



## Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame Foundation, Inc.

Schmeckle Reserve – UW-Stevens Point

2419 North Point Dr.

Stevens Point, WI 54481

715-346-4992 | WCHFame@gmail.com | WCHF.org

### NEWS RELEASE

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**Contact:** Sunshine Buchholz, WCHF Administrative Assistant – sbuchhol@uwsp.edu, 715-346-4992

#### 2021 WISCONSIN CONSERVATION HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE ANNOUNCED

#### GARY ELDRD - Citizen Scientist and Conservation Activist Extraordinaire

The Wisconsin Conservation Hall of Fame (WCHF) celebrates its 103<sup>rd</sup> Inductee, [Gary Eldred](#). Eldred is a self-taught citizen conservationist whose passion for prairies and volunteer work to preserve them led to the formation of The Prairie Enthusiasts for which he has served as leader of both the organization and field activities.

Eldred will be inducted into the WCHF on April 24, 2021 in a live ceremony held virtually. Ceremony details are below.

#### INDUCTEE BIOGRAPHY

##### Gary Eldred (1947 - )

Entirely as a volunteer and teaching himself along the way, Gary Eldred has dedicated most of his life to the effort of identifying and protecting prairies. He is unique in being self-educated about prairie habitats and rare prairie species. Eldred has been instrumental in preserving and re-establishing thousands of acres of prairies in Wisconsin.

While working seasonally on a state-owned bike trail in Green County in 1974, Eldred became exposed to the fieldwork of parks, forestry, wildlife activities and to the protection of endangered and threatened prairie plant communities. During his free time, he would travel around Green County hunting and fishing. Eldred discovered numerous small, isolated tracts of rare plant communities along the way.

In 1980, Eldred was hired as a Natural Resources Assistant at the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources' Wilson State Nursery in Boscobel, Wisconsin. The position, which later evolved to Forestry Technician, would span his 28-year career. It paid the bills, but importantly, it was only part-time. This gave him ample time to commit to his passion – locating and preserving Wisconsin prairie remnants.

Fortunately, Eldred had a group of seven friends equally dedicated to the task. Each crew member brought different skills sets, knowledge and diverse ideas to the project. Together, they became the



Gary Eldred at the Schurch-Thomson Prairie (TPE owned). 2020. Photo by Tim Eisele.



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initial prairie aficionados of Green County. In 1976, they were instrumental in securing the site named Muralt Bluff Prairie which was bought by Green County. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources classified it as a State Natural Area, the first such site initially protected by a county government. Thus, began the subtle transformation of Eldred's thinking. A tally of protected prairie acreage began to grow that year, too. By 2014, eleven prairie remnants totaling 170 acres had been protected under Eldred's leadership.

Eldred's grassroots work became a conservation organization. In 1987, the local group that he founded incorporated into a nonprofit organization dedicated to educating about, protecting and restoring prairies and savannas. Networking by Eldred brought in two other nearby prairie groups and led to a change of name to The Prairie Enthusiasts (TPE). As of 2020, TPE has nearly 1,400 members and eleven chapters in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Minnesota. It owns and manages over 2,100 acres and has worked with landowners to protect over a thousand acres of prairie through conservation easements. And the number of prairie acres protected continues to grow.

For nearly 50 years, Eldred has been a passionate prairie advocate and conducted surveys of eleven counties in Wisconsin and three in Iowa. Sometimes driving every road in a county to look for prairie remnants, Eldred has gone door to door to educate private landowners about prairie remnants and pique their interest in saving the rare ecosystem. In some instances, it took years to gain landowner support for restoration and preservation efforts on those lands. Many times, Eldred led work parties to restore those very places. His motivation came from deep commitment to Aldo Leopold's principle of ecological conscience to "save the parts."

Eldred has led field trips and negotiated the purchase of prairies (through ownership or conservation easement) to ensure long-term preservation. He has worked with a variety of landowners, farmers, and corporate entities to share the importance of native landscapes.

Eldred has taken his love of prairies to pen and paper, drawing accurate, exceptionally beautiful illustrations of native and endangered and threatened prairie plants. The sale of his extraordinary artworks has supported prairie protection efforts. Eldred also wrote stories and booklets about the wondrous world of native landscaping and rare plant communities.

Wisconsin has perhaps never known a more dedicated and passionate volunteer for its prairies than Gary Eldred.

### Quotes about Gary Eldred

*"Gary is much like conservationists of old. He is a renaissance man – artist, writer, scientist, organizer, and leader. He moves seamlessly from field to boardroom, educating landowners, farmers, and corporate presidents on the importance of nature. His skills of persuasion have helped preserve and manage Wisconsin's natural heritage into perpetuity."* –Thomas C. Hunt, Director of Science, Applied Ecological Services



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*“What is impressive about Gary is his willingness to act, to step forward and lead, and his all-out commitment to conserving the remaining prairie ecosystem of the upper Midwest. He is mostly self-taught on prairie ecology, and he had no formal training in group organizing, leadership, or environmental education. Yet, he moved forward with remarkable accomplishments.” –Richard Henderson, TPE Board of Directors*

### WCHF INDUCTION CEREMONY DETAILS

The 2021 WCHF Induction Ceremony for Gary Eldred will be held on April 24, 2021. It will be one in a series of four free Induction Ceremony events held live on a virtual platform throughout the day. Because the 2020 Induction Ceremony was cancelled due to the pandemic, the 2020 Induction Ceremony to honor Stephen Born, Jens Jensen, and Stanley Temple will be held as part of the 2021 event series. For more details about the ceremony as they become available, visit [WCHF.org](http://WCHF.org).

#### 2020 Inductees

[Stephen Born](#) is a well-known UW-Madison professor who specialized in environmental planning and worked on almost every aspect of water management, the Great Lakes, inland lakes, groundwater, rivers and watersheds, in addition to loving all things trout. [Jens Jensen](#) is a landscape architect of the Upper Midwest who developed public parks, preserves, and private estates, focusing on indigenous plants and the location's ecological features, who also founded the “school of the soil” in Door County known as The Clearing. [Stanley Temple](#) is a UW-Madison professor who studied endangered birds, habitat fragmentation, invasive species and other factors leading to species declines, and now serves as a Senior Fellow with The Aldo Leopold Foundation, researching, writing and speaking about Leopold.

All four Induction Ceremony events are free to the public and will feature speakers sharing the legacy of these conservation heroes being honored. Inductees will speak about their conservation legacy and share their life's work through images and stories.

#### WISCONSIN CONSERVATION HALL OF FAME FOUNDATION, INC. (WCHF)

The WCHF was established to encourage the growth and practice of a conservation ethic as a legacy for the people of the State. Individuals may be nominated for induction into the WCHF by the public. Based on a set of criteria, nominees are selected for induction by the WCHF Board of Directors and an independent Board of Governors.

The WCHF is located in the Schmeckle Reserve Visitor Center on the UW-Stevens Point campus in Stevens Point, WI. Outdoor spaces currently open to visitors include hiking trails, bird viewing area, restrooms, outdoor shelter and amphitheater.

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