Swamplovers Website Launched!!!

The Swamplovers Foundation has joined the digital age with the launch of its new website. We are indebted to Austin Pethan for sharing his energetic effort and web design talents to make this a reality. Be sure to bookmark the Foundation website and check its event calendar often!

www.swamploversfoundation.org

The Next Step: Targeted Wildlife Habitat Enhancement

Our most recent tally indicates that 134 at-risk species inhabit the Swamplovers Preserve, 81 of them animals. Wild animals require a variety of structural elements in their habitat, including native shrubs and tree saplings, snag trees, rotting wood, tree cavities, rock outcrops, basking logs, calling perches, oak and hickory grubs, and hibernacula. These habitat structural elements are utilized for cover and concealment, nesting, foraging, courtship rituals, hibernation, and thermoregulation. For example, several species of insectivorous birds require the presence of downed wood (called nurse logs), which are inhabited by the insects that serve as their food source. Nurse logs also function as a substrate for the mosses, lichens, and fungi that play critical roles in nutrient and material recycling in natural systems. Thus, many of these elements play dual roles of habitat structure and as community assembly components.

Prior to restoration by the Foundation, the Preserve endured more than 140 years of fire suppression and pressures from repeated waves of species invasions and changes in surrounding land use (the Cross Plains area was settled in the early 1850’s). These stressors drove out indigenous species and altered the physical structure of the landscape. By the time restoration began at the Preserve, entire age classes of oaks, along with the majority of native shrubs, had already been wiped out by buckthorn invasion, and the landscape no longer resembled its open prairie-savanna character. This affected the wildlife that originally inhabited the Preserve, since most habitat structural elements were either altered or eliminated.

In the wake of decades of intensive restoration and management at the Preserve, the next phase in the restoration process will center on habitat enhancements and ensuring replacement of existing tree stands with stands of similar structure and composition. The ultimate goals of these efforts are to increase the Preserve’s carrying capacity for at-risk species and promote oak regeneration in existing tree stands, with all age-classes well represented. Toward this end, the Foundation will partner with the WDNR LIP and WFLGP Programs, USFWS Partners for Wildlife Program, and the Dane County Capital Equipment Program for the first phase of habitat enhancement at the Preserve.

(Continued on page 3)
2015 Highlights

Throughout 2015 the Foundation continued its tradition of organizing and sponsoring community outreach events at the Preserve. In January, Swamplovers teamed with Fontana Sports for their 2nd Annual Snowshoe Scurry Race. In May, the Ice Age Trail Alliance and Fontana Sports co-sponsored the Headlamp Hustle at the Preserve, a night-time 5K/10K run/walk event to raise funds for the Trail. During the autumn months, the Preserve was once again opened to Disabled Hunters, Mentored Youth Hunting, and a Pheasants Forever Field Day. Youth outreach events included tours for students from the UW Wildlife Society and the Boy Scouts, a two-day field practicum with the UW-SP Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration, and showing students from Park Elementary School how to collect and process seeds from native plants. In all, more than 400 students visited the Preserve in 2015. The Foundation also provided a grant to the Ice Age Trail Alliance’s Saunters Program for youth education (details at iceagetrail.org/youth-education).

In September, members of the Dane County Environmental Council visited the Preserve to get a first-hand look at the assorted restoration projects funded by Dane County grant programs and provide the Preserve's land managers with pointers for integrating public recreation with restoration efforts. Jim Hess from Trout Unlimited (Blackhawk Chapter) demonstrated a portable winch system for skidding logs. Throughout 2015, more than one thousand hikers experienced the Preserve's natural landscape along the Ice Age Trail; the number of hikers visiting the Preserve increases every year!
2015 Highlights, continued...

R. Tod Highsmith and Karl and Dorothy Legler helped members of The Prairie Enthusiasts celebrate Independence Day with the annual Butterflies and Dragonflies of Swamplovers Preserve field trip, which was co-sponsored by the Southern Wisconsin Butterfly Association and the Madison Audubon Society. In May, ecology students from UW-Whitewater toured the Preserve’s sedge meadow remnant to learn about herptile conservation practices. In late July, bat biologists from the Wisconsin DNR set up mist-net stations to trap and radio-tag a female Eastern Pipistrelle (threatened in WI), previously documented inhabiting the Preserve. Although they were unable to trap a pipistrelle in their nets, they did trap and band northern long-eared bats, big brown bats, and little brown myotis bats as part of the DNR’s statewide population monitoring. They also observed a large number of WI-Special Concern hoary bats at the Preserve. The biologists indicated that they were “tremendously impressed with the habitat and bat diversity present”.

Populations of seven at-risk bat species have been documented since 2011 when bat surveys began.

Wildlife Habitat Enhancements (continued from page 1)

The concept behind this project was originally inspired by discussions among Lee, Gerry, and Kurt Waterstradt (FWS Private Lands Office) concerning deer cover. Following a successful feasibility trial with matching funds from a LIP grant, DNR forester Steve Holaday and LIP biologist Darcy Kind recently joined preserve managers and restoration consultants to hash out ideas and select management zones for additional large-scale habitat enhancements. Darcy solicited additional input from DNR ornithologist Dave Sample and bat specialists Heather Kaarakka and J. Paul White. Among the focus species for the first phase of this project are ruffled grouse, brown thrasher, wood thrush, American woodcock, red-headed woodpecker, southern flying squirrel, and several bat species, although many more species of wildlife will certainly also benefit from these enhancements.

(Continued on page 4)
Wildlife Habitat Enhancements (continued from page 3)

We will use the findings of empirical research and advice from wildlife specialists to tailor various natural and artificial features to the specific habitat requirements of the project’s focus species. For example, some at-risk birds require a shrub component in their niche, so we will plant native shrubs at strategic locations where the focus species are known or suspected to occur. Thickets of American hazel (which produces autumn hard mast in the form of filberts and soft mast in the form of catkins that adhere to stems throughout winter), wild plum (fruits in autumn), Hawthorne (fruits late summer-autumn), serviceberry (fruits in spring), gooseberry (fruits in summer), and winterberry (as its name implies, produces bright red fruit during the lean winter months) will provide cover, nesting substrate, and year-round forage for a variety of wildlife. These native shrubs also generate nectar utilized by insect pollinators, and support added species richness within the microhabitats that develop under their canopies.

To help ensure at-risk species' population growth through successful breeding, we are in the process of installing a variety of species-specific nesting boxes throughout the Preserve’s woodlands, savannas, and wetlands. We are also field-testing several bat hibernaculum designs to provide critical habitat for bats, which are of recent conservation concern due to white nose syndrome.

To enhance oak regeneration, we will plant 200 white, bur, and red oak saplings and small trees at pre-selected locations with the aid of a hydraulic auger. All of the plants will have to be monitored, watered, and browsing exclosures will have to be installed to protect them during establishment.

Ruffed grouse habitat will be created by cutting mature aspen occurring on east-facing slopes and allowing them to regenerate. Conifers and fruit trees are also being planted near food plots to provide cover and bedding for deer and other game species.

The Swamplovers group has engaged in habitat management since the Preserve was purchased, but this effort will be the first Preserve-wide application of tree and shrub planting to promote specific at-risk species.

(Concluded on page 6)
Swamplovers Partners with NRCS and the MG&E Foundation to Improve Water Quality in Black Earth Creek Watershed

The NE corner of the Preserve and upstream Kerl Farm share a series of agricultural and stormwater drainage ditches (top, left). The west ditch drains into a series of three waterfowl production ponds and surrounding wetlands in the Preserve's east valley. This ditch formerly extended into the Preserve's wetlands but was filled and several sections were converted into scrape ponds in 2006-08 by a USFWS/Swamplovers/Ducks Unlimited project. A flood control gate was installed to manage water levels in the ponds and wetland. The east ditch is an enlarged stretch of Otto Kerl Creek, which meanders through the Preserve's east valley wetlands before emptying into the Black Earth Creek to the south of the Preserve, near HWY 14. Preserve managers, along with NRCS staff, recognized both ditches were in a degraded condition that was impacting water quality at both the Preserve and downstream reaches of the Black Earth Creek Watershed. Gully and rill erosion were carrying nutrient-laden sediment into the Preserve's wetlands and Black Earth Creek, and the presence of damaged concrete fill evidenced previous attempts to stop erosion. The edges of the ditches were dominated by an overstory of invasive shrubs and trees and understory of high-impact invasive weeds that severely limited their buffering capacity. These ditches also served as effective dispersal corridors for invasive species to colonize downstream reaches of the entire watershed. In November 2013, the NRCS Environmental Quality Improvement Program (EQIP), with matching funds provided by the Swamplovers Foundation and MG&E Foundation, embarked on a multiple-year project to repair and reconstruct degraded sections of these ditches and establish functional buffer zones along their margins. After surveys were completed and permits obtained, contractors cleared invasive shrubs and harvested trees for pulp while the Swamplovers group eradicated invasive species and planted a cover crop for erosion control. In 2015, excavators removed concrete fill, installed a rock chute where surface runoff enters the ditch, and constructed embankments, diversion wings, timber toe walls, and pipe outlets to restore function to the drainage ditches and curtail erosion to improve the quality of water entering the Black Earth Creek Watershed. In 2016, Swamplovers will enhance the temporary buffer with a diverse mix of grasses, sedges, forbs, and shrubs to maximize its buffering capacity and provide habitat for wildlife.
Wildlife Habitat Enhancements (concluded...)

A related component of this effort will be to expand the acreage of herbaceous vegetation at the Preserve by converting cool-season pastures into species-rich prairie with the aid of a Truax® seed drill the Foundation purchased in 2015. Locally-sourced prairie seed is being donated by Ron Endres and collected by volunteers. These grassland plantings will augment habitat enhancement efforts by providing cover, forage, and substrate for an array of insect communities that serve as pollinators and as a food source for organisms at higher trophic levels.

In 2016, 100% of your tax-deductible contributions will be applied toward matching funds for habitat enhancement projects at the Preserve. By donating to the Foundation's Land Management Fund, you not only help to provide critical habitat for at-risk species, but also ensure future opportunities to observe and photograph a variety of rare species in their natural habitat.

Hunter Surveys

Since its inception, the Swamplovers Foundation has sanctioned deer, wild turkey, pheasant, small game, and limited waterfowl hunting at the Preserve. To uphold safety and reserve space for youth and disabled hunters, and also to ensure that hunting activities occur in conjunction with the Preserve’s management goals, the Swamplovers group coordinates hunting activities. Preserve managers also require that hunters complete a short survey at the end of each day of hunting. In addition to routine demographic questions (i.e., hunting season, male/female, youth, disabled, or military veteran, etc.) hunters are also asked to list characteristics of observed and harvested game (for estimating population sizes with linear regression models), non-game wildlife observed during their hunt (to assist with ongoing monitoring efforts), and to comment on their perceptions of ecological restoration. Here are some highlights from these surveys.

When asked their opinion of how ecological restoration and management at the Preserve have impacted their hunting experience, hunter’s responses were entirely positive and showed that as a group they were supportive of restoration activities at the Preserve. For instance, a widely-perceived drawback of restoring hunting lands is that it removes too much cover, reducing the amount of game present. However, in our survey hunters reported that clearing excessive shrub overgrowth made hunting safer and permitted more long-distance shooting opportunities. They also commented that deer numbers seemed to them unchanged or higher after restoration, because more native forage is available in restored hunting lands. Likewise, waterfowl hunters reported that replacement of dense stands of reed canarygrass with historic wetland vegetation attracted more species to the Preserve’s waterfowl production ponds, and in greater numbers, while simultaneously improving hunter concealment. Disabled hunters were particularly grateful for the opportunities provided to them by the Foundation. Disabled hunters informed us that the extensive system of trails, access paths, and firebreaks that dissect the Preserve are critical for them to be able to gain entry to favorable hunting locations, and commented how many public lands are off-limits to them for that reason. These responses demonstrate how the land management goals of both restoration and hunting share common benefits to humans and the natural environment.
The Swamplovers' Foundation Thanks:

**Funding:**
- FSA-CRP Program
- NRCS-EQIP Program
- Dane County Farm Service Agency
- Dane County Environmental Council Grant Programs
- USFWS Partners for Wildlife Program
- WDNR LIP Program
- WDNR WFLGP Program
- MG&E Foundation
- Numerous Individual Donors

**In-Kind and Technical Support:**
- Ice Age Trail Alliance
- Dane County Parks
- Pheasants Forever
- Plastic Ingenuity, Inc.
- Integrated Restorations, LLC
- Boehnen Excavations, Inc.
- Fontana Sports
- Society for Ecological Restoration (UW-SP Chap.)
- Doreen Admany
- Daniela Annen
- Jackie Arendt
- John & Cathy Attig
- John Brooks
- Denny Connor
- Arjang Damali
- Jeff Durbin
- Lyle 'Doc' Esser
- Ron Endres
- Marian Farrior
- Phil Fish
- Mike Goth
- Ryan Goth
- Pattie Haack
- Mindy Habecker
- Joan Hall
- Larry Hartzke
- Jackie Hering
- R. Tod Highsmith
- Dawn Hinebaugh
- Steve Holaday
- Kyle Johnson
- Heather Kaarakka
- Daniel Kuehn
- Darcy Kind
- Louise Kubista
- Ben Lamasey
- Ken Lange
- Dorothy & Karl Legler
- Dave Lucey
- Andrew Mack
- Karen Mack
- Will Mann
- Gary Nelson
- Lucas Olson
- Mike Padrutt
- Wayne Pauly
- Austin Petham
- Kevin Ripp
- Renee Schlick
- Linnea Smith
- Kevin Thusius
- John Vosberg
- Duane Wagner
- Kurt Waterstradt
- Steve Weiss
- John Paul White
- Jonathan Wilde
- Jordan Winkenbach

*Students from Park Elementary School get hands-on experience with Leopold's conservation ethic*
The Swamplovers’ Foundation, Inc. is a 501c3 nonprofit organization dedicated to the protection, preservation, and management of southern Wisconsin’s biological, geological, and ecological heritage.

The 460-acre Swamplovers' Nature Preserve is permanently protected by a binding conservation easement with Dane County and the Ice Age Trail Alliance, and is bisected by the Table Bluff Segment of the Ice Age Trail. The Swamplovers’ Foundation was established to restore and manage the Preserve in perpetuity, in accordance with the Foundation’s missions of conservation, hunting, and public outreach.

If your organization is interested in a tour or holding an outreach event at the Preserve, contact Lee Swanson at lee.swanson@crossplainsbank.com

These at-risk species and their friends need your help!

Remember, 100% of your tax-deductible donation will directly support on-the-ground conservation of at-risk species (the Foundation has never charged one dime for overhead or administrative expenses).

Name(s):
Address:
City:
State: ZIP:
Email (optional):

Tax-Deductible Donation $ THANK YOU!!!

Please send this form and tax-deductible contribution to:

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

Photo Credits: Craig Annen, Diane Balmer, Jackie Hering, Gerry Goth, Sean Longabaugh, Gary Nelson, and Lee Swanson.

Newsletter produced by:

∫ Integrated Restorations, LLC