Hills Trail, which has been open to the

public for several years.

By the end of 2025, we hope to complete the Driftless Trail from Tower Hill State Park through the Taliesin property. From there, we will route the trail south through the Lowery Creek watershed and begin trail construction on the Blue Mound State Park end of the project area.

As this project evolves, its value — for educating people about nature and land management, protecting and stewarding a long conservation corridor, building community, and simply connecting people to this amazing landscape — is becoming abundantly clear. We are immensely grateful to the landowners who are making this possible by hosting the trail on their property, and to the volunteers who help on multiple fronts.

Start exploring the open trail segments by accessing trail guides at driftlessconservancy.org/driftless-trail. 

FROM THE EDITOR



Grace Vosen

If you've ever taken part in a seasonal activity like gardening (or prairie restoration, minus the brush work), you know that winter can be a welcome time to wind down, celebrate your accomplishments, and plan for the year ahead. It's also a time to reflect on the lessons you've learned — and often, on the friends and mentors who helped you in that learning journey.

There will never be a replacement for in-person learning experiences on the land. But other tools, like books and apps, help experts pass on their knowledge to people they will never meet.

Even though many of BMAP's members do know one another personally, I hope this newsletter provides a similar service. You are not alone in your dedication, your curiosity or your love of the land. In the words of Aldo Leopold, I hope these stories make you feel like part of a vital "thinking community."


Prairie on,
Grace 

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by iNaturalist

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"Seek"ing App Reviews!

Do you use Seek, iNaturalist, Merlin, eBird or other nature observation apps (or websites)? Share your experiences with us by sending a short review to newsletter@bluemounds.org. Reviews will be published in the next issue of this newsletter. 



Classes, Walks and Tours Highlight Summer 2023 BMAP Events



Summer Events Wrap-up

By Sarah Crittenden; Steve Gauger; Greg Jones; Linda Millunzi-Jones

Natural Communities Class

This summer marked the third educational and fun Natural Communities Class coordinated by Kevin Doyle (Botanical Club of Wisconsin member and botanist for WDNR's Bureau of Natural Heritage Conservation) and BMAP Ecologist Josh Pletzer. Kevin taught the class along with Zach Kron this year. Zach is a biologist with the Southeast Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission (SEWRPC).

The field class included three detailed tours of Abraham's Woods State Natural Area, Mounds View

Grasslands, and Pleasant Valley Conservancy. Together, these sites represent southern mesic forest, oak savanna, prairie and wetland ecosystems. These explorations of remnant and restored native habitats helped develop our understanding of the ecology of southwestern Wisconsin. We hope to continue this partnership and offer the class again next summer.

Walks with a Naturalist

In addition, we held our customary Walks with a Naturalist in 2023. In early May, a small group of

Wisconsin Master Naturalist Volunteers teamed up to lead a walk through Walking Iron County Park, a glaciated portion of the Wisconsin River floodplain in Dane County. At this site, remnant prairie full of blooming pasqueflowers grows next to former agricultural land that is being returned to prairie. Dane County Parks workers and volunteers are opening up an eye-soothing expanse of grassland. Spring bird activity was a focus of the walk, in addition to a discussion of the flora, ecology and

management plans of this beautiful park.

The June walk at the UW-Madison Arboretum was led by Darcy Kind, a conservation biologist with the Wisconsin DNR. The Arboretum's Director, Karen Oberhauser, also shared her knowledge of the floral diversity and ongoing projects at the site. A highlight of the event was a talk by PhD candidate Mia Keady about a 70-year "Detrital Input and Removal" study. Five soil plots at the Arboretum are being subjected to various treatments



Property tour attendees gather at the trailhead at Holy Wisdom Monastery outside of Middleton.

such as burning, leaving bare, harvesting, mulching and no action. The study is monitoring the carbon dynamics of grasslands. Mia was joined that day by Lydia White, an undergraduate student in environmental sciences. The tour concluded with a delicious old-fashioned strawberry cake — thanks, Darcy!

In August, we held a tour of Rare Earth Farm, affectionately known as the "Two Chucks" property. Our walk of this stunning property was led by Craig Annen, representing Integrated Restorations, LLC. They have done a lot of work on this property, which is already beautiful

but also has long-range plans for preservation and restoration in place.

Property Tours

Equally enjoyable were our Property Tours at sites owned or restored by BMAP members. On a beautiful June evening, Amy Alstad, Director of Land Management at Holy Wisdom Monastery, led 25 attendees on a lovely walk of the monastery grounds. The property, consisting of 191 acres of restored prairie, savanna and woodlands was acquired by the Benedictine Sisters Community in 1953 primarily because of the spectacular view from the hilltop. Recent land stewardship projects have included thinning a pine plantation with the help of an Amish crew and restoring an historic barn through the efforts of BMAP's Peter Marshall and others. Amy's team also maintains 60 acres of restored prairie in partnership with Dane County. Visitors are welcome to see this magnificent property for themselves.

The July property tour was held on the 85-acre John and Darla Patterson property near Barneveld.

Summer Wrap-up continued on page 10



Holy Wisdom Monastery's Wisdom Prairie contains a diversity of native plants.

Westport Prairie:

a special place!

By Ben Lam, Groundswell Conservancy

Waunakee is home to a hidden gem of both beauty and ecological importance: Westport Prairie. This natural area is a special place. Stretching across 227 acres, it is home to over 100 species of native plants, including the federally threatened prairie bush-clover. Not only are these plants beautiful, but they have an important history.

Westport Prairie is part of the historic Empire Prairie. The Empire Prairie is estimated to have stretched over 150,000 acres across Columbia and Dane counties, but most of this expanse has been lost. The DNR estimates that the total area of remnant prairie existing in Wisconsin is less than 100 acres. Some of these remnants can be found at Westport Prairie.

Nestled within Westport Prairie is Westport Drumlin. A drumlin is a unique glacial landform that is best described as an elongated, tear-shaped hill. This particular drumlin provides amazing views of the landscape. It also happens to have some of that remnant prairie. The steep, rocky drumlin was not suitable to be cultivated into farmland, so it stood the test of time. The prairie continues to thrive like it did all those years ago — now with some help.

Groundswell Conservancy has protected Westport Prairie in perpetuity. We are conserving and expanding the wildlife habitat here with the help of partners like Waunakee High School, conservation-minded landowners and dedicated volunteers. Much of the original

prairie has disappeared, but we're working to re-establish the once mighty prairie. Invasive species are removed, and seeds are collected to be sown back into the adjacent fields. Slowly each year, the prairie expands.

Each season at Westport Prairie has something different to offer. In winter, it's a great place for snowshoeing. In the spring, many species of migratory and resident birds can be seen or heard in the prairie. And in summer and fall, you can see swaths of white and yellow blooms with purple sprinkled in.

Visitors are invited to explore the prairies and 14-acre drumlin on 1.5 miles of trails. Recreation opportunities include wildlife viewing, cross-country skiing, hiking, snowshoeing, hunting and trapping. You can also be a part of this important conservation work by volunteering with Groundswell Conservancy. Your work will live on for future generations to enjoy. Groundswell also hosts events at Westport Prairie and the other places we protect.

If you're interested in protecting special places forever, please visit groundswellconservancy.org.



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- Paul Gaynor
- Julie Melton



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Photo by Greg Jones

Visitors to the Patterson property enjoy the shade of an oak woodland.



Photo by Steve Gauger

A Quercus staff member describes land management techniques at the Patterson property.



Photo by Greg Jones

BMAP Ecologist Josh Pletzer identifies wetland plants at Kahl Halfway Prairie Park.

John and Darla acquired this land in 2015. Since then, they have been restoring prairie and savanna in conjunction with Quercus Land Stewardship. The property includes restored oak savannas, pine relicts and a converted pasture. There were 26 participants in this tour, and all

were treated to spectacular views of the Driftless Area. Finally, our September (rescheduled from August) property tour took place at Kahl Halfway Prairie Park in the Town of Berry. Christine Molling led us on a path through the prairie, which meanders through dry and

mesic areas as well as a wet area adjacent to Halfway Prairie Creek. We heard about prairie restoration efforts at the site as well as how the diverse plant community has responded to different environmental conditions. We also learned that Town of Berry volunteers collect seed to restore the prairie and last year were able to share 25% of the seed with town residents!

This park is open to the public, and the town hall next door has a shelter and picnic table. Check out the website to learn more about how the prairie was funded and maintained: <https://townofberry.org/parks/kahl-park>.



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driftlessconservancy.org

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BMAP's monthly eBulletin for announcements, habitat restoration tips, and more:
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FACEBOOK

- BMAP's Facebook page for events and environmental news: facebook.com/BMAPcommunity
- BMAP's Facebook group for sharing photos, ideas, and activities: facebook.com/groups/BMAPcommunity

OUR MISSION

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.

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, nonnative 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.

BLUE MOUNDS AREA PROJECT MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

E-mail address: _____

Membership Status:

☐ Renewal ☐ New Member ☐ Gift Membership for: _____

Membership Level:

☐ Basic \$40 ☐ Contributor \$70 ☐ Supporter \$100 ☐ Lifetime \$1000

All memberships, except lifetime, follow the calendar year.

☐ Additional donation beyond your annual membership: _____ TOTAL MEMBERSHIP / DONATION: _____

Make checks payable and return to: Blue Mounds Area Project, PO Box 332, Mount Horeb, WI 53572 or you can contribute online at <https://www.bluemounds.org/donor-form>

☐ YES, I would like to receive information about site visits. ☐ I'm interested in volunteer opportunities with BMAP.

Thank you! Your contribution is tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.



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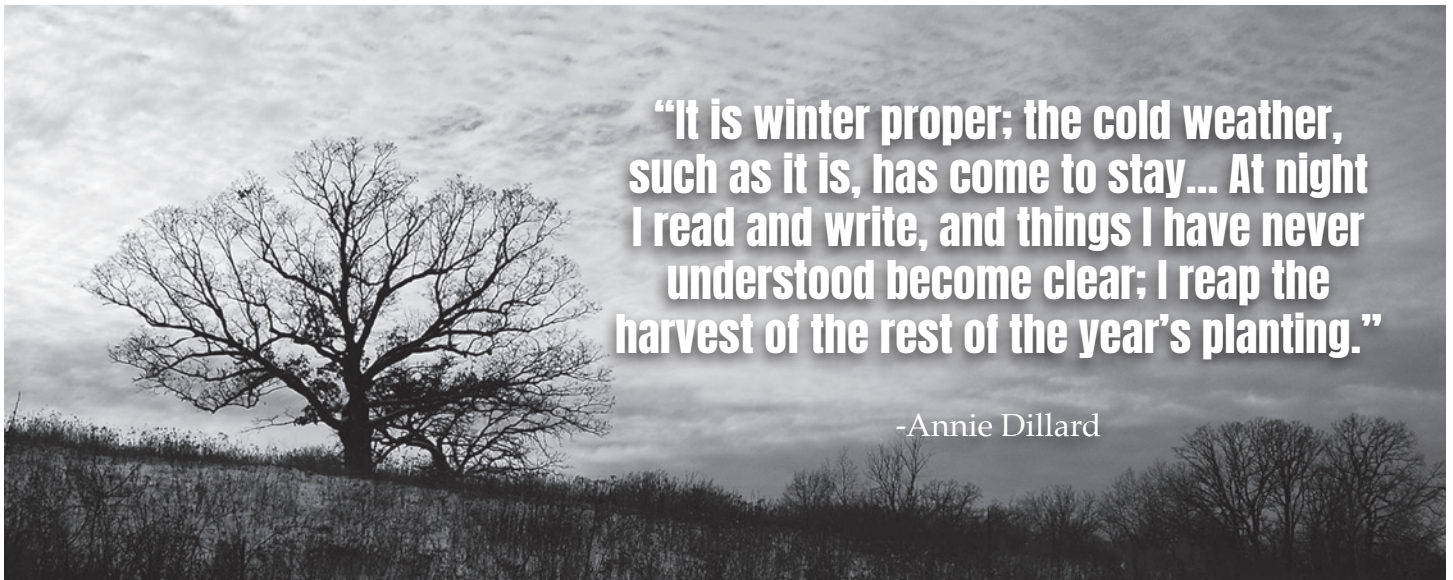
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BLUE MOUNDS AREA PROJECT

P.O. Box 332
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**"It is winter proper; the cold weather,
such as it is, has come to stay... At night
I read and write, and things I have never
understood become clear; I reap the
harvest of the rest of the year's planting."**

-Annie Dillard

Photo by Peter Gorman

BMAPNEWS

The Blue Mounds Area Project Newsletter is published three times yearly.

We welcome your comments, submissions, and advertisements.

Newsletter editor: Grace Vosen (newsletter@bluemounds.org) Graphic Design: Tom Senatori

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IS YOUR MEMBERSHIP UP TO DATE?

BMAP maintains a calendar year membership cycle. If you are receiving a complimentary copy of the newsletter, please consider becoming a member.