

# Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Monitoring the Implementation of Property Master Plans

**Property:** Southwest Wisconsin Grassland and Stream Conservation Area

**Master Plan Year:** 2015

## Goal 1: Protect, restore and manage priority natural communities and associated rare and declining species

### 1.1: Establish outreach and assistance programs

<b>MASTER PLAN OBJECTIVES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Together with cooperating partners provide direct one-to-one technical assistance to area landowners.</li> <li>▪ Create a series of brochures and education displays that provide information about the history and importance of grassland, savanna and stream ecosystems in SW Wisconsin.</li> <li>▪ Share recommended conservation actions and priorities from Wisconsin's Wildlife Action Plan with other departments, agencies and organizations.</li> <li>▪ Work with local groups to establish a "Cooperative Weed Management Area".</li> </ul>
<b>Accomplishments 2015</b>	<p><b>WDNR WM SWGSCA</b> Staff hosted a training field trip to the new WDNR WM technicians.</p> <p><b>WDNR WM SWGSCA</b> Staff hosted a Habitat &amp; Ecology Day for local a High School science class at the Davis Property.</p> <p><b>WDNR WM SWGSCA</b> continued to provide articles to the regional Driftless Magazine. This year's focus was on WDNR WM SWGSCA properties: hiking, hunting, trapping; TNC's sister MRPHA properties: driving tour, and WDNR FM Fishing Easement Opportunities.</p> <p><b>WDNR WM SWGSCA</b> provided 6 laminated posters to TNC: SWGSCA Overview; SWGSCA Management Strategies; SWGSCA Species of Special Concern, SWGSCA Birds.</p> <p><b>SWGSCA WDNR WM</b> provided photos to help WDNR BWM create a poster about the WDNR</p>

Landscape Scale Projects for the annual Pheasants Forever Meeting.

**SWGSCA WDNR WM** presented co-presented a slideshow about the WDNR Landscape Scale Projects at the annual WBCI-WSO-Audubon meeting.

**WDNR WM SWGSCA** staff hosted a Strategic Planning Field Trips to Davis with the UW Madison's Wildlife Coop Unit Leader ; the State of Wisconsin's UW Extension Grazing Expert; the NRCS Statewide Grazing Expert;

**WDNR WM SWGSCA** staff provided and promoted hiking on the temporary work unit trails we are creating during this first management intensive phase of managing Sherven and Gnewuch. This is bringing good will to WDNR WM and even between users. and users and neighbors.

**WDNR WM SWGSCA** staff installed property management signs on Sherven and Gnewuch which should facilitate use and public awareness of the good work we are doing.

**Southwest Badger RC&D** is taking lead on forming a cooperative weed management area ; and Grazing via the continuing to secure funding for the Grazer Broker and assisting to implement the New Farmer Mentoring Program.

**SW Badger RC&D** initiated a weed management conservation area to facilitate uplands in addition to its current aquatic weed specialist staff position and program.

**Blue Mounds Area Group (BMAP)** continued to host its Winter Speaker Series and provided speakers on four occasions for the public and its members to attend. This also serves as a recruitment effort with people that joining BMAP then being invited to summer volunteer work parties on member lands. This is an extremely creative grass roots endeavor that has built good will between conservationists and landowners.

**TNC** continued to hold a variety of field trips on their lands in the MRPHA, maintain a website which features the MRPHA and cites SWGSCA, submit articles to various venues (previously including the MRPHA driving Tour Article that was initial published in the WI NR Magazine and this year with the Driftless magazine. This year they published an article in the WI NR magazine that feature MRPHA (SWGSCA) landowners who were embracing habitat management.

**The Prairie Enthusiasts (TPE)** hosted UW STATEWIDE SCIENCE DAYS field trips and workshops and provided conservation speakers and Displays.

**The Prairie Enthusiasts** hosted it annual REGIONAL PRAIRIE DAYS field trips and workshops and provided conservation speakers and displays.

**TNC** and the Farm Bill Biologist began to plan to have a private lands prescribed burn cooperative

	<p>models after similar groups out west.</p> <p><b>SW Badger RC&amp;D</b> initiated a weed management conservation area to facilitate uplands in addition to its current aquatic weed specialist staff position and program.</p> <p><b>DRIFTLESS Area Land Trust (DALC)</b> beefed up effort in outreach on a variety of fronts increasing children's programs by hiring an early childhood professional and providing speakers to talk to members and the public about conservation. They also held several field trips showcasing their work on private lands.</p> <p><b>UW Extension and DALC</b> the annual general Landowner workshop targeting SWGSCA landowners.</p> <p><b>UW Extension</b> held its annual YOUTH CONSERVATION DAYS. Iowa County Middle schools are invited. SWGSCA conservation partners are asked to show up and man booths located within conservation grassland to teach hand-on conservation programs to the children.</p>
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**1.2: Acquire, restore, and manage large permanent grassland areas and remnant habitat areas**

<p><b>MASTER PLAN OBJECTIVES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Inventory, protect and manage key lands to permanently protect and buffer managed grasslands in and surrounding BCA cores, as well as remnant prairies, oak savanna (oak openings), some high-quality oak woodlands, and priority streams that are of particularly high quality, support rare species, or contribute to permanent managed grassland areas.</li> <li>▪ Establish a course-grain habitat monitoring program that will include analyzing land-cover changes by tracking changes in habitat acreages using databases such as the EPA's National Land Cover Database and the NRCS's Natural Resources Inventory).</li> <li>▪ Use computerized mapping in conjunction with field cover-mapping to track progress of protection over time in BCA cores as well as in small sites such as high quality prairies, savannas, and stream reaches.</li> </ul>
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***Accomplishments  
2015***

SWGSCA WM created work 4 units within the **Sherven Property**, developed five year plans for each, began implementation. Prairie Remnants were identified and mapped. This property is a high quality post CRP cool season grassland where spot mowing was the primary method of invasive and brush control. We will continue to use mowing as the primary method of management in the three primary units. The fourth unit which is across from the main property on HWY JG will be included in a WDNR RS Burn study. It will be burned for three consecutive years in late spring along with supplemental management. We are cooperating with a kestrel box project hosted by the Blue Bird Association. We submitted burn plans for all units. We met with and are now working with neighbor Ganser who manages high quality grass fields which substantially increase grassland acreage for this site. She in fact, is the catalyst for the tree line removal project and interested in working together with us. She is also willing to allow us access to some of her employees who may be willing to use their bat winged mower to alternatively mow the three primary units of Sheven and perhaps put in fire break- work unit trails for us.

Breaks/ Trails were established on all units. Fence line was removed. the Ganser tree line was removed, invasive control was implanted, pollinator seeding was established in a cooperative project with the neighboring landowner and USFWS. The Sherven NW unit was mowed.

On the **Gnewuch Property**, three units were established. A fire break was installed on the two units on the west side of HWYs G&A. We submitted burn plans for 2/3 units. We attempted to burn one unit, but did not secure priority for the county burn team and switched strategy by setting up a contract for burns with Adaptive Management which is in the neighboring Mount Vernon (again, trying to connect to community via working with folks on our properties).

We attempted to secure NFWF dollars with SWGSCA partners to remove brush but were not allowed to be a part of this collaborative effort. Additional effort is needed to increase understanding of our objectives.

The SE Gnewuch unit will be part of the WDNR RS Burn Study and will be burned in early spring of each year The Gnewuch NW parcel of 40 acres was forestry mowed. It was chosen as the 2/3 units for the WDNR RS Burn Study. It will be burned for 3 consecutive years in the fall.

We established a relationship with a wood cutting business/ contractor/neighbor (lives down the road) who has agreed to eventually take down the remaining cherry, stack the wood and bury it. In the mean time we will enjoy the redheaded woodpecker habitat that we are temporarily creating. This contractor also offered to burn the wood piles that were left behind from the Ganser Tree line removal project that we were unsuccessful in burning this year.

We removed fence line.

On the Gnewuch East Unit we worked with the neighboring dairy farmer and removed trees on the boundary of the property via chainsaw and bobcat. We established a relationship with a local woodcutter who owns equipment capable of harvesting substantial trees and hope to work with him in the future in

helping us remove this wood. We established a relationship with the neighbor to the south of this property by also offering him wood left over from this project. We began to clean the gravel pit. We worked with a third neighbor who lives along HWY G, south of the gravel pit to take out junk wood from that site.

**WDNR WM SWGSCA** staff assisted with many burns on the two WM burn teams that cover SWGSCA (WA and EA).

**WDNR WM SWGSCA** staff strategically planned and purchased initial equipment to establish a work unit needed to manage SWGSCA WM properties (2 pumper units, chainsaws, ATV, Small mower, hand tools, back packs, fire control equipment, radios, etc.)

**1.3: Protect rare and declining species, including native plants, fish, grassland birds, mammals, prairie-dependent vertebrates and others**

<p><b>MASTER PLAN OBJECTIVES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Permanently protect, buffer, manage and restore the native communities and habitats that support those species.</li> <li>▪ Identify additional locations in the project boundary supporting rare species, including those that historically supported rare species but have not been sampled in recent years.</li> <li>▪ Develop a comprehensive long-term monitoring program for populations of target species that will allow the Department to evaluate progress toward protecting our priority natural communities and the species that depend on them.</li> <li>▪ Provide information to landowners highlighting specific management actions that would benefit rare species found on or near their land.</li> <li>▪ Consider restoring populations of rare species to locations where they were historically present and where habitat improvements indicate their likely long-term survival</li> </ul>
<p><b>Accomplishments 2015</b></p>	<p>Mapped Prairie Remnants on properties. Conducted bird surveys on properties. Hand brush control on rare spp. site. Met with Raasch neighbor and NHC Darcy Kind to plan and secure funding for a cooperative- LIP WM project on 3 promote remnants. Met with contractor Quercus to follow up with plans to work on this site. Identified threat of crowned vetch to prairie remnants and developed a plan to remove it along with the shared brush and treelike and acres.</p> <p>WDNR WM NHC manages State Natural Areas in SWGSCA – including the York Prairies.</p> <p>TPE and TNC manage natural areas. BMAP manages informal natural areas.</p> <p>TPE facilities research of rare and declining species on their properties and in the SWGSCA.</p> <p>WDNR NHC Bat Team manages hibernacula in the SWGSCA.</p> <p>Many others conservation enthusiast are monitoring these species throughout SWGSCA.</p>

**1.4: Protect watersheds of warm-water and cold-water streams that have been designated as Outstanding or Exceptional Resource Waters and restore, protect and manage degraded (“Impaired”) streams and ri-parian corridors**

<p><b>MASTER PLAN OBJECTIVES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Sample warm-water streams that have not been sampled in recent years to identify locations supporting rare aquatic species, including fish, reptiles and amphibians.</li> <li>▪ Establish or maintain existing long-term grass cover of 20 percent or more within priority watersheds.</li> <li>▪ Update stream designations and the state’s list of impaired waters by identifying waters not meeting their designated biological use.</li> <li>▪ Once conditions in the watersheds of priority warm-water streams have improved to the point that water quality concerns have been addressed, consider projects to restore stream channel morphology in degraded reaches of priority streams.</li> <li>▪ Monitor stream response (e.g., water quality, channel morphology, stream Index of Biotic Integrity, fish sampling) to protection and management activities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Accomplishments 2015</b></p>	<p>Met with NRCS Water Erosions Specialist on the Davis Property to document and begin to monitor and plan for an erosion control plan.</p> <p>Met with WDNR Water Staff to do the same and requested they work with SWGSCA partners on a water conservation project – which they are now doing. The SWGSCA partners previously picked out the Dodge Branch as its priority stream for a cooperative project – and they are now in the planning and grant writing stage of effort. They hope to make this a show piece property. Hopefully the WDNR WM SWGSCA Davis property will be part of that.</p> <p>SWGSCA partners have been continually working on our watersheds. In particular, TNC takes lead in getting people together to work on star projects such as the Sugar River, Pecatonica Watershed and now seem to be playing a lead in the Dodge Branch Effort. Watershed protection seems to rally the troops. Both conservationists and landowners want to work together.</p> <p>On the WDNR WM SWGSCA properties:          Davis: we are developing a new grazing plan which should greatly improve water conservation. For the current year an last year of the grandfathered grazing plan, we are lifting the spring turkey non grazing area to lesson negative impact to the intensively grazed site and disperse it thought-out the property.</p> <p>In the Gnewuch property we are removing invasive brush around springs that create the head of a watershed.</p> <p>On Sheven, we continue quality effort at maintaining quality grass habitat which protects the greater watershed.</p>

	<p>SW Badger RC&amp;D continues with its aquatic invasive program.</p>
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**Goal 2: Develop and enhance compatible recreational opportunities such as hunting, bird-watching, trout and bass fishing, trapping, nature study, paddling, hiking, and appreciation of the area’s cultural history.**

<p><b><i>MASTER PLAN OBJECTIVES</i></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide compatible recreational opportunities in the project area on lands acquired in fee, or work to secure public access on lands that are protected by easement.</li> <li>▪ Enhance recreational experiences by developing educational materials that highlight stream and grassland-related points of interest on or near Department properties.</li> <li>▪ Continue work through the Streambank Protection Program to increase public access to high quality fishing areas, particularly streams supporting brook trout and smallmouth bass.</li> <li>▪ Work with Wisconsin Department of Transportation and utility companies to enhance recreational opportunities and minimize negative aesthetic impacts of roadway and powerline corridors within the project area.</li> <li>▪ Promote the Southwest Savanna Great Wisconsin Birding and Nature Trail in southwest Wisconsin, highlighting some of the many great birding opportunities in the project area.</li> <li>▪ Monitor usership patterns on public lands as funding allows, using tools such as onsite surveys, consultation with local units of government, and coordination with the Department of Tourism and other local recreation and sporting groups</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Accomplishments 2015</i></b></p>	<p>WDNR WM SWGSCA provided opportunity for hunting, hiking, trapping, fishing on the WDNR WM SWGSCA properties. The WDNR Stewardship program has also opened up SWGSCA partners properties to hunting, trapping, fishing. WDNR and all the partners (especially (TPE) host bird and grassland hikes and volunteer opportunities year round.</p>

**Goal 3: Help sustain the area’s rural agricultural landscape.**

<p><b>MASTER PLAN OBJECTIVES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Department and contributing Partners will provide staff to assist farmers and help them enroll in USDA programs that provide financial and technical assistance, such as CSP, and GRP.</li> <li>▪ Protect and manage lands in a manner that is compatible with surrounding agriculture.</li> <li>▪ Help reduce the land investments for some farmers interested in selling or easing valuable conservation lands, while continuing to farm remaining higher production lands.</li> <li>▪ Provide input to USDA, DATCP, and our state and national legislators about conservation implications of proposed changes in farm policies and programs, and to recommend actions that would benefit both conservation and local producers.</li> <li>▪ In some cases use land management tools, including management agreements or cropland rental, to continue project-compatible agricultural uses on Department owned land.</li> <li>▪ Work with DATCP to create brochures and other educational materials and displays highlighting the history of farming in southwest Wisconsin, and the importance of maintaining grass-based agriculture to provide habitat for fish and wildlife.</li> <li>▪ Promote the establishment of a Working Lands Initiative project in this project area.</li> <li>▪ Encourage efforts on the part of producers to market agricultural products that are produced in a way that is compatible with grassland conservation.</li> <li>▪ Monitor agricultural trends over time so project goals and strategies are adjusted to accommodate changing land use practices.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Accomplishments 2015</b></p>	<p>WDNR provides funding to NRCS for the Farm Bill Biologist program (NRCS and Pheasants Forever also contribute). The assigned FBB’s then to assist farmers and help them enroll in USDA programs that provide financial and technical assistance, such as CS, and GRP. The FBB helps protect and manage lands in a manner that is compatible with surrounding agriculture. When asked, the Department and contributing Partners will provide staff to assist farmers and help them enroll in USDA programs that provide financial and technical assistance, such as CSP, and GRP. The program is so technical that often the FBB prefers to receive partner help via media outreach efforts and working with the SWGSCA partners to put on various landowner workshops. DALC and UW Ext. are helping the FBB host a landowner workshop.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ DALC and TPE help reduce the land investments for some farmers interested in selling or leasing valuable conservation lands, while continuing to farm remaining higher production lands.</li> <li>▪ USFWS, TNC, TPE, WDNR SS provide input to USDA, DATCP, and our state and national legislators via the Statewide Wildlife technical Committee about conservation implications of proposed changes in farm policies and programs, and to recommend actions that would benefit both conservation and local producers. Witness to this is the approved Driftless Initiative.</li> </ul>

	<p>In appropriate situations WDNR uses land management tools, including management agreements or cropland rental, to continue project-compatible agricultural uses on Department owned land. Currently WDNR is using grazing as a tool via a grazing contract on the SWGSCA Davis Habitat Area.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ The SW Badger RC&amp; D (SWGSCA) Grazing Broker working with DATCP and NRCS to create brochures and other educational materials and displays highlighting the history of farming in southwest Wisconsin, and the importance of maintaining grass-based agriculture to provide habitat for fish and wildlife is being promoted and increased.</li><li>▪ Promote the establishment of a Working Lands Initiative project in this project area has not been approved by local communities at this point.</li><li>▪ Grazing broker supported by SWGSCA partnership is encourage efforts on the part of producers to market agricultural products that are produced in a way that is compatible with grassland conservation.</li><li>▪ The WDNR SS is monitor agricultural trends over time so project goals and strategies are adjusted to accommodate changing land use practice via the Bird/Habitat/BCA study.</li></ul> <p>Outreach field trips and provided a TNC conservation grazing kiosk.</p>
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**Goal 4: Work with local communities to help design and locate development in places that minimize impacts on grassland, savanna and stream ecosystems, while promoting a healthy rural economy.**

<p><b>MASTER PLAN OBJECTIVES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work to incorporate consideration of natural resource conservation into local planning and decision-making processes.</li> <li>▪ Provide local communities with technical information on key natural resources within their planning jurisdiction, and become involved in comprehensive planning wherever possible.</li> <li>▪ Encourage and support local communities in their efforts to survey and assess key resources in areas that are the subject of current or future land-use planning.</li> <li>▪ Assist with local efforts to promote grassland-based tourism in the project area.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Accomplishments 2015</b></p>	<p>WDNR Water Program has several Adaptive Management projects in the planning stages in SWGSCA.</p> <p>WDNR NHC LIP program is targeting individuals in the SWGSCA community.</p> <p>BMAP facilitates community involvement in conservation habitat management.</p>

**Goal 5: Promote appreciation of historical, cultural, and archaeological resources.**

<p><b>MASTER PLAN OBJECTIVES</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ When protection is warranted based on natural resources present, work to enrich the inherent value and public benefits of land protection where there is opportunity to encompass archaeological, cultural and historical features either on the site, or within its viewshed.</li> <li>▪ Obtain information from the State Historical Society on the locations of such historic and archaeological features and consider these data in land protection planning efforts</li> <li>▪ Work with state and local historical societies and local governments to create outreach materials describing important cultural, historical, and archaeological sites visible from Department properties.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Accomplishments 2015</b></p>	<p>When requested, continued to provide the SWGSCA Oral History Book to folks by directing them to library holdings or to website links.</p> <p>DALC and UW Extension host cultural events.</p>