



Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources

STATE NATURAL AREAS

2015 VOLUNTEER REPORT



Thank you volunteers

One of the coolest parts about working with volunteers on State Natural Areas (SNAs) is when my expectations are exceedingly shattered. The “Wow, I didn’t expect that!” moments are what make my job so much fun. I’ve always dreamed of a network of people across the state caring for and enjoying our most important State Natural Areas. I’d like to see the program grow so much that we struggle to find enough work for all of our volunteers. Right now that day may seem a ways off and the work to be done may feel overwhelming, but I am amazed at the steps we are making.

When I see volunteers doing cool things it adds fuel to the fire. It’s happening. The wheels are turning. We are working together to get there. There is Ridge-way Pine Relict where new volunteers were just going to pull some garlic mustard, then they grew in numbers and cut brush, and then took seniors out to collect seeds and plant a prairie. The Maiden Rock Bluff workday where local conservation leaders helped publicize our first event and almost 50 people showed up on a Friday. The college students who are taking ownership at Bald Bluff and getting involved at Pope Lake. The 109 species prairie planted entirely with volunteer collected seeds at Stauffacher Prairie. There are countless stories of new volunteers just appearing. Perhaps the most amazing stories come from those who have been caring for natural areas for 10-20 years and they continue to put their hearts into it. I’m happy to share these stories with you in this report.



Whitewater Oak Opening



Kettle Moraine Oak Opening

There is something to be said about simply experiencing State Natural Areas. And the experience of making small positive changes to State Natural Areas. I think it grows on you, gets in your blood, maybe is a little addicting even in a good way. In fact, I’ve heard volunteers refer to themselves as nature addicts. I get to be around people who know how to tap into that experience and continue to do what they love and some that are just trying it out with no idea what they are getting into. That blows me away. There are a lot of people who have helped make this thing work. Whether you have sent one email, cut one buckthorn, or sweated for 1000 hours, thank you for making my job fun and completely surpassing my expectations.

Sincerely,

Jared Urban

Volunteer Coordinator, SNA Program



Cherokee Marsh

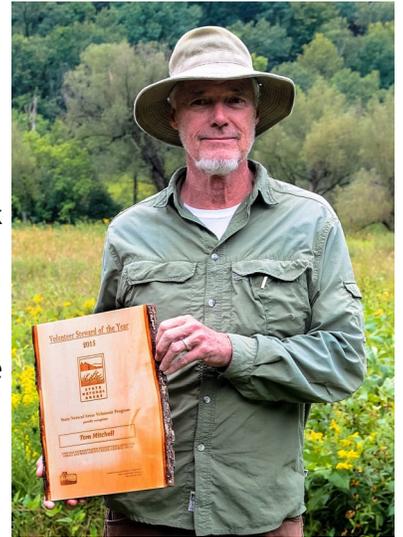
Steward of the year

Tom Mitchell of Monroe received the Volunteer Steward of the Year award on Aug. 29 at the Pleasant Valley State Natural Area in Dane County during the volunteer appreciation potluck.

The award recognizes volunteers for their outstanding work and commitment to help manage SNAs. Mitchell's efforts have benefitted SNAs in Green and Rock counties, where he is a leader in The Prairie Enthusiasts-Prairie Bluff Chapter.

The Prairie Enthusiasts, or TPE for short, help manage state and University of Wisconsin-Arboretum owned properties as well as TPE-owned properties where Mitchell organizes weekly workdays and spends a majority of his days working.

"You will often find Tom working with others in the field, forming friendships and leading by example," Jared Urban, volunteer coordinator, says. "Lots of people have learned from his knowledge and infectious interest by working with him directly. He is unafraid to try new things, teach new people, allow others to lead, or blaze his own trail even when things get tough."



Urban says that Mitchell works year-round doing a variety of tasks, but his recent accomplishments include work at Muralt Bluff Prairie State Natural Area, where his chapter put in more than 400 hours in 2014. Mitchell collected pounds of seed for prairie plantings on DNR and TPE properties, removed garlic mustard and other herbaceous invasive weeds, sumac and other woody plants, and led field trips.

In addition to that work, Mitchell has participated in numerous workdays on publicly owned state natural areas across Green and Rock counties, Urban says. He also has been a valuable contributor and advocate for the SNA volunteer program since its beginning in 2011.

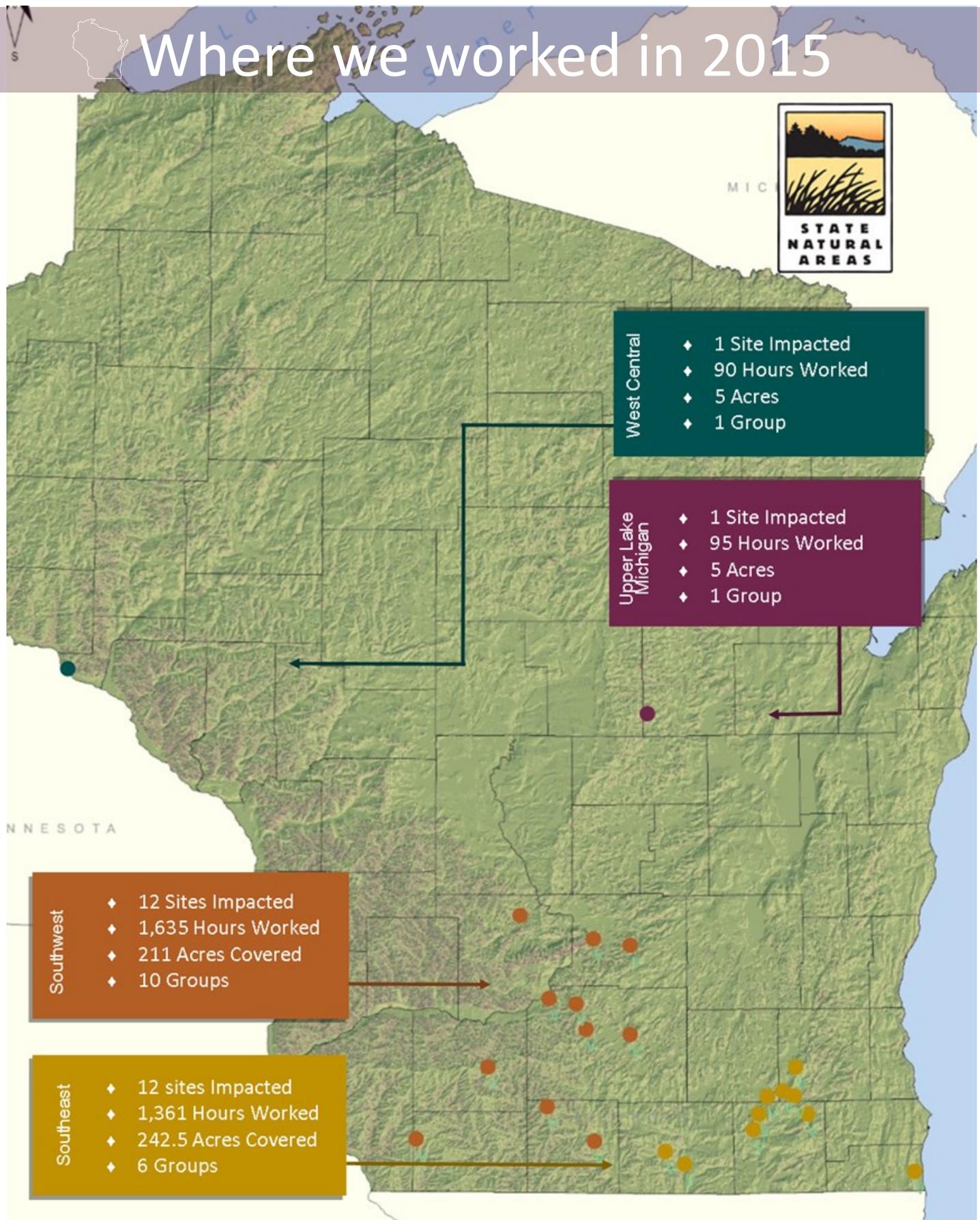
Mitchell says he was surprised by the award because "there are so many people doing good volunteer work on SNAs and Jared has done a wonderful job of organizing them."



Since he got hooked on prairie restoration in the 1990s, he couldn't wait to retire, and now that he's retired, "this has become what I do," Mitchell says. "It's outdoors, healthy, and a nice combination of physical and mental, trying to figure out how you are going to manage the prairie. I can't imagine what my life would be like without them. "

Muralt Bluff Prairie State Natural Area is particularly important to him and other prairie enthusiasts because it's where the prairie movement in southern Wisconsin got started and because the site boasts a rich prairie ecosystem, full of insects, grassland birds, and other prairie plant and animal species.

Where we worked in 2015





Where we worked in 2015

SITE	HOURS	VALUE ADDED	ACRES	VOLUNTEERS
Beulah Bog	10	\$240	5	1
Bluff Creek	374	\$8,792	55	52
Cherokee Marsh	149	\$3,454	6	10
Chiwaukee Prairie	106	\$2,445		2
Eagle Oak Opening	3	\$73	2	1
Empire Prairies	51	\$1,177		19
Fern Dell	7	\$161	5	1
Ipswich Prairie	22	\$559	1	7
Kessler Railroad Prairie	14	\$327	4	1
Kettle Moraine Oak Opening	188	\$4,458	70	35
Lodi Marsh	394	\$9,130	52	27
Lost Lake	1	\$34	1	2
Maiden Rock Bluff	90	\$2,082	5	30
Mazomanie Oak Barrens	284	\$6,909	64	14
Messinger Dry Prairie and Savanna Preserve	99	\$2,362	15	14
Mirror Lake Pine Oak Forest	4	\$92	3	1
Muralt Bluff Prairie	63	\$1,528	6	16
Ottawa Lake Fen	45	\$1,068	1.5	4
Pope Lake	95	\$2,192	8	25
Ridgeway Pine Relict	396	\$9,171	49	13
Rock River Prairie	288	\$6,791	85	7
Rocky Run Oak Savanna	145	\$3,478	17	20
Scuppernong Prairie	12	\$286	1	2
Undisclosed Site	177	\$4,083	4	5
York Prairie	119	\$2,930	7	9
Young Prairie	45	\$1,090		15
TOTALS	3,181	\$74,910	467	333

\$ 74,910 of Value



467 Acres Covered

🕒 3,181 Hours



18 Volunteer Groups

Volunteer Projects

There were 26 State Natural Areas that volunteers devoted time and energy to throughout 2015. Here are examples from some of the sites explaining the type of work that is done on State Natural Areas.



Kettle Moraine Oak Opening

Cherokee Marsh: The main project at Cherokee Marsh is “Phragmites Fridays,” where volunteers head out once a week in late summer to remove phragmites (giant reed grass) that have been invading the sedge meadows of the SNA. They have also helped with girdling aspen trees and removing brush that crowds out other wetland vegetation.

Kettle Moraine Oak Opening: This site is where the "kettles" group began a couple of years ago on an invasive brush removal project. That area has received continued follow-up attention with over-seeding and foliar spraying of brush re-sprouts. A couple of volunteers have spent individual

time on foliar spraying spotted knapweed to keep it out of the high quality dry remnants there. The biggest group efforts were doing fire-break prep, girdling aspen on Bald Bluff and collecting seeds on a few of the dry prairies there. The biggest workday included 27 volunteers giving 81 hours collecting seeds, which were able to be used on some of the other SNAs in the immediate area. The Ecology Club from UW-Whitewater asked to be given a project of their own and were given the responsibility of brush clearing at the base of Bald Bluff. The students accepted the task and began with a little bit of work in 2015 and have continued into 2016 with five students and two local volunteers.

Scuppernong Prairie: A couple volunteers accepted an invitation to join part of the SNA crew out of Fitchburg for a day on an Aspen girdling project at this site. It was a great hike and they were able to girdle a lot of trees that were trying to take hold in the prairie.

Bluff Creek: Bluff Creek used to be an amazing place until buckthorn and honeysuckle took over the area to the point that you couldn't even find the springs anymore. The volunteers took on the challenge to restore the area and made respectable progress. Significant brush has been removed and locally collected seeds distributed to begin the healing process. Volunteers continue to keep the brush in check with foliar spray if needed in the summer months. Over in the west half of Bluff creek we have girdled aspen to control a clone that is creeping into the prairie. We also patrol for sweet clover and parsnip which we either cut or pull as needed in early to mid summer. Then in the late summer we worked on eradicating a very dense stand of phragmites near the creek. We also led a field trip for The Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin where we showed off the beautiful fens and the work that volunteers are doing and then had people join with us for a little phragmites removal. In the fall, seeds were collected by Whitewater High School students during an event organized by Kettle Moraine Land Trust and supported by a couple of volunteers. The work has continued in 2016 already.



Bluff Creek

What is Tree Girdling?

Girdling removes the outer bark all the way around a tree trunk. It is used to kill certain types of trees since it cuts off the flow of sugars from the leaves to the roots. This starves the roots and eventually kills the tree. Since the interior part of the tree is not cut the tree is “tricked” into thinking it still is intact and the typical resprouting response is not triggered.

Empire Prairies: There is a 2 acre planting planned for the fall of 2016 and volunteers collected seeds to store for the planting. Since this site is only 4 acres and our seeds are coming entirely from this site we are utilizing the Dane County United Way to help us find volunteer groups. We held two workdays, one in late August, and one in October. We had 19 enthusiastic people from American Family Insurance and Monsanto come out to help and collected pounds of 23 species of seed including a full poly bag of rattlesnake master! We are currently looking for a volunteer to lead this effort and help get some spring species to make a more diverse planting.



Bluff Creek

York Prairie: Throughout the spring, summer, and fall groups of volunteers meet every few weeks to gather the seeds of native prairie species. The York Prairie SNA is a collection of three proximal remnants, totaling 145 acres, from the original York Prairie. Over the years since it was made an SNA the relic populations have increased until there are now many dozens of native prairie species with populations strong enough for annual seed collecting. In addition to seed collecting the volunteers also help with brush clearing during winter and continually monitor the whole SNA throughout the year for any spots where the DNR should manage invasives.

What are invasives?

Invasives are plants that spread at an undesirable rate and take over native plant communities. Often these species spread because there are no natural predators, competitors, and processes in their new environment to keep their numbers in check. Removing them is a priority when caring for the health of the plant community.

Muralt Bluff (Stauffacher Unit)/Abraham’s Woods: A 4 acre ag field was planted to prairie with locally collected seeds from 109 different species. Brush cutting and burning workdays continue on the remnant prairie. A few volunteers pulled garlic mustard once in April and six times in May. They bag the plants and removed them from the site. They work with the UW Arboretum to direct their visit to the densest populations before seed set to maximize the cooperative efforts. Volunteers also monitor Abe’s Woods of dead falls across hiking trails.

Whitewater Oak Opening: Volunteers collect dry hill prairie seeds here for use on appropriate local sites after buckthorn is cleared. There are also sweeps in early summer to remove any sweet clover in the prairie remnant. There have been a couple of workdays at this site removing buckthorn and freeing some beautiful oaks on really significant terrain. After volunteers burned our brush piles, they returned with some of locally collected seeds and prepared and seeded the burn scars, which led to success this last summer.



Young Prairie



Empire Prairies

Why do we collect seeds?

Seed from native species is valuable and can be an important piece of caring for State Natural Areas. Native seeds are often present on high quality plant communities and can be collected and spread in degraded areas to increase diversity. This is a slow but enjoyable process often done by hand.

Why we do what we do

I really like working with volunteers. Many of the folks who support our group are experts and I always learn something new at each event. Networking with these folks has helped me become a more knowledgeable leader in my Kettle Moraine Land Trust stewardship role. I also enjoy working with less experienced folks as they become familiar with native plants and restoration activities. **In the SNAs, you get to see the results of your work right away,** while meeting very interesting people and learning from them. The workdays are really morning activities with guided nature walks built into the activities, and you work at your own pace!

— Herb Sharpless, Southern Kettles

My favorite part about volunteering on SNAs is getting outside, breathing the fresh air, seeing the overall plant and animal community on a micro-level, and helping a neglected piece of land recover. Although many humans don't know it, being in nature is scientifically proven to help humans rebound (mentally and emotionally) from the busy lives we now lead in today's society. **By volunteering on state natural areas, we are not only improving our lives, but we are building relationships with others,** and we are restoring the complex relations and interactions that plants and animals have with one another and with their natural communities.

— Andrew Badje, Rocky Run



Ridgeway Pine Relict

I find that **volunteering in an SNA is a great excuse to spend time outdoors in some very special places** while getting to know interesting people and doing good at the same time. If you are considering volunteering but are concerned you don't have the needed skills, be aware that many volunteer projects require no special skills, just a willingness to pitch in and help. —Jan Axelson, Cherokee Marsh



Lodi Marsh

My favorite part about volunteering with SNAs is being out on our natural areas almost every day, seeing the changes in flora and fauna from spring to winter, **and seeing WHAT A DIFFERENCE that a small but dedicated group of volunteers can make.** A highlight from the year was at Abraham's Woods when we finally realized, after more than a dozen years of pulling garlic mustard, a noticeable decrease in hours required to declare the woodlot free of mature, seed-setting plants. I also enjoyed seeing prairie dandelion at Muralt Bluff for the first time.

— Tom Mitchell, Green County SNAs



Ridgeway Pine Relict

Volunteering on SNAs is far more than just a hobby or community service for me, it's become my life's work. SNAs are our land and they need our help. We cannot just expect "someone to do something" about the invasives that are threatening the natural heritage of Wisconsin, we need to act. Luckily **the people I continue to meet who are volunteering are a lot of fun and great people to be around; together we are making a difference in the natural world around us.** The DNR is providing top notch tools and support to show us how to be good stewards. Also it's a great way to learn skills that can be applied on your own land if you want to. Or maybe there is an SNA near where you live and you hate to see it deteriorating, you can get involved and help. The workdays are not high stress production based workdays, they are fun, you'll definitely break a sweat if you are looking to do so or you can hang back a little. Everyone works to their ability and there is plenty of fresh air to go around too.

—Zach Kastern, Southern Kettles

My favorite part about volunteering with SNAs is **watching the faces of the volunteers as they discover new things or engage in efforts that improve the environment.** One highlight of my year was having a dozen high school and college students spending over a hundred hours doing research and restoration projects in the SNA. They were very excited about applying some of the things they studied in the classroom to the real world.

— Phil Peterson, Pope Lake

There are two highlights that stand out this year. One is that I have had a number of new volunteers join us. This has made the work more enjoyable while allowing us to accomplish more in less time. The second was finishing the initial cutting of honey-suckle and thinning of black oak on the large ridge on the eastern block of the barrens. This will make for less work down the road in this area so we can focus on other areas within the eastern block. I love working outdoors and seeing the fruit of our labor, so we are able to achieve our goals while getting some exercise. It doesn't get any better than that! The need for volunteers is the only way we will be able to maintain these unique natural communities. **The work is fun and rewarding as you see the impact of your work from year to year.**

—Bob Hay , Mazo Oak Barrens



Empire Prairies



Rocky Run



Bluff Creek



Pope Lake

Join us! Discover how you can help care for our natural heritage. Go to dnr.wi.gov and search "SNA volunteers"
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