Our First Newsletter!

First envisioned in 1986, Swamplovers, Inc. has grown and evolved both as a concept and as a reality. Now entering its 25th year, Swamplovers and its ever-growing list of formal and informal partners cooperatively manage the 460-acre Swamplovers Nature Preserve, a mosaic of the ecological and biological heritage of prairie, savanna, oak woodland, mesic forest, and wetlands in southwestern Wisconsin’s Driftless Area. This permanently-protected landscape is a biodiversity hotspot and is home to more than 1,000 species, 68 of which have at-risk conservation status.

We are using the occasion of our 25th anniversary to launch the first volume of our newsletter to thank all of you who have contributed to our efforts over the years, and to share with you some highlights of our 2010 accomplishments.

Every story has a context, and a sensible starting point for our first newsletter should be to summarize the background history of the Swamplovers Foundation. In 1986, a large block of land immediately west of Cross Plains had been plotted for a future housing development. A group of five friends, Lee Swanson, Gerry Goth, and Joe, Tom, and Jim Kuehn, pooled their resources and purchased the property. The group had no intention of developing the land, initially planning to use it for hunting and outdoor recreation. Lee had an extensive background in both conservation and hunting, while Gerry and the Kuehn brothers had a blooming passion for prairie restoration. In 1987, the group formed a sub S corporation named Swamplovers, Inc. Why the name “Swamplovers”? This question gets asked a lot! The group was sure local people would think they were crazy for buying a parcel of “unproductive” (!) land, and Joe Kuehn coined the name Swamplovers to portray the purchase (and the group) in jest.

The Swamplovers group hit the ground running, enrolling in the CRP program and beginning prairie and wetland restoration projects less than six months after the closing date. Restoration efforts at the property have been gaining momentum ever since.

(Continued on page 6)
2010 Highlights

Swamplovers Receive Wetland Restoration Award

Left to right: Gerry Goth, Lee Swanson, Alice Thompson, Kate Redmond, and Tom Kuehn

In the News...

On June 30, the Swamplovers Nature Preserve was featured on the WKOW Channel 27 evening news. News reporter Jamie Hersch joined Swamplovers, Heidi Nelson, and Greg Matthews to highlight the benefits of the WDNR Landowner Incentives Program (LIP). The Foundation was one of the participants of this program from 2008 through 2010, co-sponsoring efforts to restore and enhance more than 100 acres of the Preserve’s remnant prairie, oak savanna, and open oak woodland habitat.

Swamplovers Participates in Fresh Start Program

Since 1998, the Fresh Start Program has provided hands-on job training to enable at-risk youth ages 16 to 24 to become self-sufficient and productive citizens. In 2009 the Foundation joined the ranks of other conservation organizations participating in this program. Fresh Start crews assisted Foundation staff and contractors in weed control, seed collection, and planting prairie buffers. One of the Fresh Start crew even expressed serious interest in forsaking a life of crime in favor of a life of restoration!

On October 21, the Swamplovers Foundation was awarded the 2010 Wetland Heroes Restoration Award from the Wisconsin Wetlands Association. The award acknowledged their long-term commitment to wetland restoration and conservation. This award recognizes the efforts of some of Wisconsin’s wetland conservation leaders and the issues they promote.
Collecting Baseline Data for Future Wetland Restoration Project

Proper planning is an important factor influencing the success of every restoration project. The Preserve’s south marsh contains remnant patches of sedge meadow persisting within a matrix of the aggressive wetland invader reed canarygrass. Additional patches of remnant vegetation have appeared in the south marsh’s firebreaks following several years of regular mowing, indicating the presence of a persistent native species seed bank at this site. The Foundation is determined to reverse this invasion and restore this imperiled sedge meadow remnant to its historical condition.

In November, the Foundation hired Thompson & Associates, a firm specializing in wetland delineations, and Integrated Restorations, a firm with expertise in reed canarygrass mitigation, to collect baseline data that will be used for developing a comprehensive restoration plan for the south marsh. Consultants examined the soils of the south marsh and determined that hydric soils indicative of wet herbaceous meadows were present. In fact, it is likely that these soils developed over the course of thousands of years under a shifting mosaic of wet prairie and sedge meadow vegetation. Geologist John Attig and the USGS are in the process of collecting core samples from the south marsh (these data are still being analyzed).
Tree and Brush Clearing Accomplished with Turkey Stamp Program

Contractors finished clearing 14 acres of fire-intolerant elm trees and invasive shrubs (consisting mostly of buckthorn and honeysuckle) from the Preserve’s west ridge oak savanna remnant. Preserve staff observed two broods of nesting turkeys inhabiting this area following management. This management unit additionally supports several at-risk species, including brown thrasher, red-headed woodpecker, Hill’s prairie thistle, and a satellite population of giant yellow hyssop.

Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid Seedling!

While the Foundation has achieved great success in our orchid transplanting efforts, for the first time one of these federally-threatened plants has emerged from planted seed at the Preserve. Jon van Altena (of Koshkonong Corners State Natural Area) made the discovery during our annual sedge meadow tour, commenting that the finding increases the chances of successfully establishing a viable satellite population of this orchid species.

Work Begins on Recently-Discovered Prairie Remnant

Several years ago, Gerry discovered a small prairie remnant midway along the east ridge of the Preserve. Although this postage-stamp prairie appears on 1937 aerial photos of the Preserve, it had since become overgrown with eastern red cedar and buckthorn. Beginning in September, funding assistance from a USDA-NRCS Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) Grant enabled the Foundation to begin rescuing this remnant and the surrounding oak savanna habitat.
Fruits of our Efforts: Long-Term Sedge Meadow Restoration at the Preserve

Remnant sedge meadow habitat in the Preserve’s eastern valley

Return of Mead’s Milkweed to Wisconsin’s Prairies

Relic populations of Mead’s Milkweed (Asclepias meadii) are extinct in Wisconsin, but still exist in isolated populations across the Midwest. In 2010, Gerry, working with Larry Rizzo from Missouri and Steve Roels from Kansas, re-introduced ten transplants of this species into one of the Preserve’s prairie remnants. The Foundation hopes to eventually restore a viable satellite population of Mead’s Milkweed at the Preserve.

WDNR LIP Program Co-Sponsors Mesic Prairie and Oak Woodland Restoration Project

Remnant mesic prairie at the Preserve

Losses of high-quality sedge meadow habitat in southern Wisconsin exceed 75%. For decades, the 24.5-acre sedge meadow remnant in the Preserve’s eastern valley was in peril. Hydrological disturbance, nutrient inputs, and fire suppression had encouraged invasion by aggressive plant species such as reed canarygrass and box elder. In 1999, Swamplovers and its funding partners began efforts to restore this habitat gem from the bottom-up. These efforts have achieved tremendous progress.

Cooperative funding from the Landowner Incentives Program (LIP) has enabled the Foundation to carry out enhancement of 7 acres of remnant mesic prairie and 40 acres of remnant open oak woodland on the Preserve’s eastern ridge. In 2010 volunteers and contractors conducted controlled burns, invasive species suppression, and cleared trees and invasive shrubs from this habitat mosaic. Additional restoration efforts are scheduled for 2011.
Our First Newsletter... (Continued from page 1)

In the 1990s a relic population of Pale Purple Coneflower (*Echinacea pallida*), a Threatened Species, was found on the property while clearing trees and brush from a ridge top to make room for a picnic shelter. This discovery put the Swamplovers’ enthusiasm into overdrive, and the pace of restoration quickened; soon the Foundation began to hire professional contractors to assist with tree and brush clearing and reintroduction of prairie fires to the property. In 2007, the Board of Directors agreed to contract a professional consulting firm to compose a detailed long-term habitat management plan for the Preserve, and also to assist with implementing management and coordinating biological survey efforts.

Meanwhile, in 2003 the group decided unanimously to protect the property in perpetuity, and in 2005 a permanent conservation easement went into effect between the Foundation and the Ice Age Trail Alliance, with additional county, state, and National Park Service involvement. The Foundation sold the property to the IATA at a reduced rate, set up the non-profit Swamplovers Foundation, and then used the dividends from the land sale to provide the Foundation with a trust fund for restoration project costs. The balance of project costs are matched by grants from government agencies and other non-profit organizations, corporate giving, and also from private donations. Additionally, it is not uncommon for specialists, consultants, and contractors to provide some services *pro-bono* or at a discount rate. All time and expenses related to the Foundation’s administrative responsibilities are personally donated by the Swamplovers Board of Directors, who annually contribute hundreds of hours to fulfill these tasks. *This means that 100% of grants and donations are used exclusively for on-the-ground management.* In 2010, the Board decided to dissolve the Swamplovers Corporation and donate all of its holdings to the Swamplovers Foundation. This transfer will be completed in 2011.

In our first 25 years, Swamplovers has evolved from an idea to a conservation reality, expanding its scope, mission, and partnerships along the way, while concomitantly increasing the quality of the habitats it protects. The Foundation has been aided every step along the way by scores of individuals who helped us shape and achieve our vision. *This is your story as much as it is ours, and we couldn’t have done this without your input, skills, and dedication. THANK YOU!!!*
The Swamplovers
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University of Wisconsin Forestry Department
US Geological Survey

Yellow Hyssop (Threatened)
I would like to be added to Swamplovers email list (to be notified of upcoming events)
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We need your help!

Remember, 100% of your tax-deductible donation will directly support on-the-ground conservation and management (rather than administrative costs).

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The Swamplovers Foundation, Inc.
ATTN: Land Management Fund
5053 County Road KP
Cross Plains, WI 53528

Photos courtesy of Gary Nelson, Gerry Goth, Craig Annen, WKOW-TV, and Wisconsin Wetlands Association

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