



Star Prairie Land
Preservation Trust, Inc.

P.O. Box 88
Star Prairie, WI 54026



Star Prairie Land Preservation Trust, Inc.

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A NEWSLETTER FOR OUR FRIENDS

April 2012



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ACTIVITY UPDATES



Boy Scouts Work and Learn at the McMurtrie Preserve

Boy scouts from the Eagle River Scouting District completed merit badges and camped out at the McMurtrie Preserve this past October. The scouts were part of a larger group from the Eagle River Scouting District who were guided by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District. The scouts completed outdoor work projects and education activities including touring the McMurtrie Preserve with our trail guide.

The McMurtrie Preserve is available for outdoor educational activities on a pre-arranged basis. For more information, contact education committee chair, Mike Reiter, by calling 715-294-3950 or emailing education@starprairielandtrust.org.

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Easement Documentation and Monitoring

The Star Prairie Land Preservation Trust property committee used our new *Site Monitoring Form for Conservation Easements* to inspect currently held easements this past year. Regular monitoring is an important tool used to ensure that easement conditions are followed – especially when ownership changes. Monitoring also provides an opportunity to communicate with landowners each year. Annual monitoring follows *Baseline Survey Reports* which are prepared when the easement is accepted.

The Star Prairie Land Preservation Trust board and consultants used guidance from the national Land Trust Alliance to create the monitoring forms and process. The Land Trust Alliance provides national *Land Trust Standards and Practices* which help ensure that the conditions of conservation easements will be permanent. For more information about donating a conservation easement in southern Polk or northern St. Croix County, contact our property committee chair Mike Kelly at 715-246-4109 or property@starprairielandtrust.org.

For more information go to: starprairielandtrust.org



Land Conservation Protects Species

Land conservation efforts of the Star Prairie Land Preservation Trust and other groups help to preserve rare, threatened, and special concern species of Wisconsin. The Star Prairie Watershed Preserve, located just east of the Village of Star Prairie on the north side of County Highway H, is a good example of land conservation for species protection. The Star Prairie Land Preservation Trust acquired the 40-acre property with the help of a North American Waterfowl Conservation Act grant in 2005. U.S. Fish and Wildlife property adjoins the property to the north and west.

Western Prairie Landscape

The preserve is located in the western prairie ecological landscape in northern St. Croix County. Historically, this ecological landscape was a major area for mesic prairie. This is the only landscape in Wisconsin where prairie potholes were characteristic of the landscape. Prairie potholes are shallow wetland depressions that may be wet only during early spring. They provide important nesting habitat for migratory waterfowl.

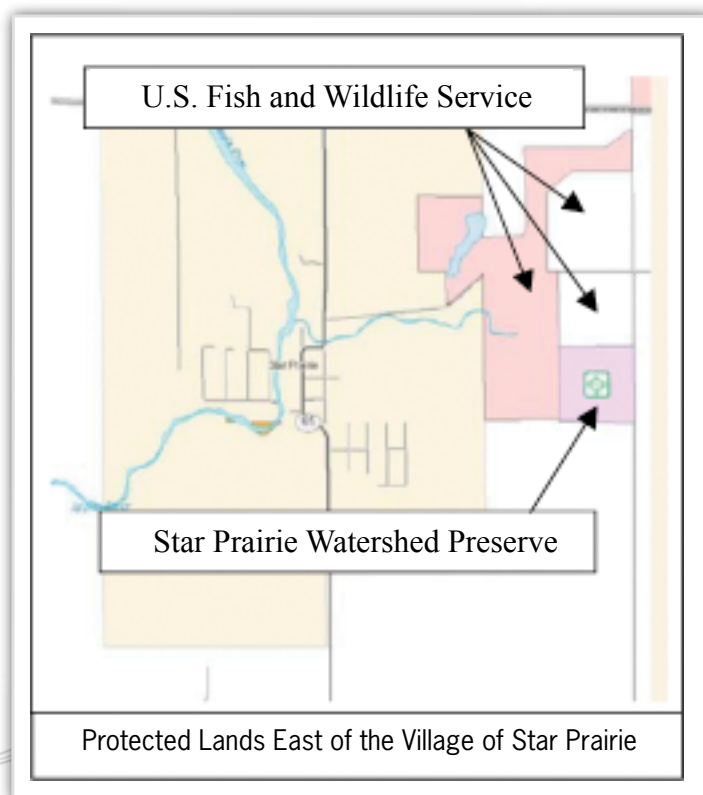
This grassland community occurs on rich, moist, well-drained sites. The dominant plant is the tall grass, big bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*). The grasses little bluestem (*Andropogon scoparius*), indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*), porcupine grass (*Stipa spartea*), prairie dropseed (*Sporobolus heterolepis*), and tall switchgrass (*Panicum virgatum*) are also frequent. Many flowers are present including prairie docks (*Silphium* spp.), lead plant (*Amorpha canescens*), heath and smooth asters (*Aster ericoides* and *A. laevis*), sand coreopsis (*Coreopsis palmata*), prairie sunflower (*Helianthus laetiflorus*), rattlesnake-master (*Eryngium yuccifolium*), flowering spurge (*Euphorbia corollata*), wild bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*), prairie coneflower (*Ratibida pinnata*), and spiderwort (*Tradescantia ohioensis*).

Threats to Mesic Prairie

Very few mesic prairie remnants remain. In most areas, the land was plowed right down to the edge of the potholes. Prairie is maintained by fire. Today, commercial and residential development limits the opportunity for prairie restoration and for managing prairies using prescribed burns. Invasive species that threaten prairies include non-native grasses such as smooth brome, Kentucky bluegrass, and Canada bluegrass; crown vetch, sweet clover, wild parsnip, multiflora rose, and Eurasian honeysuckles.

Wisconsin's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Plan strongly recommends preserving the few small existing remnants of mesic prairie. Ideally these remnants would be surrounded by restored prairie with potholes of small wetland ponds. Examples of remnant prairie remain in St. Croix County including the Roberts Railroad Prairie and the Hammond Cemetery Prairie. The plan identifies the best restoration opportunities adjacent to federal Waterfowl Production Areas – exactly where the Star Prairie Watershed Preserve is located!

Information from www.wi.dnr.gov



Species of Greatest Conservation Need

Mesic prairies provide important habitat to many species. The *Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan* identifies several birds often associated with these prairies. Preserving mesic prairie is critical to preserving these species described as “species of greatest conservation need” in the wildlife action plan.

The Henslow's Sparrow, a threatened species in Wisconsin, is found in mesic prairies in St. Croix County including in the town of Stanton where the Star Prairie Watershed Preserve is located. The threats to the Henslow's Sparrow read very much like the list of threats to mesic prairie. With continued land conservation, we will make strides in reducing these threats to the Henslow's Sparrow and other threatened species!

Birds of Mesic Prairies	
Barn Owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>
Bobolink	<i>Dolichonyx oryzivorus</i>
Dickcissel	<i>Spiza americana</i>
Eastern Meadowlark	<i>Sturnella magna</i>
Greater Prairie-Chicken	<i>Tympanuchus cupido</i>
Henslow's Sparrow	<i>Ammodramus henslowii</i>
Northern Harrier	<i>Circus cyaneus</i>
Short-eared Owl	<i>Asio flammeus</i>

Threats to Henslow's Sparrow

- Succession of grassland habitats to shrubland and woodland, due to lack of fire or other management to suppress woody growth.
- Any changes in climate that lead to loss or degradation of preferred habitat.
- Intensification of agriculture, including early and frequent harvest of hay and conversion of idle grassland to row crops or tree plantations.
- Loss of grassland habitat due to development.
- Disturbance of grassland nesting cover during the breeding season.
- Henslow's sparrows require relatively tall, grass-dominated dense vegetation with a significant litter layer and standing dead vegetation. Burning or haying entire fields should not occur more often than once in 3 years. Species prefers grass-dominated habitat, so any management that promotes dominance by flowers will pose a threat.
- This species does not tolerate grazing well.
- Invasive woody plants can degrade quality of nesting grasslands, if woody canopy cover exceeds 30%.
- Aggressive invasive species, including yellow parsnip, crown vetch, leafy spurge, thistles, reed canary grass, and some goldenrods can degrade habitat quality of grasslands for this species.
- Agricultural pesticides may pose a threat in certain cases on winter, migration, and breeding grounds.



“Mesic prairies occur on rich, moist, well-drained soils and support a tall native grass community dominated by big bluestem.”