

U.S. Fish and Wildlife
Private Stewardship Grants Program
Application

Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area
Prairie Restoration Project

- Objectives:
- 1) Restoration of degraded remnants of original prairie that are supporting rare and endangered species on privately owned land in important grassland focus area.
 - 2) Build landowner appreciation and understanding of native prairie ecosystem.
 - 3) Integrate large habitat complexes around ecologically significant core area.

Duration: October 1, 2006 -- September 30, 2007

Costs Summary: Total Grant Request \$141,424
Total Match Provided \$15,700

Primary Contact: Dr. Renae Prell Mitchell
P.O. Box 620556
Middleton, WI 53562-0556
262/473-2956, tpedirector@idcnet.com

Submitted by: Renae Mitchell Date: 1/20/06
Renae Prell Mitchell, Executive Director, The Prairie Enthusiasts

Project Description

The Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area (MRPHA) encompasses 49,000 rural acres in southwestern Wisconsin (see attached brochure and map). The area supports more than 90 prairie remnants, and thousands of acres enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Fourteen grassland bird species of conservation concern breed in MRPHA. This landscape currently provides habitat for one federally threatened species, two species of federal conservation concern, twelve species on Wisconsin's Threatened or Endangered list and eleven species from Wisconsin's special concern list (Table 1).

Table 1. Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area Elements of Conservation Concern

	Status	Comments
Nesting Birds		
	WI Threatened	Partners in Flight Score 14
		Partners in Flight Score 17
		Partners in Flight Score 15
	Special Concern	
		Partners in Flight Score 15
		Partners in Flight Score 15
	Special Concern	
Henslow's sparrow	US Species of Concern	WI Threatened
Northern harrier	Special Concern	Also winters in MRPHA
	Special Concern	Savanna species
		Partners in Flight Score 14
		Partners in Flight Score 16
Upland sandpiper	Special Concern	
Vesper sparrow		Partners in Flight Score 15
Western meadowlark	Special Concern	
Plants		
Prairie bush clover	US Threatened	Midwest endemic species; globally vulnerable (G3)
Smooth-sheathed sedge	WI Endangered	
Woolly milkweed	WI Threatened	
Prairie Indian plantain	WI Threatened	
Hill's thistle	US Species of Concern	Globally vulnerable (G3), WI Threatened
Creamy gentian	WI Threatened	
American fever-few	WI Threatened	
Small white lady's-slipper	WI Threatened	
Fame flower	Special Concern	G3G4
	Special Concern	
	Special Concern	
	Special Concern	
	Special Concern	Genus endemic to Midwest plus Virg. (G3)
	WI Endangered	Globally vulnerable (G3)
	WI Endangered	Globally rare (G1G2)
	< 1% remains	Globally rare (G1G2 – G2G3)
	< 1% remains	Globally rare (G1 – G2)
	Special Concern	

The prairie ecosystem, once a dominant feature in the upper Midwest, covering millions of acres, is now almost nonexistent. Less than one-tenth of one-percent of the original prairie sod still remains intact. As a consequence, many species that rely upon this ecosystem are now rare.

Rare species in MRPHA are concentrated on prairie remnants. Most of MRPHA's prairie remnants lie on land owned by individual families. In recent years, conservation partners have contacted most of these families to bring their attention to the value of the prairie remnants and to discuss management. Very few of these landowners have adequate interest in Wisconsin's prairie biota to commit to the time and financial costs of prairie restoration.

Military Ridge conservation partners have learned that many of these families are willing to allow prairie restoration work on their land if the families themselves are not required to initiate the work or get involved in government contracts. As partners conduct the restoration work, the families learn about the significance of grassland habitats as well as the threats to grassland species. Families who have worked with conservation partners in recent years have spread restoration interest among their friends, and we have developed a reputation as trustworthy partners. The Prairie Enthusiasts' friendly, low-pressure methods have alerted many local families to the existence of endangered grassland communities in their midst. This has built pride in the local landscape.

Grassland birds are the fastest declining group of species in North America, primarily due to loss of critical habitat. Scientists from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, The Nature Conservancy and other agencies and experts have identified MRPHA's mix of prairies, pastures, farmland, and lands enrolled in conservation programs as one of the best opportunities for large-scale grassland protection and management in Wisconsin and the upper Midwest. Birds that have disappeared from much of southern Wisconsin still thrive in the Military Ridge grassland area. Nine conservation organizations have joined efforts to promote grassland, savanna, and stream quality in this important area (see attached Memorandum of Understanding).

On all sites in this project, habitat for the grassland birds listed in Table 1 will be enhanced, expanded and recovered. In addition, such habitat improvements will benefit one federally listed and 11 state listed species (Table 2), as well as dozens of species likely to become listed in the near future. The project will affect 32 sites with remnant prairie; three are owned by TPE, 29 are privately-owned (Table 3). 577.2 acres of unplowed, original prairie sod are found on all sites combined. In addition, non-remnant prairie grassland habitat that is contiguous with or proximal to the targeted prairie remnants totals 1,491 acres which, when combined with the restored prairie remnant acreages, creates large tracts of uninterrupted habitat for declining grassland bird species. The combined area of prairie remnants that will be managed for this project and proximal, non-remnant grasslands is 2,068.2 acres.

Table 2. Listed Species - Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area Prairie Restoration Project 2006-2007

Site	US End - G2	WI End - G1G2	WI End - G3	WI Thr - G4?	WI Thr	WI Thr	WI Thr - G3	WI Thr	WI Thr	WI Thr	WI Thr	WI End
			1									
A-Z											1	
Anderson		1										
Bigler Family		1		1	1		1			1	1	
Denure					1		1		1	1		
Fox Point							1					
Goplin Prairies		1	1							1		1
Haag			1									
			1		1			1	1	1		
	1		1				1					
Rue, Shea, Mueller			2				1			1		
Swenson			1				1			1		
Underwood, Schurch-Thomson		2	2		1		2			1		
Vivian			1						1			
Williams	1		1		1					1		
Total Number of Sites:	2	5	12	1	5	0	8	1	3	9	1	1

Table 3. Project Sites - Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area Prairie Restoration Project - 2006-2007

	Ownership	Acres of remnant prairie	Acres of non-prairie grasslands	Total acres
Anderson	Private	4.6	210	214.6
A-Z	TPE	58	24	82
Bigler	Private	40	65	105
Black	Private	8	36	44
Denure	Private	15	59	74
Fox Point	Private	9.8		9.8
Geiger	Private	3.2		3.2
Goplin, Eddie	Private	20	75	95
Goplin, Erik	Private	2.4	34	36.4
	Private	18	66	84
	Private	10		51
Lee	Private	10	32	42
	Private	10	4	14
	Private	8.6	29	37.6
	Private	4.3	34	38.3
Meyers		12		12
		15	110	125
Paul		0.5		0.5
Powell		20	3	23
		0.6	133	133.6
Rosenthal	Private	33	13	46
Rue	Private	7	70	77
Schuelke	Private	55	241	296
	TPE	17		117
Shea	TPE	11	40	51
Stauffer	Private	1	31	32
	Private	15	11	26
	Private	7	10	17
	Private	2.2	18	20.2
	Private	43		43
		3,800	118	118
Total:		577.2	1491	2068.2

These remnant prairie sites are being lost to invasion by trees, shrubs, and non-native weeds because of insufficient resources to implement the level of remedial management needed to get these degraded sites into good shape. Many of the prairie remnants are located adjacent to fallow fields which host grassland bird species. By removing trees and brush from the prairie remnants, this project will increase grassland habitat continuity and improve site suitability for grassland birds. To increase the long-term viability of these relatively small patches of habitat, they also need to be expanded

through planting of prairie onto adjacent buffer lands. Once the major recovery work is completed, existing available resources will be able to cover the routine maintenance of these sites. This vital work effectively complements the continuing efforts of MRPHA partners who encourage and assist landowners in creating or maintaining grassland habitat through other land uses such as pasture, conservation program enrollment and compatible grass-based crops.

Impact on Federally Listed Species

Prairie bush clover (*Lespedeza leptostachya*) The proposed management work will enhance approximately 100 acres of prairie bush clover habitat that is currently threatened by brush invasion (one site) and by invasive plants such as spotted knapweed, sweet clover and parsnip (other site). There is also a good chance that the project's proposed restoration and management work will reveal and release previously undetected prairie bush clover populations at additional sites. The prescribed burns proposed for this project will likely increase the growth, reproduction, and recruitment of prairie bush clover. The type of management work being proposed here has been associated with population increases of four- to five-fold at the two largest prairie bush clover populations in Wisconsin.

Impact on Globally Rare (G1-G3), State Listed Species

Regal fritillary butterfly (*Speyeria idalia*) Currently, there are essentially only seven population centers of regal fritillary butterflies still remaining in Wisconsin. The MRPHA represents one of these population centers, and will have its regal fritillary habitat greatly improved and expanded through tree and brush clearing. During the 2003-2004 PSGP grant period, the TPE project "Southern Wisconsin Prairie Recovery Project" yielded exciting results: Three project sites where this rare insect was previously unrecorded proved to be appealing to them, evidently due to the tree and brush clearing which took place over the winter. The numbers of acres to be affected in this current project are 342.

Red-tailed leafhopper (*Aflexia rubranura*) This prairie-specialist leafhopper is known in only 30 Wisconsin sites. Five of them will be affected by this project. Approximately 89 acres will be enhanced by this project through tree and brush clearing and weed control.

Hill's thistle (*Cirsium hillii*) This Midwestern endemic prairie species is known on only 55 sites in the state of Wisconsin. This project will improve Hill's thistle habitat on eight of these sites through tree and brush clearing and weed control. During the 2003-2004 PSGP grant period, the TPE project "Southern Wisconsin Prairie Recovery Project" yielded exciting results: This rare species at least doubled its numbers at two sites where trees and shrubs had been suppressing them. These areas were cleared by contractors over the winter; the thistles appeared in great numbers in these areas the following growing season.

Impact on State Listed Species of Federal Concern

Henslow's sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*) Although strongly declining as a species and extirpated from large portions of its range, this species verges on common in fallow fields within MRPHA. It breeds in duffy stands of grass with minimal woody vegetation. As prairie is cleared on all sites, this bird will find more available habitat for shelter and nesting.

The Partners

The Prairie Enthusiasts is a non-profit land trust operating in parts of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Illinois, with a membership base of 1,100. The heart of its mission is to conserve prairies, savannas, and related fire-dependent ecosystems of the upper Midwest. In addition to providing permanent protection of land through acquisition of title and easements, it works extensively with private owners of prairie and savanna remnants to help them restore and maintain their natural areas. The TPE Restoration Manager, TPE President Richard Henderson, and a troop of enthusiastic volunteers will all offer support to this project in the form of expert guidance, labor, equipment and supplies. Please see the enclosed brochure for further details. The Prairie Enthusiasts owns three of the sites in this project, and all 29 private individual landowners included in this project will be cooperating through written agreements with The Prairie Enthusiasts.

Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area is a partnership of 9 conservation organizations. The Project Coordinator, Kristin Westad, contacted many of the families listed in Table 3 and took inventory of their prairies. She contacts landowners regularly through a newsletter, local newspaper press releases, tailored letters and field visits. The Project Coordinator is based in the local NRCS office, and can ease coordination between the Prairie Enthusiasts' efforts and the requirements of CRP and other USDA programs. After this project is completed, the Project Coordinator will continue contact with the landowners to encourage them to maintain the restored areas and protect them for the future. The Project Coordinator will also be able to link landowners to other partner organizations that may help them protect natural resources on their land. See attached commitment letter.

Statement of Work

- 1) Prescribed burns will be conducted in early spring or late fall on portions of most sites. The long-term goal is to burn all portions of all sites, but on a staggered, rotational basis over multiple years. The average fire return interval will range from two to five years depending upon site condition and needs. Initially, limited subsets of some sites that are highly degraded may get burned annually until site conditions improve. Fire breaks will be cleared and mowed. Prescribed burns will be conducted exclusively by volunteers; no grant dollars will be spent for burning.
- 2) Invasive native and non-native tree and shrub cover will be removed to the greatest extent possible and practical. The long-term goal on these sites is to have treeless prairie habitat, except where, in a limited number of cases, original oak savanna trees

are present. In those areas, native trees and shrubs will be retained at a species composition, density, and structure considered natural for oak savanna. Another exception will occur where the Bell's vireo (*Vireo bellii*, a threatened species in Wisconsin) is present on sites greater than 30 acres in size. On those sites, patches of nesting habitat (not to exceed 30 feet in diameter) of primarily prickly ash (*Zanthoxylum americanum*) or American plum (*Prunus americana*) will be left at the rate of no more than one patch per ten acres. Lastly, low growing native shrubs that are an integral and characteristic component of the prairie flora will not be removed. This includes leadplant (*Amorpha canescens*), New Jersey tea (*Ceanothus americanus* & *C. herbaceus*), sand cherry (*Prunus pumila*), and prairie willow (*Salix humilis*). Trees and shrubs will be controlled by a combination of cutting and treating the cut stumps with glyphosate herbicide, basal bark application of triclopyr herbicide (in the least sensitive areas only), and mowing or chopping without herbicide.

3) Control of invasive, non-native herbaceous plants. These include reed canary grass, sweet clover, wild parsnip, spotted knapweed and crown vetch. They will be hand cut/pulled and selectively mowed. We may also selectively use herbicide.

4) Prairie seed collecting and planting will be done at most sites. Seeds will be collected from the project sites and from other prairie remnants within a 20-mile radius. At the Schurch-Thomson tract, a one-quarter-acre seed orchard produces local-source prairie seed for some of the sites. The seeds will be planted into remnant sod areas cleared of brush and, at Schurch-Thomson, into old-field (former cropland) habitat adjacent to the remnants.

Personnel

The Prairie Enthusiasts (TPE) will be the lead entity, with TPE president and chair of land stewardship, Richard Henderson, as the lead person within TPE. TPE will hire a Restoration Manager to implement the stewardship, should this project be funded. Other expenses include fees for accounting, payroll services and Workman's Compensation insurance. All grant moneys will be going through TPE.

Volunteers will conduct all prescribed burns and seed planting, and most of the seed collecting. No grant dollars will be spent for burning. Volunteers will also do an estimated 10% of the tree, brush, and weed control work. Both volunteers and contractors will prepare sites for prairie plantings and mow the developing plantings. Contractors will also do the rest of the tree, brush, and weed control work.

Baseline condition and milestones

Heavy tree and brush invasion exists on all the project sites to varying degrees from 10% to 70% cover. About 80% of the sites have significant sweet clover and parsnip problems. A couple sites have crown-vetch and knapweed problems. Two sites have reed canary-grass. One site has a five-acre old-field area to be seeded to prairie vegetation.

Work would be done from October 1, 2006 to September 30, 2007 as follows:

October-January	tree/brush control (depending on snow depth and temperature)
October-March	mow fire-breaks, prescribed burns
November	plant prairie
March-April	prescribed burns, spotted knapweed control, girdle aspen
May	first mowing of prairie plantings
May-August	tree/brush control on areas of non-prairie-remnant sod
June-November	seed collecting yellow sweet clover, reed canary-grass, leafy spurge and crown-vetch control white sweet clover and wild parsnip control, second mowing of prairie plantings
August-September	follow-up brush control, sow seed in cleared areas

Evaluating success

Success will be quantified by the use of surveys, inventories, and photos to assess:

- 1) The increase in establishment or recovery of the diversity and flowering of prairie vegetation.
- 2) The percent reduction of tree and brush cover.
- 3) The increases in the populations of the targeted endangered/threatened species.
- 4) The amount of acres burned.

Long-term commitment

The long-term goal is to protect and maintain the habitat on these sites through fee title, perpetual conservation easements, or management agreements with the landowners (preferably 10-year or longer agreements). We will work with the landowners by whatever means they prefer. The Prairie Enthusiasts are committed to providing the maintenance management of these sites once the major remedial work is completed.

The Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area has the benefit of a large group of capable partners. Three of the partners are land trusts. Each of these has a different role in protecting targeted pieces of Military Ridge land from development. The partners have almost 600 acres in conservation easements and 1,300 acres of nature preserve. Research from WDNR and University of Wisconsin scientists helps to guide restoration and protection work within MRPHA. The Partners for Fish & Wildlife program has 22 agreements with landowners within the area. The NRCS and Southwest Badger Resource Conservation and Development work with farmers to promote prescribed grazing. Six landowners have Wildlife Habitat Incentive Program contracts. The Blue Mounds Area Project teaches the local public about grasslands and biodiversity through a lecture series, field trips and newspaper articles.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources is currently developing a feasibility study which could lead to establishment of a large land protection project which would include the MRPHA. In the current draft, the DNR project would set a goal of establishing permanent grass cover on at least 25% of the landscape. This long-term goal would support the grassland improvements the Prairie Enthusiasts propose in this project.

Project Budget

In addition to summary provided below, please see Table 4 below for specific budget details, including site priority rankings. In addition to the request of \$116,400 for labor, supplies, and materials, we are requesting \$25,024 for the Restoration Manager (salary, Social Security, travel and expenses), accountant fees, and Worker’s Compensation insurance. The Restoration Manager performs the following duties:

- Conduct pre- and post-management surveys of sites
- Draft site-specific management/restoration plans and agreements
- Where appropriate, solicit competitive bids for management
- Set up contracts between landowners, TPE and contractors
- Oversee contractor work
- Document restoration progress through photomonitoring or mapping
- Conduct surveys of target species, both plant and animal
- Compile progress report and final report for granting agency

In-kind contributions are based on actual costs of the supplies, materials, or time of paid staff used. General volunteer labor is based on \$16/hour (this is a standard amount used under National Park Service guidelines). Prescribed burns will be conducted exclusively by volunteers; no grant dollars will be spent for burning. The value of in-kind prescribed burns is based on acres burned, using a sliding scale. The rate used is \$100/acre for burns of less than 5 acres, \$80/ acres for 6-10 acres, \$60/ acre for 11-20 acres, \$40/ acre for 21-40acres, \$20/ acre for burns of greater than 40 acres.

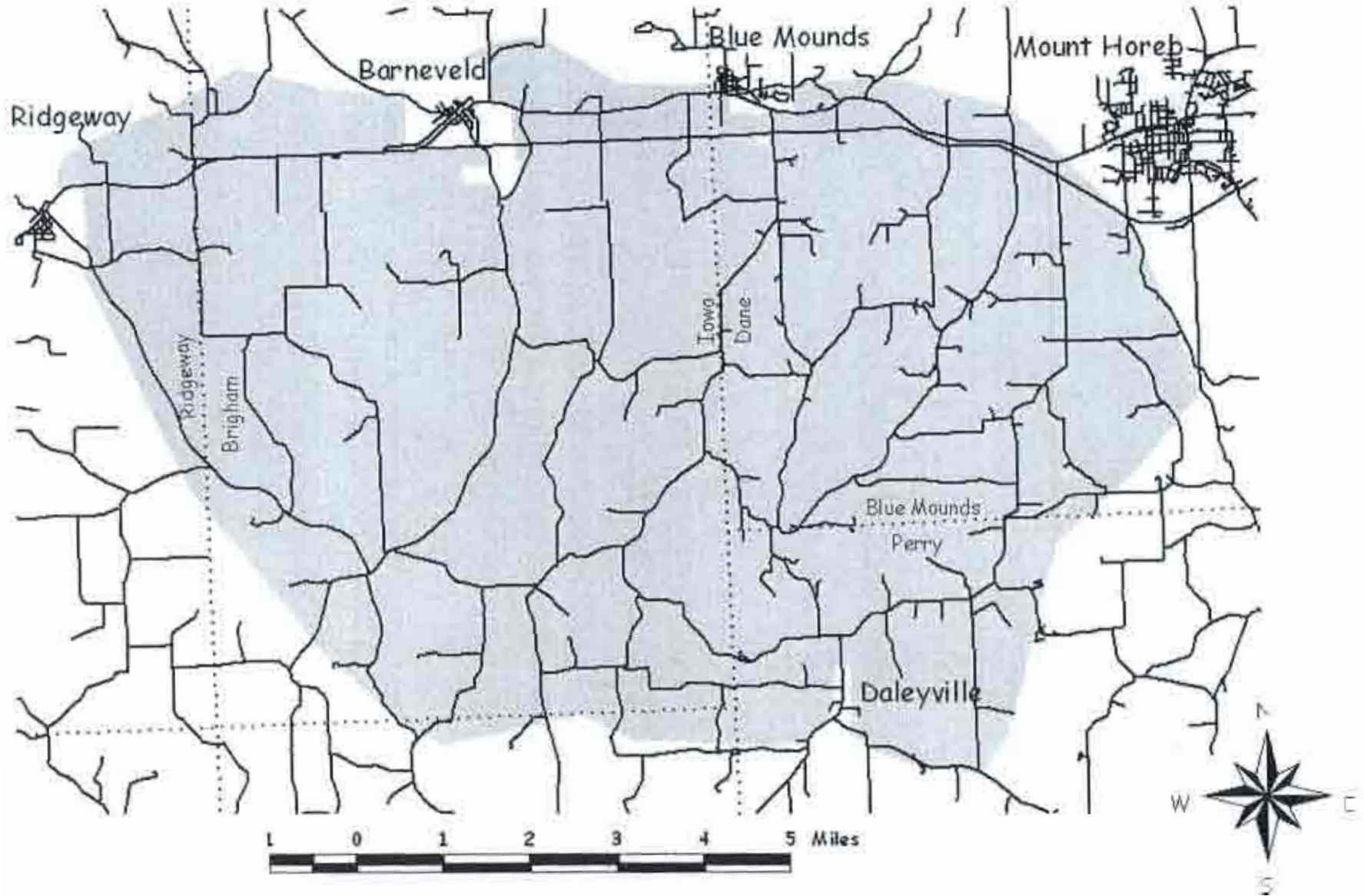
Summary

Contract Work for Stewardship	\$116,400
Restoration Manager at \$18/hour for 1,040 hours ..	\$18,720
Social Security at 7.5% \$1,404
Administrator and Accountant Fees .	\$2,000
Worker’s Compensation	\$300
Travel and Other Expenses ..	\$2,600
Total Dollar Request	\$141,424
Total Match \$15,700

Table 4. Project Site Budgets - Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area Prairie Restoration Project - 2006-2007

Priority	Site	Brush/tree cutting	Planting	Weed control	Total \$\$ Request	Match Commitments		
						Nonburn	Prescribed Burn	Total Match
1	Schuelke	5,000			5,000	100		100
2	Shea	5,000		4,000	9,000	400	600	1,000
3	Powell			5,000	5,000		560	560
4	Schurch-Thomson		2,500	1,000	3,500	1,500	800	2,300
5	A to Z	2,500		3,000	5,500	400	900	1,300
6	Fox Point	2,500			2,500	100		100
7	Eddie Goplin			1,300	1,300	1,300	540	1,840
8	Denure	8,000		3,000	11,000	400		400
9	Swenson	2,500		2,000	4,500		500	500
10	Monroe-Romolino	2,500		5,000	7,500	500	2,100	2,600
11	Erik Goplin	3,800			3,800			0
12	Williams			1,000	1,000		1,700	1,700
13	Haag	2,500			2,500	100		100
14	Underwood			1,000	1,000	1,500		1,500
15	Hayward-D'Alessio	1,300			1,300	100		100
16	Losenegger	3,000		500	3,500	200		200
17	Anderson	1,300			1,300	100		100
18	Black	1,300			1,300	100		100
19	Ripp	600			600			0
20	Rosenthal	8,000			8,000			0
21	Bigler	15,000		3,000	18,000			0
22	Stauffer	1,300			1,300	100		100
23	Vivian	2,500		2,000	4,500			0
24	Lorenz	2,500			2,500	100		100
25	Paul	1,300			1,300			0
26	Meyers	2,500			2,500	100		100
27	Gelger	1,300			1,300	100		100
28	Van Haren	1,300			1,300	100		100
29	Lee	1,300			1,300	100		100
30	Mahoney	1,300			1,300	100		100
31	Rue	1,000		1,000	2,000	200	300	500
				Total:	116,400		Total Match:	15,700

Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area



MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

By and Among the
Natural Resources Conservation Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture
and
The Nature Conservancy
And
Pheasants Forever
And
Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of Interior
And
Blue Mounds Area Project
And
Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
And
The Prairie Enthusiasts
And
Driftless Area Land Conservancy
And
Southwest Badger Resource, Conservation, and Development Council

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among the above listed organizations and agencies collectively referred to as “partners,” is to establish a framework for cooperation and participation in the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area (MRPHA), that relate to the protection, management, and restoration of prairie, oak savanna, and other grassland habitat; the protection of local water quality; the sustainability of the area’s predominantly rural agricultural landscape and economy; and the protection of sensitive, threatened and endangered plants, animals and communities that are contained within the grassland landscape. It is the common intention of the partners to pursue these activities in a manner which best protects the biodiversity of the MRPHA. This MOU is not legally binding, but in signing this MOU each partner agrees to participate in good faith to best of its abilities and resources.

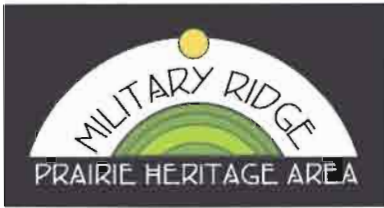
Partners will work together to achieve the following common goals. These goals summarize the more specific goals of the MRPHA as outlined in the MRPHA Site Conservation Plan:

1. Provide and maintain viable prairie, savanna, and grassland habitat, as well as aquatic habitat, for the many plants and animals that depend on these habitats for their survival, including area-dependent grassland birds.
2. Maintain an economically viable rural and agricultural landscape by encouraging conservation objectives on lands that remain in private ownership.
3. Provide and encourage traditional recreational opportunities which are compatible with the conservation goals of the MRPHA.
4. Integrate best applied science within the MRPHA through the use of continued monitoring and adaptive management.

successful with their respective activities, insofar as these activities further the goals of the MRPHA project.

3. The partners agree, consistent with their respective missions and as their funding allows, to provide their respective skills and resources to the appropriate extent in a coordinated and organized manner to meet the conservation goals of the MRPHA project. Each partner will work with the team to identify areas where it can contribute and those contributions will be reflected in an action plan to be completed by December 2003. The plan can be modified and amended over time by the mutual agreement of the partners in an effort to implement best practices and strategies.
4. The partners agree to use a community-based approach by working openly and cooperatively with landowners, local governments, and members of the local communities to better understand and integrate community needs and concerns as they relate to the conservation goals of the MRPHA project. Partners recognize that doing so will lead to a more sustainable and successful project in the long-term.
5. The partners will strive to broaden the base of interest and support for the MRPHA project by finding ways to encourage appropriate economic development that are consistent with the goals of the MRPHA project.
6. The partners agree to work with the farming community to maintain agriculture as an economically viable life-style within the MRPHA and surrounding area. This will be done through such activities as encouragement of best management practices, appropriate protection of working farms, and encouraging agricultural practices that are compatible with the conservation goals of the MRPHA, such as managed grazing.
7. The partners will strive to identify, pursue, and utilize opportunities from funding sources to leverage or match funds for projects of mutual interest.
8. The partners agree to integrate best applied science with prairie, savanna, and grassland restoration through the use of established research studies, monitoring plans, and adaptive management as they relate to the ecology of grassland and freshwater ecosystems, the compatibility of agriculture and grassland conservation, and/or the MRPHA project specifically.
9. The partners agree to act with the highest level of professional conduct in dealing with one another and all landowners, elected officials, the general public, and other potential partners.

This Memorandum of Understanding shall be in effect when signed by all of the partners. This MOU may be revised or amended, including amendments to add new partners, upon consent of all the partners represented. Any partner may terminate its participation in the Military Ridge project team and its rights and obligations under this MOU by providing written notice to the other partners.



138 South Iowa Street, Suite 3
Dodgeville WI 53533-1543
608/935-2791 x134
kristin.westad@rcdnet.net

19 January 2006

US Fish & Wildlife Service
Private Stewardship Grant Program Committee

Dear Committee Members:

I am writing in support of the Prairie Enthusiasts' proposal to restore prairie remnants on private land in the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area (MRPHA). The Prairie Enthusiasts have been a leading partner in MRPHA since its first development in the late 1990s. The volunteers have performed management work on several private sites. They have also contributed their expertise by developing management plans and leading field trips.

I started in my present position in 2003. I contact landowners to encourage them to manage their land to the benefit of grassland species and stream quality. In the beginning, many of the landowners were quite unfamiliar with the idea that grassland is a declining ecosystem or that cutting down trees might somehow be good for nature.

In the last few years, the Prairie Enthusiasts have secured grant money which allowed them to expand the scope of their work. They hired a staff person to work closely with families who own prairie remnants. This person educated the families about their special pieces of natural heritage as well as arranging contractors and overseeing the quality of the work. This process has given a great boost to my project. The neighbors see the evidence of Prairie Enthusiasts' work and talk to each other about it. People get the impression that we conservation groups are helpful, and doing nice things in the neighborhood.

The Prairie Enthusiasts have helped open doors to me. They've achieved this by doing good work restoring native prairies. We have better connected grassland habitat and higher quality prairie remnants than we did a few years ago. The Prairie Enthusiasts and other local land trusts are also taking the next step by permanently protecting parcels through fee acquisition and conservation easements.

Please consider supporting the Prairie Enthusiasts proposal so that they can continue doing this valuable work.

Sincerely,

Kristin Westad