

Evolution of My Land Ethic

By Gary Eldred

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My Start in Conservation

I had been a hunter, fisherman, and trapper since I was twelve years old. I deeply enjoyed these outdoor activities, and spent as much time as I could pursuing them. In the process, I became a skilled amateur naturalist and developed a strong interest in conservation. While in my mid-twenties, I was fortunate enough to read Aldo Leopold's "Sand County Almanac." That new perspective on nature and conservation, especially the chapters on land ethics, began a subtle transformation of my thinking.

I had always wanted to work in conservation, but lack of a college education seemed to rule out that opportunity! I had been a member and director of the local Green County Conservation League, and its president, Bob Hahlen, became a bit of a mentor to me. He always took time to listen to ideas I had about conservation projects as well as ideas about how to involve the League in such projects. I saw him as a doer rather than a follower, which inspired me.

In 1971, a couple of friends and I became interested in a local project that would attempt to restore Marsh Creek, a three- or four-mile-long spring creek, into a trout stream. With the help of Tom Hall, John Ochsner, and Steve Eldred, we started contacting landowners. Getting them on board was the first step. After most of the owners agreed to support the project, we worked on step two -- fencing the sections of the stream to protect its banks from being grazed and trampled. The Green County Conservation League stepped in with money for fencing and supplies. After three summers, all of the landowners we had originally contacted were now sold on the project and agreed to let us on their property. We thus had complete cooperation and were able to finish fencing the stream. Along with

fencing, I had studied up on stream hydrology and in-stream structures to improve the habitat for the trout. This guided us to complete several other stream improvements — namely, installation of deflector and digger logs to change the current and deepen the stream, and seeding of streambanks that had been eroded by cattle. In 1972, I worked with the local fish manager from the Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources (WDNR) , after which, about 200 brown trout were stocked into our stream.

About the same time that we finished this stream fencing project, I was lucky enough to get hired as a seasonal or Limited Term Employee (LTE) working for the WDNR. My boss was Reynold Zeller, the Sugar River Bike Trail Manager for the WDNR, and on March 19, 1974, I started what would become my career in conservation! From 1974 until 1980, I had the opportunity to work in many facets of public service — parks, wildlife, forestry, and endangered species. I had especially deep passion for working with endangered species, but again, lack of a college degree closed the door to pursuing and getting a job in this field.

However, my WDNR job in general and the opportunity to work with Reynold in particular opened up many opportunities and experiences for me in the seven years I worked on the bike trail. That is when the seeds of my passion for prairies began to germinate. I learned about the prairie remnants along the bike trail, and quickly learned the natural history and names of all the native plants growing there.

Reynold was a pivotal person at this time in my life. He shared my interest in prairies and supported my passion for restoring tiny remnants along the Sugar River Bike Trail. His WDNR connections would prove invaluable, as well as his moral support for my ideas about prairie conservation and projects that I would undertake in Green County. He was a fine mentor to me, and without his support and knowledge, it is hard to say what direction my life would have taken.

Seed of a Prairie Organization Takes Root

In addition to what I discovered while working on the bike trail, my hunting and fishing trips took me around the Green County area where I began to discover small, isolated bits and pieces of native prairie. Whenever I found one of these sites, I asked around to find out who owned it, and then talked with the landowners about the rare botanical jewels they owned. More times than not, they had only a passing interest, but they were open to allowing tree and brush removal, and even the use of fire, to help restore the remnants.

And I was not alone. I was incredibly lucky to have a small, but completely dedicated group of guys that were just as excited as I was about working on these sites. John Ochsner, Reynold Zeller, Jonathan Wilde, Chuck Phillipson, Tim Hammerly, John Ringhand, Dan Hazlett, and I were the initial prairie aficionados in Green County.

I would contact landowners to get permission to do prairie restoration or management on their properties, then I would call in the crew with the time and place where we would meet to burn the site, cut brush, or collect seed. They were always there!

It was a varied group. Ochsner was a true partner in prairie conservation from day one. For any activity I did with prairies, he was there, and for any he did, I was there. Zeller had many contacts with WDNR personnel who had knowledge and resources that would benefit us all along the way. Wilde knew a lot about controlled burning. Phillipson was a reporter for the New Glarus newspaper and got us news coverage on what we were doing and why! Hammerly was always upbeat, and most of all, liked to burn prairies and to drink a beer or two; his attitude and willingness to be part of the crew were confidence building. Ringhand was the youngster of the crew. I felt that my friendship and mentoring of

him was something he valued, and it helped me a lot. Hazlett was a self-taught naturalist and — unlike me as a beginner — had much insight into prairies. His knowledge proved very important to our cause! A subset of this dynamic group is shown below, after a successful prairie burn. From left to right are Hazlett, Eldred, Wilde, Zeller, and Phillipson.

Each member of the crew brought different skill sets, knowledge, and diverse ideas to the project. Some of the guys were prairie teachers, while others were students. All shared enthusiasm for the work. With Ochsner in particular, and the way in which we supported and relied on each other, I learned the value of having a true partner in prairie conservation. Together, the two of us were much stronger than either one of us alone. Although I did not know it at the time, this group formed the core of the spark for the beginning of a grassroots prairie conservation movement, first in Green County, and eventually throughout WI.



In time, this movement became more formalized. Different groups formed and gave themselves names, funds were raised, memberships sought, and more. But the desire to find and try to protect southern Wisconsin's few remaining prairie remnants before they were lost forever, came first.

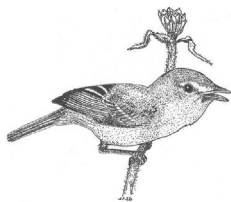
Saving Prairie Remnants

Saving Prairie Remnants in Green County

Each of the 8 Green County prairie guys had seen and admired prairies in different parts of the county. Of the little remnant jewels we found, one particularly stands out:

- In 1974, John Ochsner and I had stumbled onto a fantastic, 67-acre dry bluff prairie. The two of us started to dream about saving the prairie remnant and its numerous rare plants and animals. With much support and determination, we gathered our troops and approached the Green County Board about purchasing the site. After various setbacks, in June, 1976, **Muralt Bluff Prairie** was purchased by Green County. The whole process was truly a very important learning experience for me!

Ownership of Muralt Bluff Prairie has since been transferred to The Prairie Enthusiasts (TPE), with the WNDR assuming management responsibility for the site. In addition, the WNDR named this property a State Natural Area in 1977; it was the first such natural area in Wisconsin that had been purchased by a county to protect it. Among other things, this natural area designation allows public use restrictions to protect endangered or threatened species or to close the site temporarily due to specific management activities.



The high-quality Muralt Bluff Prairie contains several uncommon species of plants. Animals of concern include the bobolink and grasshopper sparrow. The state-threatened Bell's vireo (shown here) nests at this prairie.

Saving the Muralt Bluff Prairie was very special to me for a number of different reasons: (1) It was the first place where I identified a wild flower (*Liatris aspera*) as a true prairie plant. (2) Because of my long-time interest in Native Americans, I was fascinated by the idea that plants on which Indians had walked were still there in 1974! (3) The Muralt Bluff Prairie was the first site in which I had the

opportunity to be part of a team that set out to talk with landowners, gain public support, raise money, and actually purchase a large piece of original Green County prairie. (4) The success of this project offset others that did not work out. Landowners for two remnants that we found were willing to sell, but we had no way to raise or find funds for the purchases. The Muralt Bluff Prairie, on the other hand, proved that what seemed very unlikely could, indeed, happen! The project gave me the confidence and access to resources that told me we could do more prairie projects.

The purchase of Muralt Bluff Prairie also stimulated numerous newspaper stories and radio interviews. The public's interest in prairies and their protection served to increase my enthusiasm and passion to locate as many prairie remnants as possible and to educate the owners about how rare they were. My search took me all over Green County, and eventually, I had located several dozen sites totaling about 210 acres. By 2014, 7 of these prairie remnants scattered across Green County and totaling 170 acres have been protected and restored — some by TPE, some by the WDNR, and one by a private landowner.

During the years that I worked for Reynold Zeller as a WDNR LTE, one of my jobs was to run the county tree planting project. This involved planting trees on landowners' properties for conservation purposes. I had assistants, and I did this job for about three or four seasons. During that time, I located numerous prairie remnants:

- One of those encounters occurred in 1977 when I met a man named Harrison Butenhoff who was going to plant a dry, rocky hill to pine trees. To my amazement, his site was a 20-acre, dry prairie in central Green County. Boots, which was his nickname, was an avid conservationist, and it didn't take me long to convince him of the value of his remnant. For starters, I was able to persuade him not to plant the site to pine trees. Then, over the next 10 years, many conversations with the Green County Conservation League took place. My goal was to convince the League that purchasing high-quality pieces of Green County plant communities would be a great project for a conservation organization like them. As past Vice-President of the League, I also worked with their Board members, looking for funding sources. At the same time, I continued conversations with Boots about his site's historical and biological importance. Finally, in 1988, the League undertook its first prairie conservation project and bought this property — the **Butenhoff Prairie** — for preservation. The 20 acres harbors over 40 native species, including several State-threatened species and "species of greatest conservation need" such as the Indian plantain (shown here). This site is now owned and managed by TPE.



In 1980, I was lucky enough to be hired as a Natural Resources Assistant at the WDNR's Wilson State Nursery in Boscobel, Wisconsin. The position, which later evolved (through several promotions) to Forestry Technician, was one that I would occupy for the next 28 years.

In time, the job would prove to have 2 singular attributes. First, the position was a 7-month seasonal job, which allowed me 5 months off a year. I would use this time to do prairie conservation work, and would begin to pull together the beginnings of The Prairie Enthusiasts. Secondly, the job — which involved such activities as irrigation, weeding, inventorying, mowing, and seedbed preparation — was very mechanical. The repetitive nature of the work forced me to think of things to live for, which turned out to be prairie conservation projects that I would explore on evenings and weekends as well as on my seasonal time off.

Although this new job in Boscobel was ninety miles from Albany, my hometown, I maintained strong ties with Green County prairie conservation efforts. Giving slide talks to civic groups, schools, and garden clubs, as well as leading field trips for many interested groups including grade school, high school, college groups, county employees, and private citizens, I continued not only public presentations but also participation in prairie work parties, seed collection, and controlled burns throughout Green County. I also maintained contact with numerous owners and my prairie buddies.

Over the next 10 or more years, while living in Grant County, these contacts maintained with Green County landowners led to the 3 important prairie remnant purchases:

- In 1981, I was instrumental in the purchase of the **Muralt Bluff Prairie South Unit** in Green County, WI. This purchase resulted from my landowner contacts with the Muralt family, as well as my contacts with the Green County Board, Green County Conservation League, and The Nature Conservancy. After the Muralts signed an option to sell, I asked the League to be the receiving party for donations; they agreed. I then showed prairie slides to the Green County Board, and afterwards, they voted 28 to 1 to purchase the property. Funding also came from The Nature Conservancy and from private donations I helped raise. Public support came from my work with local newspapers to do stories about the purchase and its value. The end result was protection of a high-quality, 13-acre mesic prairie remnant, with over 50 species. It is now owned by TPE.
- In 1992, I had a meeting with Harold Vale who owned a nice prairie remnant near Albany in Green County, WI. Numerous subsequent meetings between the two of us resulted in the sale of 16 acres to the Southwest Wisconsin Chapter of TPE. (Note: How this Chapter came to be is a story that will be told later in “TPE Organization Takes Shape.”) I did all negotiations for the purchase up to the Chapter’s approval to buy the property. With over 70 species, including two State-endangered species and several threatened species, the **Vale Prairie** is over 4 acres and includes 12 buffer acres that are presently being restored.

In 1993, about 50 prairie enthusiasts attended a Vale Prairie dedication and fundraiser, at which over \$1,900 was raised to help replenish Southwest Wisconsin Chapter coffers. Highlighting the event was a keynote speech by Representative Spencer Black, a well-known champion of environmental preservation. Representative Black is shown here at that dedication; I am standing at

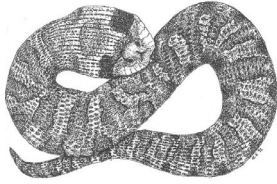


the left. While Representative Black applauded TPE’s efforts to preserve remnants of the once-vast prairie/savanna ecosystem, he stressed that our work could not stop with prairie purchases. Ultimately, he said, we must educate our fellow citizens about why preservation is essential. He warned that unless citizens become involved and become partners in government in protecting what is left, inevitably, there will be nothing left to protect. He then described a specific blueprint for an “ethic of preservation” that he urged us boldly to disseminate.

Representative Black’s speech that day is one that I have never forgotten and that I have worked all the years since then to follow. The significance of this speech was captured in an article about the Vale Prairie dedication, which appeared in our organizational newsletter (Fall 1993):

“Representative Black did more than provide us with a message — he charged us with a mission. We must do our best, as individuals and as members of TPE, to carry out that mission. The implications of failing to do so are appallingly clear.”

- I spent 1999 working with Jeanette Muralt, negotiating the purchase of 22 acres of prairie/savanna lands adjacent to the 67-acre Muralt Bluff Prairie in Green County, WI. That resulted in the *Itis Savanna* addition, which was purchased in 2000. It is a critical element to the preserve. Many native species of birds, insects, reptiles (like this hog-nosed snake), and microorganisms are dependent on savanna habitat for their survival. About 30-40 native grassland species call this site home. It is now owned and managed by TPE.



Saving Prairie Remnants In Grant County

In June 1987, I decided to take on the challenge of driving all of the roads in Grant County in search of roadside prairie remnants, as well as locating prairie remnants on private property that could be visited at a later date. My inventory efforts eventually led me in several directions.

The first offshoot was that every site that had threatened, endangered, or special concern prairie species on it was reported to the WDNR Bureau of Endangered Resources. I filled out a special form for each species I found. The form included the site, location, date, threats to the site, name of species, and approximately how many. I sent dozens and dozens of these reports to the WDNR for their files. All information was collected on weekends and during my annual seasonal time off for which I received no pay from my job.

One of the most important outcomes of my Grant County inventories was finding many prairie remnants. The location of these sites was the beginning of landowner contacts for permission to visit the sites and to inventory them. Eventually, as the landowners got to know me and my sincerity, I discussed the possibility of TPE purchasing the site for preservation and restoration. Several of the remnants I found were purchased within three or four years; these included the following:

- The *Thomas Wet Prairie* in Grant County, WI was purchased by the Southwest Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts in August of 1988. The 13.5-acre wet prairie has over 100 species and was the first prairie purchased by the Southwest Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts. (The story of how this organization came to be formed will be told later in "TPE Organization Takes Shape.") My role in the purchase of the Thomas Wet Prairie was connected to meeting David and Helen MacGregor who owned land adjacent to this prairie and wanted to see it protected. After they offered funds to purchase it, I started negotiations with the owner, Duwayne Thomas. He was willing, and the sale was completed.

To mark the occasion of our first prairie purchase, we held a special dedication on the site. We were honored to have the former Governor Tony Earl officiate, as he was a well-known advocate for grassroots environmental activism. Gov. Earl is shown in the accompanying photo, flanked by Helen and David MacGregor on the left, and me on the right. David would later play a very important and pivotal role in the formalization of our prairie organization, again a story that will be told later in this narrative.





- While doing roadside inventories, I discovered a small prairie remnant near Lancaster. I contacted the owner, and discussed purchasing the site. He, too, was willing, so my next step was to find funds. Through my contacts with private donors, I was able to come up with money to make the purchase. After about six months of final negotiations, the August 1989 purchase of **Bush Clover Prairie** in Grant County, WI was completed. The 2 and 2/3-acre site is home to over 50 native prairie species, including 4 threatened species and other rare species such as marbleseed (shown here). It is owned and managed by TPE.

In addition to these remnants whose purchases took place within a few years of initial landowner contact, my roadside inventories in Grant County identified other special remnants whose purchase occurred but took a lot longer to accomplish:

- In 1987, while doing roadside prairie inventories, I stumbled on the 45-acre **Ellenboro Prairie**. I was totally taken aback by the size and diversity of the site, and made contact with the owners within a few weeks. The site was a Christmas tree farm owned by Grantland Growers, a landscaping company, and they were not interested in selling the property. Over the years, I kept a close eye on the site, and did species inventories. As is the story nearly every time, the site is home to 3 or 4 State-threatened or endangered prairie species, over 60 other prairie species, and grassland-loving birds such as the dickcissel (shown here).



Finally in 2000, I again contacted the owners who expressed an interest in selling, but they first wanted to find an equal-sized property on which to re-establish their plantings. After several months, they found such a replacement. I then contacted Jay Maxfield, a Southwest Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts Board member who was very dedicated to our cause. I thought she might like to take on the challenge of the purchase details as a learning experience. This would involve working with the landowner as well as the WDNR's Stewardship Fund that was providing partial funding for the purchase. Of course I was available to help her at any time. She agreed and proceeded with the purchase process, consulting with me on numerous occasions. Finally in 2001, the closing took place, and this gem became property of TPE.

Several years later, the Southwest Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts Board voted to rename the prairie the **Eldred Prairie**. Jay and her husband went on to pursue their own interests in land conservation by founding their own company, Driftless Land Stewardship, LLC.

- In 1988, in my search for prairie seed sources, as well as prairie remnants, I found **Heather's Prairie** in Grant County. It was a low-rolling, north-to-south valley, with a small creek flowing south into Borah Creek. The site was about 20 acres, had been a hog pasture in previous years, and lately had been grazed by beef cattle. I became welcomed and trusted by Dan and Lorie Neuroth as well as Dan's mother Norma, the owner. Whenever I visited, from 1988 until 2009, I invited Dan and Lorie and their kids on hikes with me and told them of the value, history, and beauty of their prairie. They enjoyed these hikes, which helped develop trust and appreciation for the prairie they owned. Their daughter, 9-year-old Heather, was especially interested in the prairie and its history. Every time I would hike the prairie doing inventories, Heather would tag along, asking questions nonstop as we walked. One of the saddest days of my life was when I heard that young Heather had been badly injured while learning to ride a snowmobile, and had passed away as the result of that accident. Heather's parents had been allowing TPE to cut brush and collect seed on the prairie, and after Heather's loss, we placed a marble marker at the site dedicating it "to Heather."

By 2009, the Neuroth farm was being sold. It was purchased initially by an IA corn farmer, which prompted a 5-page letter to him from me extolling the virtues of Heather's Prairie and bemoaning the prairie's demise as a corn field. He eventually agreed to separate the prairie from the rest of the farm and sell that portion to us. The Mississippi Valley Conservancy originally acquired the 138-acre site with funding from the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). In 2010, ownership was transferred to TPE. Since then, about 50 acres has been added to the property.



The preserve, which was designated a Wisconsin State Natural Area in 2009, is now known as the **Borah Creek Prairie**, preserved for the future, 21 years after I first discovered it. This site has one of the highest populations in Wisconsin of Prairie Bush Clover, a federally endangered species. Over 70 other prairie species live on the preserve, of which 5 are on the State-threatened or endangered list; grassland birds like the bobolink thrive here, too.

- In 1988, the **Feist Prairie** was completely overgrown with junipers when I discovered it while doing roadside prairie inventories. I contacted the owners, Gerald and Patricia Feist, the same year and told them about the prairie remnant they had. Although this was just a small, few-acre remnant, the site was unique because it had never been cultivated, pastured, or sprayed. I asked if TPE could do some restoration work there, and I got the okay. Gerald told me that after he learned about the prairie and its history, he began to see his family farm and its history much differently. He began to understand the value of the remnant and how it painted a larger picture than he had previously seen.

After 25 years of restoration, Feist Prairie is home to over 40 prairie plant species, two of which are on the threatened species list. Tree removal and invasive species control are ongoing. In 2012, after I contacted the Feists to discuss the idea of developing some kind of long-term protection for the site, Gerald decided that it was time to sell the 4 acres to TPE! The Feist Prairie was then purchased in 2013. Success after 25 years!!

Along with outright purchases by the TPE, other Grant County sites have been protected through conservation easements. Such easements are legal documents structured to suit the landowners' wishes. They do not transfer ownership, but allow possible restoration to be done on the owners' private property in exchange for their efforts to protect it. Two Grant County prairies benefited from such easements:

- In 1987, while spending weekends doing roadside inventories of all of Grant County, WI, I located two high-quality prairie remnants on the **Belscampers Farm** outside of Lancaster. One was 10 acres, and the other was 1.5; both were on the same farm. The sites were home to a number of uncommon prairie plants such as the wood lily (shown here). When I attempted to find the owner, I discovered that the farm had reverted back to the Farm and Home Administration (FMHA) when the farmer could not make ends meet. I then found out, to my surprise, that if there were endangered or threatened species on a FMHA property, they could be protected through a conservation easement! Such an easement would be held by the USFWS, if a management agreement with a responsible organization were set up.



Initially, the WDNR wanted to be the site steward. However, as time passed and less funding was available to the WDNR to manage the remnants, Southwest Wisconsin Chapter members occasionally took on some of this work, such as

invasive weed control or brush cutting and re-seeding. As a result of my efforts working with the USFWS, these two sites are now protected and co-managed by the WDNR and TPE.

- Yet another bluff prairie that I inventoried and hiked on for about twenty years now has a non-binding conservation easement in place. This site, the *Zimmerman Prairie*, is about two miles west of Muscoda, WI. I kept contact with the owner, Elton Zimmerman, for many years.

About six years ago, Scott Sauer, an insect expert found a very rare species of leaf hopper there, the only known population in Wisconsin. I approached Mr. Zimmerman about four years ago to explore the possibility of developing a plan to allow some prairie restoration on the hillside. The Zimmermans were not interested in selling, but might give an informal conservation easement. I then went to work with Jack Kusmaul, a lawyer and TPE Board member, to draw up a non-binding conservation easement for the site, which the Zimmermans were comfortable with and signed. Scott Sauer agreed to be the site steward. The Zimmerman Prairie is being cleared of junipers and other invasive species; this will open the site to more plants like its prairie turnip (shown here). Fire will also be used as a management tool.



By the end of the summer of 1987, I concluded my Grant County inventories. I had driven over 4,000 miles and recorded over 140 sites with prairie species. Some sites were small and harbored a few threatened species along a roadside. Others were very large — for instance, Borah Creek Preserve at 189 acres and the Eldred Prairie at 45 acres — but most were smaller, ranging from 1/4 of an acre to 5 acres. Sad to say, nearly all remnants on roadsides have been destroyed by 2015.

Prairie Remnants in Lafayette County

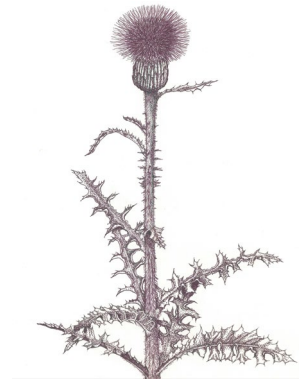
In July of 1989, I started roadside inventories in Lafayette County, WI. As the summer progressed, Gary and Gail Adams, as well as Walter and Alice Mirk, joined in on the inventories there. The Adams were both officers in the Southwest Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts, and the Mirks were active members of the group. Between the 5 of us, our success in finding noteworthy prairie remnants in Lafayette County was grim. Seventy nine sites were recorded, most of which were only roadsides and consisted of from a couple of compass plants, to several dozen. I drove over 2,000 miles inventorying Lafayette County, and I did not record the miles that the Adams or Mirks surveyed. Our efforts did, however, pay off in the sense that Steve Hubner, the County Zoning Administrator, found \$1,500 to pay TPE to print an atlas of these sites. Sad to say, no remnants were purchased, nor were any conservation easements created. I did find two very nice cemetery prairies, but when contacts were made by Steve Hubner, the overseers sprayed the sites with broad-leaved herbicide. Many of the sites on County and Township roads have since been destroyed by grain farming, roadside mowing and spraying, or right-of-way grading.

Miles and hours of inventorying sometimes yield spectacular results, as they did in Green and Grant Counties. Other times, they do not, as happened here in Lafayette County. The goal was to keep going and never lose confidence that somewhere, somehow, other prairie remnants could be found and preserved.

Saving Prairie Remnants in Iowa County

In 1990, after my Lafayette County inventories were completed, I moved north into Iowa County. Due to a more wooded, hilly topography, I had hopes of finding more prairie and savanna remnants. I documented over 86 sites of varying size and quality. Many had threatened or endangered species, which I documented and reported to the WDNR. I did see dozens of areas that had high potential for restoration, but did not note them in my records. I traveled over 1,500 miles in Iowa County, and located 26 pine relics as well. There were many more in Iowa and Grant Counties, but I did not record them. However, at least one site in Iowa County was donated to TPE as a result of my roadside inventories:

- In 1993, I found the *Kalscheur Oak Savanna* while doing inventories. I got permission to visit the remnant and was very impressed with the quality and diversity of the place, which is home to the rare Hills Thistle (shown here) along with over forty five other native prairie and savanna species. At the time, I had a good friend, David Long, who was intensely interested in prairie conservation, so I offered to mentor him in taking on the process of contacting the owner, and talking to the owner about the site, its natural history, and its value as a refuge for native plants and insects. The process took many months, but eventually the appraisals, surveys, title search, and other paper work were done, and the owner donated the 19 acres to TPE.



My familiarity with Iowa County remnants, gained through my roadside inventories, also led to other types of prairie preservation:

- In 1998, I volunteered to visit more than two dozen sites in Iowa County, where landowners had applied for Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) funding to do some savanna and prairie restoration. My job was to walk the areas, then map out the areas to be worked on, and how the restoration work should be done. I spent all or part of 20 days to complete my commitment to Peggy James, Director of the Natural Resource Conservation Service in Iowa County. I put in over 85 hours and 1,322 miles crisscrossing Iowa County. Peggy told me at the end of the project that her successful application for funding these projects passed the \$20,000 mark — the most she had ever received. No pay was given to me for this work.

Prairie Remnants in Crawford County



In 1994, I started inventorying Crawford County, spending 16 hours driving county roads. Again in 2000 and 2008-11, I spent over 60 hours in Crawford County and drove all the roads in the county. The last of these years were spent almost exclusively looking for the state-endangered Purple Milkweed (shown here). These inventories covered 1,100 miles and produced the locations of over 155 sites of the rare milkweed. All the locations were marked with G.P.S., then sent electronically to the WDNR for their records. In addition, I recorded dozens of "goat prairies" in Crawford County. Many SW-facing bluffs have small, relic prairies in varying levels of diversity and size. These small sites are home to the last of the County's native prairies.

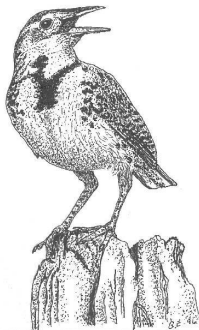
Prairie Remnants in Richland County

Beyond Crawford County to the east and north, I surveyed nearly all of Richland County. I found very little traces of native prairie in Richland County, but I did find many forested areas filled with native plant communities. The northern areas of the county have many interesting geological formations adjacent to stream wetlands.

Saving the Seeds

My roadside inventories had other payoffs besides purchases or besides protection of remnants through easements. These related activities involved raising prairie plants for their seeds and collecting seeds on private and public sites. Having sufficient seeds is, of course, key to any prairie restoration effort. Here are stories of 2 seed activities in which I was instrumental:

- In 1996, I had contacted Bill and Wendy Everham on several occasions. They had some 6 acres of vacant land near Hollandale, WI, and they were interested in allowing TPE to establish a prairie seed orchard on it, under a conservation easement. The main purpose for establishing such an orchard was to begin producing seed in larger amounts than could be collected from scattered sites, which were long distances apart. A second goal was to start the orchard with seed collected from 4 nearby counties (Grant, Lafayette, Iowa, and Green) in the hopes of preserving local genetics. A third goal was to be able to produce large amounts of seed to restore buffer zones around some of the sites that TPE owns, as well as to provide free seed for qualified educational groups such as schools, and for public places such as parks and highway right-of-ways.



Steve Hubner (County Zoning Administrator) became my right-hand man with the seed orchard project. He had read about TPE and contacted me to learn more. He was a hunter and interested in all things connected with nature. Steve and I proceeded to collect seed from about 10 different species for the orchard. On June 29, the two of us met at Yellowstone State Park where we had the TPE no-till drill stored. We got permission to use a tractor from the park to pull the drill, and with both pieces of equipment, we drove several miles north to the Everham property. Steve and I spent all day there planting the 6 acres to a prairie seed orchard, and were dog tired, but elated, about our first seed orchard. By 2015, the **Everham Seed Orchard** has changed its looks, but it produces an abundance of seed nearly every single year. The seed has been used on the prairie projects all over southwestern Wisconsin, and will continue to do so for years to come. Even though the Orchard is a “farm” whose crop is harvested, the prairie plants being raised create an artificial grassland. As a result, meadowlarks now nest here.

- In 1998, a small, but interesting, one-of-a-kind project took place in Dodgeville in Iowa County, WI at a city council meeting. I had been talking to the mayor about a prairie planting project that TPE was discussing with DOT personnel on a new highway interchange near town. I asked the mayor if there might be a chance the City could pass a resolution to officially adopt a threatened or endangered prairie species and urge its protection. My plan was to collect seed from all known sites of Pale Purple Coneflower (shown here) in Grant County. The collection would encompass seeds from about seven or eight different locations or sources. We would then plant those seeds at the Dodgeville highway interchange to help save the genetic strain. To my surprise and joy, the city did just that. I believe it was the first time anywhere a community had made a resolution of that kind.



Other Prairie Remnants

Over the years, my urges to explore new areas have led me on surveying trips that have covered all of Vernon, Monroe, nearly all of LaCrosse, nearly all of the west half of Juneau, about 3/4 of Jackson, and about 1/2 of Buffalo Counties. Most prairie remnants in these counties are on steep hillsides and at long distances from roads. They are also on private property. It goes without saying that it would take the better part of a decade to survey and inventory the many hundreds of remnants that were seen.

My search for high-quality prairie remnants of significant size has also taken me into northeastern Iowa, where I have driven about 85% of the roads in Clayton County. Nearly all of Winneshiek County has been looked at, and I did find one superb little remnant named Ludwig Prairie. It is owned by the county and managed by the county conservation board. I also surveyed about 1/3 of the roadsides in Allamakee County. Again, many "goat prairies" can be seen from the roads, but it would take years to survey and inventory them, as well as establish landowner trust and permission. All my routes and notes can be found in my collections of plat books and in Wisconsin and Iowa gazetteers.

I have documented over 8,600 miles traveled in Grant, Lafayette, Iowa, and Crawford Counties. My surveys prior to 1980 when I moved to Grant County also covered all of Green County. Many of those prairie remnants are now protected and managed. My notes indicated that in the late 1970s, there were between 150 and 210 acres of known prairie in Green County. Not knowing the precise miles of roads in Green County, I will estimate them at about 1,000 miles. That puts me at nearly 10,000 traveled miles for inventorying these 5 WI counties.

I think it would be within reason to say that I drove a total of another 8,000 miles in Vernon, LaCrosse, Juneau, Jackson, and Buffalo Counties in WI and in Winneshiek, Clayton, and Allamakee Counties in IA. While I have not logged every single mile driven, I do not think that it is out of line to say I have covered a total of at least 18,000 miles in my searches for native prairie remnants in WI and IA.

All of this was done at my own expense. In addition, with the exception of the remnants I found while tree planting, which I did as part of my first job with the WDNR in Green County (1974-80), all of these inventories were done on my own time.

TPE Organization Takes Shape

Organizations under Different Names

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, 3 different groups of prairie conservationists turned from hands-on work on prairie parcels, to how each group should be organized and under what name. Each came from different parts of southern WI: one from the southwest, one from Green County, and one from the south-central region. The story of how each group developed during this time is not necessarily separate and chronological but rather is colored by the close proximity of these groups and by interactions between them.

As I have told earlier, my prairie roots were put down in Green County, then I moved to Grant County in 1980 where I have lived ever since. After I moved away, some of my prairie friends in Green County were joined by others who formed a group that they called the *Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts*. This group published its first newsletter in Mar 1987 and became incorporated under that name in Mar of the following year. They continued publishing newsletters several times a year, the last one in winter 1991.

Meanwhile in Grant County, I found others who shared my love for prairies; we became known as the Southwest Chapter of the Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts. It was not a formal or legal association, but rather a useful descriptive name. We met regularly, usually at the annual banquet of the Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts so that each group could share news of their activities. We also began publishing our own newsletter, the first one in Aug 1987.

More importantly, my surveys of all roadsides, which I began in Jun 1987, led to finding a number of prairie parcels and to purchases of some of them. The first, the Thomas Wet Prairie, which was bought in 1988, was very fortuitous. (Note: its story was told earlier in "Saving Prairie Remnants in Grant County.") The landowner who wanted very much to save this prairie, located on neighboring land, was David MacGregor, a lawyer from Milwaukee. He became very interested in our mission to find and preserve prairie remnants in southwest WI, and he strongly suggested that we become incorporated and obtain our own 501(c)3 tax-exempt status. (The Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts was working on the same thing for their group at this time, but their tax-exempt status would not extend to us, because our association with them was unofficial.) I was excited about the chance to formalize our organization and thereby gain valuable fundraising advantages. I accepted David's offer to help us with all the necessary paperwork. The name we chose for our new organization was the *Southwest Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts*.

The formalization of the Southwest Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts, which took place on July 14, 1987, was an important step for prairie conservation in Wisconsin. On that date, the first board of directors was chosen; it was comprised of myself as President and Founder; Ruth Bierwirth, Vice-President; Catherine Eckert, Chairperson; Gary Adams, Director; Mary Bremmer, Director; and Gail Adams, Secretary and Treasurer. In that same month, David MacGregor completed the paperwork to incorporate our organization with the State of Wisconsin and to obtain non-profit status for us from the IRS.

In the next several years, the Southwest Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts became more and more active. At this point, I was regularly networking with very committed, like-minded prairie folks in the Dane County area. Whenever they would have seminars about prairie management, I tried to attend.

One of these that I remember occurred in 1991 at the McKay Center at the UW Arboretum. After the seminar, I stood up to introduce myself. After I told who I was and gave the name of my prairie organization (the Southwest Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts), I said I wanted to find and preserve every prairie remnant in Grant County. This was met with a round of applause followed by an active dialogue about what our group was doing, how it was structured, etc.

Conversations like this led to the idea of blending our two groups together in some way. In Nov 1991, at another meeting at the Arboretum, the Dane County group became a chapter, the *Prairie Oak Chapter* of the Southwest Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts. Initially, this linkage was informal, just as our chapter status with the Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts had been in the mid-1980s. However, we wanted to make the corporate vs. chapter relationship a formal one.

There were many reasons to do so, such as setting up small groups or chapters to work locally, preserving autonomy of the chapters, spelling out corporate responsibilities, providing funding for the corporation through shared membership dues and donations, etc. This required me to make numerous trips to Dane County and to network between our group from southwest WI and the new one from Dane County. We had lots of work to do, to begin modifying bylaws, setting up our formal structure, establishing chapter boundaries, and addressing many other details.

In addition to this more formal status that would benefit us both, we now needed a new name that would not be geographically limiting. The new name we chose was *The Prairie Enthusiasts*. Our first newsletter under that name was published in winter 1992. We then worked with our prairie legal helper, David MacGregor, to officially change our name and re-register us with the State of Wisconsin and IRS under the name The Prairie Enthusiasts. This work was completed in 1993 and involved setting in place an official corporate group as well as bylaws describing how chapters and the corporate entity would interact with each other. The Prairie Oak Chapter, which is now renamed the *Empire-Sauk Chapter*, would be one chapter of the larger group, and the unit I had gathered in southwest WI would become the *Southwest Wisconsin Chapter* of TPE.

At the same time, while our group was growing and actively purchasing and protecting remnants in southwest WI, the Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts failed to thrive as a group, for unknown reasons. This led to the idea of inviting members of that group to become a chapter of TPE.

Whereas the Prairie Oak members were eager to become such a chapter, the Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts were adamantly not. Their founder did not want to have his group folded into TPE. In addition, several individuals were distrustful. They felt that TPE would take over its financial assets, and/or apply restrictions on local prairie conservation activities. Several of these enthusiasts had been close friends of mine for years, so this was a frustrating experience for me.

To try to resolve these differences, I had many one-on-one talks with these folks, reassuring them that their concerns could and, more importantly, would be addressed to their satisfaction. As TPE President, I and several Board members made numerous trips to Green County in 1991 to work with the group. Finally, the *Prairie Bluff Chapter* of the TPE emerged, as we stated in our first TPE newsletter in the winter of 1992. This Chapter designation marked an end to The Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts as an entity under that name.

At this point, I had now strongly been involved in the formation of not only the global organization, TPE, but also its first three local chapters — the Southwest Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts, becoming a southwest chapter; the Empire-Sauk Chapter; and the Prairie Bluff Chapter.

In my President's Message in the Winter 1992 issue of *The Prairie Promoter*, I described how I thought the newly formed TPE and its chapters would function. The following is an excerpt from that message, which remains just as true now, 23 years later, as it did then:

"The Prairie Enthusiasts will be comprised of chapters throughout the state . . . and will be talking, educating, managing, purchasing, restoring, conducting inventories, and simply caring for and about prairies on a much broader basis. . . . Each chapter will have as much autonomy as possible, with TPE providing services (e.g., a regular newsletter, bookkeeping, insurance, etc.) that would be difficult and expensive for grassroots organizations to provide for themselves."

After TPE is Established, New Chapters Form

Once TPE was created as a corporate structure that could serve as an umbrella over prairie conservationists overseeing local activities within their own counties, exciting new possibilities opened up for setting up additional new chapters of TPE. This led to outreach in a number of geographic directions in WI, IL, and MN:

- The spring of 1994 was the year I met with a group of prairie people from northwest Illinois, the Northern IL Natural Area Guardians or NAGs. They had heard of TPE's successes and had contacted me (as TPE President) to express interest in how they might become a TPE Chapter. At that time, NAGs were subject to the rules of a federal farm agency, and they felt they would have more



autonomy as a TPE chapter. So we made arrangements for a field trip and meeting to discuss the idea. The result of these discussions was the formation of another new TPE chapter. By this time (i.e., summer of 1994), the NAGs group would become The Prairie Enthusiasts' 4th chapter, the *Northwest Illinois Chapter*.

- In 1996, I went up to Menomonie, WI to attend a meeting of around 50 people. The meeting had been scheduled on a weekday evening and was too far for me to drive there and back, so I enlisted the help of Jack Kussmaul, an attorney who had helped with some of our purchases. Jack was a pilot with access to a small private plane, so the two of us flew to the meeting. There we were joined by Harvey Halvorsen, a friend of mine with the area WDNR who was instrumental in working with the local group.

Like many groups with whom I had met, this one already had a keen interest in prairie conservation and wanted to know more about what the TPE had to offer. I answered questions about such topics as chapters being autonomous with freedom to choose what projects they wanted to support, how finances were allocated, what chapter board duties and responsibilities were, etc. We talked to folks for over two hours before Jack and I headed south to Boscobel.

Shortly after that, we learned that over twenty people who attended that meeting joined The Prairie Enthusiasts. A chapter with all the needed officers and directors formed within a few weeks. Originally, it was known as the *West Central Chapter*. The group later decided its territory was too big, so it split into the *Chippewa Savannas* and *St. Croix Valley Chapters*.

- In 1999, Walter and Alice Mirk (who had become Southwest Wisconsin Chapter officers) and I traveled to West Bend, WI for a meeting with interested people who wanted to establish a chapter of TPE in the area. Again, as TPE President, my role was to explain the benefits that TPE could offer a new chapter. These included providing liability insurance, a corporate newsletter and space in it to report chapter activities, access to other members with expert advice and experience with prairie restoration and conservation, nonprofit status that helped with fundraising, and frequently, donations from other existing chapters to new chapters to show support and provide start-up seed money.

This group had a difficult time getting started, and it languished for 12 years. In 2011, I journeyed to Waterville in southeastern WI to assist with the coalescing of this group. Three TPE leaders — President Evanne Hunt, Vice-President Jack Kussmaul, and Treasurer Nick Faessler — led the discussions that day. I joined the threesome with the thought that that my history and track record with prairie conservation and with TPE might be helpful in establishing this chapter. We met with about eight to ten people who had a lot of questions and comments.

The same year (2011), the Mirks moved to Watertown, Walter's hometown, which was situated in the southeast WI region in which the above two meetings had previously occurred. Soon after that, they proceeded to network with interested local prairie conservationists, and ended up finalizing, at last, the formation of the *Glacial Sands Chapter* of the TPE.

- In 2001, I got a call from Andrea Mueller asking me about TPE and asking if I would travel to Rochester, MN to speak to a group of people about how to form a new chapter, what the requirements were, and what TPE had to offer. Again, I was excited about having the opportunity to help another TPE chapter develop.

There were about twenty people at Quarry Hill Nature Center where the meeting took place. I told them that starting a new chapter was quite simple; all that was needed was President, Vice-

President, Secretary, Treasurer, and a couple of directors. A show of hands filled all of these positions on the spot! I then listed the benefits TPE could offer: space in the newsletter, liability insurance, nonprofit tax-exempt status that would allow tax deductions for people donating money to their chapter, and events such as our annual TPE banquet. These banquets offered several benefits. They were opportunities at which chapters could present their own activities and accomplishments to an audience of supporters. They also featured an auction, so chapters could donate items to raise money for their own projects.

I was very happy about the group's eagerness to become our newest chapter and said I would be available any time they needed me. A year later, in 2002, the Rochester-based enthusiasts would become the *Prairie Smoke Chapter* of TPE.

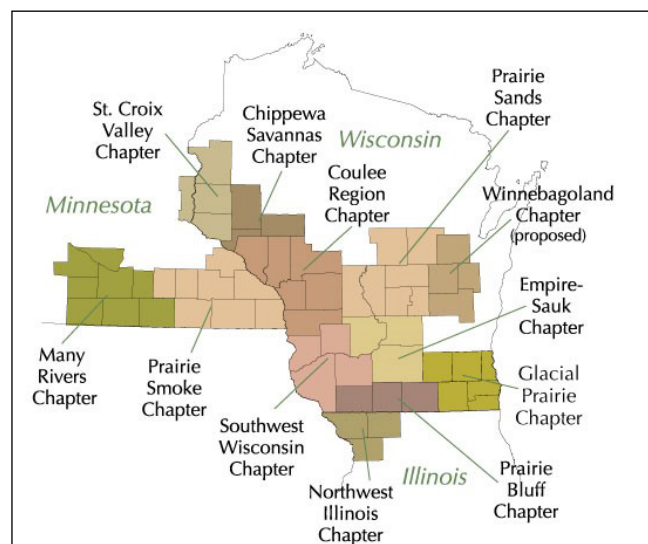
- Finally, in mid-March 2010, I headed north from Boscobel to Mankato, MN, a 6-hr drive, to participate in a meeting with a small, but intensely committed, group of future prairie enthusiasts interested in possibly forming another Minnesota chapter of TPE. I had ended my term as TPE President years earlier, so I called the then-President, Evanne Hunt, to see if she would attend. I offered to join her in Mankato to be of any help I could. We met with nine people, and had a two-hour, question-and-answer session. Evanne did a fine job of answering questions and outlining how TPE could help the new chapter. We had a great meeting, and by that summer, yet another chapter, the *Many Rivers Chapter*, joined our flock.

What stood out the most for me about that meeting was how deeply impressed some of the Minnesota people were that I, the founder of TPE, would travel such a long distance to participate in and support the forming of a new chapter! I was totally flattered by that.

One of the new chapter directors, Henry Panowitsch, was particularly impressed with my presence at that meeting, and we have kept in close contact ever since. He has recently become a bit disillusioned with TPE leadership, an expected occurrence as new leaders with new ideas come and go. Through discussions with him about this and through support and encouragement, I think I've been a stabilizing factor for him and his chapter.

- In addition to the above chapters in which I had some role in their formation, several other groups joined our organization. These were the *Coulee Region* and *Prairie Sands Chapters*, which were formed in 1997 and 2008, respectively. I believe these 2 groups had exposure to existing TPE chapters nearby, and after gaining information from them, petitioned us to join TPE.

The geographic distribution of these 11 chapters, along with one other that has been proposed in WI, is shown in the map at the right, which is reproduced with permission from the TPE's 2014 Annual Report. Since 2014 when this map was made, a few minor boundary changes have occurred, as well as changes in plans for new chapters. Nevertheless, this map remains representative of the current distribution of TPE activities.



My Roles in TPE

I headed the helm of prairie enthusiasts in southwest Wisconsin for 17 years, first as the appointed President of the Southwest Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts for 1 year (1987), as elected President of that group for the next 5 years (1988-92), then as elected President of the Southwest Wisconsin Chapter of TPE for the next 11 years (1992-2003). In that time, I saw a grassroots movement develop into a conservation movement that I can scarcely believe would have happened. Not in my wildest dreams would I have thought we could have done so much conservation work.

In the early years, along with being President of the Southwest Wisconsin organization/chapter, I also served as elected President of The Prairie Enthusiasts for 10 years (1992-2002). My life was nearly consumed with prairie conservation, and I loved every minute of it. I wrote many articles for our chapter news, as well as general educational articles for the quarterly newsletter, *The Prairie Promoter*.

As President, I had to do many things for which I did not have much aptitude. I will be the first to admit I have never had much of an attraction to public speaking or public relations, but in the name of conservation, I took on some of these challenges, and I did improve my skills. In addition, when we started TPE, neither I nor anyone else had any notion of ALL that would be required to preserve prairie remnants and to educate people about the importance of doing so. It has become a lifetime commitment.

One of my many duties as President was to write a President's Message for *The Prairie Promoter*. This amounted to 50 messages over the years, with 13 written as President of the Southwest Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts, and 37 as President of the new corporate organization, The Prairie Enthusiasts. Topics written about seemed to fall into a number of common themes:

- Calls to action. As new remnants came into our hands, immediately there was need for volunteers to begin restoration and management. Besides benefitting the land itself, this work brought with it, people benefits as well, which I described in Winter 1998:

“Birds of a feather do flock together: to do controlled burns, to remove woody vegetation, and to collect and plant seed. These Chapter activities offer unparalleled opportunities to learn, to share information, and to enjoy one another's company.”

Calls to action also solicited donations for specific properties, and attendance at our annual banquet. In addition to *asking* volunteers for something, another theme in the majority of my Messages was *thanking* our many volunteers for all that they do. In my second-to-last Message (Fall 2001), I said this about our volunteers:

“I have said this many times, and each time, I am convinced that the people who are doing the work are completely dedicated, committed, passionate, optimistic, creative, and tireless. Like a pit bull, our members have literally locked onto an idea and can't let it go.”

- Outreach. The organization needed different things at different times. Messages talked about bringing younger members into the fold, or seeking volunteers to fill Chapter officer and board positions. Another Message gave a recipe for how to form a new chapter. Beginning in Winter 1999, three different Messages championed the need to hire an executive director to focus on expanding membership and raising funds.
- News. Messages were a great platform in which to highlight new Chapter accomplishments and exciting new activities. I also used them to give book reviews; discuss impending legislation such as “takings legislation” that might affect our work; and report on field trips, prairie meetings, and

management seminars attended. Some such meetings were local; others were out of state. In Winter 1997 after attending annual meetings of the Missouri Prairie Foundation and the Iowa Prairie Network, I wrote that “as usual, when one leaves such gatherings, it is with the warmth of new friends and the feeling that prairie conservation is advancing on a bigger scale than one previously thought.”

- Organizational growth. The door to my virtual office was always open, but President’s Messages were still needed (and more than once) to encourage feedback — both comments and suggestions — about any and all organizational activities. The Messages were also opportunities to reflect on the organization’s growth, which, at times, seemed imperceptible. I remember marveling at these incremental steps when I wrote in Spring 1999 about how TPE came to be:

“One meeting at a time, then thousands of hours of meetings. One work party at a time, then thousands of brush stems and trees cut and countless weeds pulled, year after year. One mile driven to a work project, then thousands of miles driven to talk with landowners about preserving and protecting prairie remnants, to talk with community groups and schools, and to help members and non-members alike with on-site consultations.”

- Opinions. My “soap box” was a great pulpit from which to share my thoughts on the work we were doing. One message, in Fall 1990, talked about genetic history and diversity:

“I’ve begun to view remnants as small islands or miniature ‘Noah’s Arks’ of genetic history and diversity, surrounded by agricultural monocultures. When one looks at these sites from this viewpoint, one begins to realize that management needs to focus not only on the native forbs and grasses, but also on the other forms of life that call these arks home.”

Other soap boxes talked about the need for compassion for a plant species facing extinction and the need to reflect on childhood connections to nature.

I tried to keep the tone of my Messages positive and uplifting, but that proved impossible all of the time. Current events brought disappointments, which I shared. These included such things as losses of roadside remnants, and rural development .

Several times, my anger really surfaced. One such occasion was prompted by use of the word “environmentalist” in a derogatory way. Another was widespread roadside spraying by local governments. Still another was the despicable practice of native plant poaching by those I referred to as low-life plant diggers. In most of these discussions, which may have been viewed by some as rantings, I tried to insert a positive spin, such as the importance of redoubling our efforts to educate town officials about the value of tiny roadside prairies.

All in all, the President’s Messages were important to me because they were opportunities to speak from the heart. They also proved to be an important communication tool, and writing of them has been continued in quarterly newsletters, to this day, by presidents who now lead TPE.

In the Spring 1991 issue of *The Prairie Promoter*, I added something beneath the newsletter name at the top of the first page. It was a quote I found memorable enough to live by: “People create landscapes that reflect their morality, humanity, and culture, and these landscapes, then in turn, determine our fate.” It was a message, which I had come across earlier (it was actually written in 1986 by Sam Broder), that spoke to me about the potential to reconnect people with their world. This message, from which I had to drop 3 words (“then in turn”) in order to make it fit at the top of our newsletter, stayed in that key place to guide — and hopefully inspire — readers of the next 25 issues of this newsletter.

In 2002-03, my elected leadership positions for the organization ended, as I have stated above. By that time, the corporation had evolved considerably, and I found myself sitting next to professionals and bureaucrats who had a high level of understanding of the complicated work that was needed. They brought skills to this work that I did not have, so I was more than happy to pass the baton to the next generation of committed prairie conservation leaders.

This, however, proved a difficult time for me. I no longer had a specific niche in the organization to fill. I knew for certain that I did not want to retire and turn to something else in life. Without a role that I was asked by the new TPE leaders to play, I realized I needed to reinvent my life.

Up until now, it had been my life's dream, to be able to leave behind me some of the beauty and mystery of nature that had inspired me all of my life. This involved being able to save — for future nature lovers, biologists, botanists, historians, and dreamers — at least a small part of our precious native prairie landscape.

To be able to continue to strive toward this dream, I realized I needed to turn back to my early roots in prairie conservation, so I resumed the field activities that I had started doing in the late 1980s. This involved looking for high-quality prairie remnants, contacting landowners to obtain permission to manage those remnants on their lands, and reaching out to volunteers to help me do this restoration.

At the same time, I attended Board meetings as Director At-Large, and in 2008, I was elected to serve on the corporate board of directors as "Director Emeritus", a title of which I am very proud. In the dozen years since I last served in an elected capacity as President of TPE and its Southwest Wisconsin Chapter, I also continued to communicate with the large network of prairie enthusiasts whom I had met and with whom I had worked over the years, both locally and as part of TPE's many chapters. This networking eventually led to various organization-related activities such as participating in meetings of TPE; being involved in committee assignments; participating with one or more work parties a week; and supporting chapters with donations of original artwork for fundraising, with advice, and any other way that I could contribute.

At 68 years of age in 2015, I still do prairie conservation, and I have not left the passion and activities that have filled my last 4+ decades. Doing this keeps me active in all levels of the organization on a weekly basis.

In mid-October 2015, for example, as I finish writing this narrative, I am coordinating work on an exciting new prairie, the Iris Drive Prairie, which I found near Gays Mills, WI while doing inventories in Crawford County. This has involved getting permission to do restoration work on the site, starting that management (mostly brush control), and obtaining an appraisal. Next on the list will be discussing sale of the parcel and farm on which it sits with the landowner, and if he agrees to sell, working with the WDNR's Stewardship Fund and private donors to raise funds for the purchase. In addition, I recently met with Southwest Wisconsin Chapter officers to propose (successfully) having face-to-face Board meetings (instead of conference calls). I traveled to Green County to meet with Prairie Bluff Chapter members to discuss a new idea for chapters to create vehicle window stickers advertising TPE. I have also invited a group of members from the Mankato Chapter to come out to my farm in Nebraska on the edge of the Sandhills. Witnessing the Sandhills — one of the largest and best grasslands in North America — is a great tool for imparting a different, broader perspective on the much smaller prairie remnants remaining in the Midwest, for which we are their stewards for future generations. (For this reason, I have invited and hosted visits, to my Sandhills farm, by dozens of TPE members over the years.)

There is always some prairie activity in which to become immersed, and I would not have it any other way.

Other Activities that have Supported Prairie Conservation

A Picture IS Worth a Thousand Words

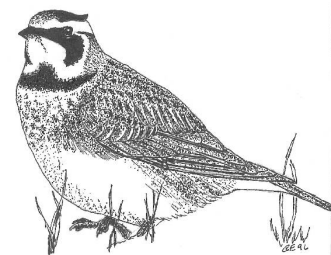
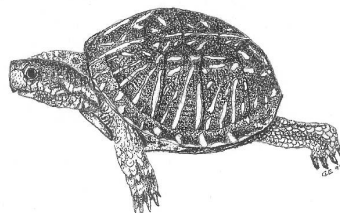
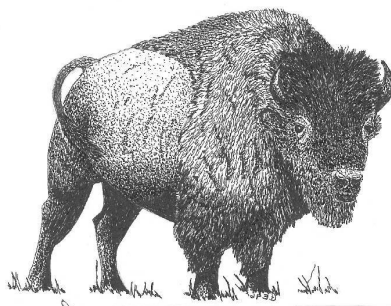
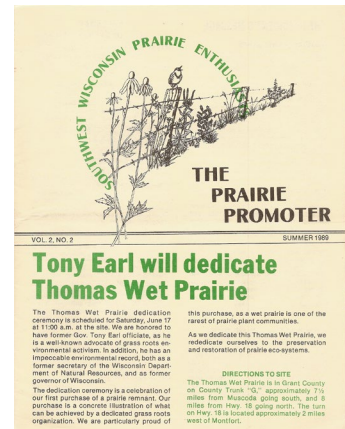
In 1989, I started doing a series of 11- by 14-inch, pen-and-ink drawings of prairie plants. I originally started this just for fun, to give life to numerous pages of articles in our newsletters. However, once I got going, I decided to focus on drawings of rare, threatened, or endangered native prairie and savanna plant species. I thought such illustrations in our newsletters could serve as a rudimentary field guide to the less-common prairie species, for our members. Gary Adams (an officer in the organization at the time) would write a short profile or biography of these species, to accompany the artwork. These drawings soon began to be a staple in our organizational newsletters, beginning in 1989.

I began this work using fine-tipped markers, but graduated soon to India ink and a rapidograph, which allowed finer lines and dot patterns for shading. Over the course of several winters, I finished a portfolio of 23 illustrations. The Southwest Wisconsin Chapter of TPE paid for the printing of about 200 copies of each one. They were then sold as sets of 23 to raise money for prairie conservation.

In the same year (1989), the Southwest Wisconsin Chapter held a competition for a logo that would appear on its quarterly newsletter. I submitted several entries and was pleased that of the 15 entries, one of mine was selected as the winner. This drawing featured a meadowlark on a fencerow with prairie flowers along it. (A larger image of this drawing appears on page 1 of this narrative.) I am happy to say that this logo artwork was used on our quarterly newsletter for the next 17 years. Beginning with this first issue containing this new logo (the summer 1989 issue, shown here), we called this newsletter *The Prairie Promoter*. This name, first used by the Southwest Wisconsin Prairie Enthusiasts for its newsletters, has been retained and is still being used by TPE.

In 1997, the Southwest Wisconsin Chapter produced a 77-page booklet entitled “An Introduction to the Tallgrass Prairie of the Upper Midwest: its History, Ecology, Preservation, and Reconstruction.” Previous to the printing of the booklet, I spent many, many hours doing illustrations for it. By the time the booklet was published, it included 104 of my drawings.

I also played key roles in two other small publications printed by TPE. One, written by Scott Fulton (now TPE’s Vice-President), was entitled “Plants and Animals of the Tallgrass Prairie: A Picture Book and Nature Guide.” It took some of my drawings from the longer tallgrass prairie publication (described above) and featured them in a short booklet for a younger audience. Originally designed as a coloring book for children, it has been reprinted several times, because, I am told, adult readers like its artwork. In addition to various prairie plants, the booklet features prairie creatures — namely, mammals, reptiles, amphibians, butterflies, and birds that not only live on prairies, but also sometimes are found only there. A few of these interesting critters are shown here.



I also wrote and illustrated another small publication printed by TPE. It was entitled “Aspen Control on Prairie Remnants.” Brush control is a never-ending prairie management and restoration effort. Whatever cloning-growing species needs to be eradicated — whether aspen, sumac, or grey dogwood, some of the techniques remain the same. This publication gave me a forum for gathering — in one place — various management tips on this topic.

In addition to using my drawings in publications and the organization’s newsletters, I found several other uses for them. For a number of years when TPE recognized a deserving volunteer for his or her outstanding contributions to prairie conservation, I did a highly detailed pen-and-ink illustration. The drawing original would then be given as part of the award. The gift of these originals seemed to be greatly appreciated by award recipients. In more recent years, I have donated an original to the Chapter sponsoring TPE’s annual banquet. This original was then raffled off as a fundraiser for that Chapter at the banquet.

I donated rights to use all of my pen-and-ink prairie artwork to TPE. Because a number have been given away, I have no count of their total. I do remember, though, that some drawings, such as one of the rose mallow (shown here), were so intricate that a single one took 25-30 hours to complete. In calculating hours of time in creating these drawings, I estimate that they represent hundreds of hours of work between 1989 and 1996.



Flint Knapping and Prairie Records

Due to a life-long interest in Native Americans, as well as native prairies, I have endeavored to learn how Indians made stone tools, a process called flint knapping. While participating in flint knapping demonstrations at Silver Mound, a 12,000-year-old quarry near Hixon, WI, I had a conversation with Ernie Boshart, UW-LaCrosse Professor and Board member of the Mississippi Valley Archeological Society. I told him I had met a farmer who owned land on the west side of the quarry and who might be interested in selling it. After our knapping demo, Ernie contacted Paul Gardner, Midwest Regional Director of the Archaeological Conservancy, a national organization that works to save archeological sites in North America. The quarry seemed to offer a great opportunity for TPE and the Archaeological Conservancy to work together, with one group protecting the prehistoric site, the other doing native prairie and savanna restoration on the site. I met up with Paul and Ernie, and they both felt that prairie restoration was a great idea. In 1999, Paul and I were joined by 2 others — Ernie Boshart and Jim Sime, Director of the Southwest Wisconsin Chapter of TPE and someone with whom I have worked on prairie conservation for a long time. The four of us met with the owner of the land, Terry Phaff, and discussed the purchase of 40 acres for preservation. Later that summer, the transition was completed. The Coulee chapter of TPE took on the job of restoring prairie in the fields there.

When I wasn’t in the field doing prairie restoration or networking with members, or in my back yard doing flint knapping, I wrote daily journals to keep track of my activities to preserve our natural resources. This began in the late 1970s for my first job as an LTE for the WDNR when I needed daily activity notes for time reporting. Eventually, this daily journal writing became a habit.

Over time, I wondered if these records — kept for nearly 40 years — might have potential value to others in the future. They laid a foundation for what prairie plants existed and where, just as a foundation was given to me in books by the iconic early Wisconsin botanists, Curtis and Fassett. In addition, they traced the arc of how TPE grew from a motley crew of 8 in Green County to an impressive regional prairie organization spanning 3 adjoining Midwestern states. The journals told the stories of which prairie conservation efforts took root, and which ones did not.

Listed in these journals for each year are most, but by no means all, of my efforts that have gone into prairie conservation: 103 seed collecting trips adding up to 585 hours; 22 sessions of seed cleaning adding up to 119 hours; 33 trips for seed orchard establishment at Hollandale in Iowa County and at a second site, Sullivan's, in Grant County; as well as plantings (totaling 166 hours) on WDNR lands at Liberty Marsh in Albany, WI, the Albany Wildlife Area, and the Sugar River Trail, all in Green County and at Yellowstone State Park in Lafayette County.

In connection with prairie restoration, I have donated considerable hours doing various jobs. In burning prairie remnants, I have participated in over 58 burns accounting for 282 hours. In terms of hands-on work on prairies, I have spent over 2,112 hours and 479 work parties cutting brush and trees, pulling weeds, fencing, spraying, posting signs, and stump-treating trees and brush with herbicide. In addition, I donated over 166 hours filling seed orders for one Chapter that sold this seed for fundraising.

All of my prairie conservation activities in the last 41 years has been done without any pay and has been completely outside of any job. Based on information I collected from my journals between 1975 to 2015 (for which one year is missing, and 2 years have only three months of records each), I have donated over 7,247 hours of my time to prairie conservation and another 133 hours to other conservation projects, all which were done on my own time. These included restoring a trout stream, making and erecting over 200 bluebird boxes, and making and erecting dozens of wood duck boxes.

The Upshot: Prairie Conservation Comes of Age

It is now 41 years since the start of a Wisconsin grassroots prairie conservation movement, which began in 1974 with the purchase of the Muralt Bluff Prairie — the first spark in our prairie conservation fire. At that time, the prototype of what evolved into TPE was a small, informal, and not very organized group of volunteers. By 2015, The Prairie Enthusiasts has matured into a highly respected, hardworking, innovative, and well-structured conservation organization, whose membership is drawn not only from the Upper Midwest, but also from throughout the country.

Over the years, many positive growth changes have taken place within TPE, but our passion, commitment, and dedication to prairie and savanna conservation and restoration have never wavered. The importance of our message that started in Green and Grant Counties 4 decades ago has spread across southern and western Wisconsin and then northern Illinois, and from there, north to west-central Wisconsin and into Minnesota. Most recently, our message has moved into southeastern Wisconsin.

From its small band of volunteers in three chapters, to over 1,350 members and eleven chapters in three states, the passion for prairies and all the rare species that depend on their care and protection has continued to grow. Whether it has been education, raising funds for outright purchase of prairie remnants, helping other members and non-members on their prairie projects, or a combination of all of these activities, each chapter has always been encouraged and supported in its efforts.

The eleven chapters of TPE have many outstanding and unique projects to their credit, and over the years, we have developed many close and cooperative partnerships with many organizations ranging from national organizations to local groups. These include: (1) *National organizations*: US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Dept. of Agriculture/Natural Resources Conservation Service, The Nature Conservancy, Archeological Conservancy, Trout Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, and National Turkey Foundation; (2) *State agencies*: Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources (WDNR), Minnesota DNR, Illinois DNR, and Wisconsin Dept. of Transportation; (3) *Regional organizations*: Natural Resource Foundation of Wisconsin, Natural Heritage Land Trust, Driftless Area Land Trust, and Mississippi Valley Conservancy; and (4) *Local organizations* (all in WI): Dane County Conservation Fund, Blue Mound Project, Green County Conservation League, Green County Board, Grant County Zoning, and Dodgeville City Council.

As of TPE's 2014 Annual Report, The Prairie Enthusiasts now owns 24 sites, totaling 1,734 acres of prairie and savanna remnants that are being restored and managed to protect the native species dependent on that habitat. The Prairie Enthusiasts also holds conservation easements totaling 1,051 acres at 10 sites. These protected sites — covering 3 states (WI, IL, and MN) — also provide a last refuge for dozens and dozens of rare, threatened, and endangered insect, plants, birds, and mammals, not to mention microscopic organisms. Along with ownership and easements, the Enthusiasts have also bought and transferred another 300 acres to other land trusts for protection. Not included in these figures is an unknown number of acres of prairies preserved on private lands as a result of education and advocacy by TPE members.

Our work has not gone unnoticed, and several awards have been bestowed on TPE for our efforts. In April of 1999, the Aldo Leopold Chapter of the Society for Conservation Biology recognized TPE for its outstanding contributions to preserving Wisconsin's biological diversity. In 2001, the Iowa County Land Conservation Committee honored the Southwest Wisconsin Chapter of TPE with its Wildlife Habitat Award. In 2012, the Iowa County Land Conservation Committee, for a second time, honored TPE's Empire-Sauk Chapter with its Wildlife Habitat Award. In 2013, TPE was recognized by Gathering Waters Conservancy, an organization providing consulting services to land trusts, as their choice of Land Trust of the year. Again in 2014, TPE was recognized by the Iowa County Land Conservation Committee, and given its Wildlife Habitat Award for Sylvan Road conservation projects.

Along with these awards, TPE has received nearly one million dollars in grants to purchase and manage prairies and savanna remnants. These grants have come from many sources, including international organizations funding wildlife habitat conservation. To date, The Prairie Enthusiasts has assets of over 7.5 million dollars.

However, the real value of TPE is not measured in dollars, membership numbers, chapter counts, field trips, work parties, or presentations. The real value of what we save and protect — the land itself and the species that live there — is beyond a price that can be measured.

