



The Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance

Creating a Conservation Future for the Badger Lands



Behind the Fence

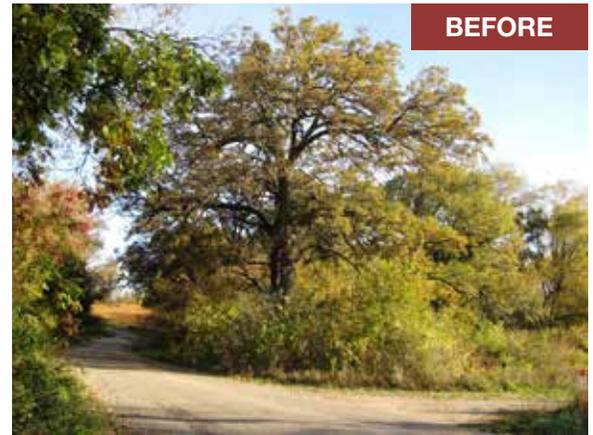
2015 Volunteer Restoration Program Highlights

by Alison Duff

The Alliance hosted eight volunteer work days in 2015. Our volunteers have contributed over 340 hours to stewardship of prairie and oak savanna within the former Badger Plant. Much of our work has targeted management of exotic invasive species, including both herbaceous species (garlic mustard, sweet clover, wild parsnip, and Japanese hedge parsley) and shrubs (bush honeysuckle, common buckthorn, and autumn olive).

Ninety individuals generously committed their time to our volunteer stewardship program this season, including 31 first-time volunteers. Many of these new volunteers joined us for a fantastic October event in the oak savanna adjacent to the prairie hillside. Beautiful weather, enthusiastic volunteers, and the great support by REI in publicizing the event made for a memorable morning. In three hours, volunteers cleared more than half an acre of dense shrubs around an old, open-grown bur oak tree. We look forward to continuing this progress in the 2016 volunteer season.

We thank REI for financial support of our volunteer leadership program and our fantastic team of volunteer leaders for a great field season. Our leadership team—Michael Coutts, Alison



FAR RIGHT:

TOP: This is an image of a large bur oak at Badger (Hillside Prairie) enshrouded in invasive shrubs taken prior to the commencement of the volunteer restoration day on October 10. PHOTO: CURT MEINE

BOTTOM: This is an image taken from the same perspective after several hours of hard labor by a swarm of dedicated volunteers. We FREED the bur oak! PHOTO: CURT MEINE

BELOW: The October 10 volunteer work team at Badger Hillside Prairie/oak savanna sponsored by REI. PHOTO: KURT EAKLE



Duff, Tom Pier, and Mary Zenker—contributed more than 140 hours of their time to restoration at Badger, and countless hours in conversation and planning for the future of our stewardship sites. Thanks also to the Wisconsin DNR for providing access to our work sites and for the work of DNR biologists in conducting prescribed burning at the prairie hillside.

We encourage community members to consider joining our volunteer program—it is an excellent way to explore and learn about the fascinating Badger landscape. This winter we'll post our first-ever volunteer leadership workshop scheduled for early March 2016. Stay tuned! ♦

Banff Mountain Film Festival to Benefit Alliance!



REI (Madison Store) has invited the Alliance to be its partner in hosting the Banff Mountain Film Festival on April 12-13 at the Barrymore Theater in Madison. "The Banff Mountain Film Festival is one of the largest and most prestigious mountain festivals in the world. The Festival is held each year in November in Banff, Canada and features a collection of thought-provoking films from all over the globe. Hot on the heels of the festival each year, the best films head off on the Banff Mountain Festival World tour with stops in about 285 communities and 36 countries across the globe. Traveling from remote landscapes and cultures to adrenaline-packed action sports, the World Tour showcases the efforts and talents of the world's finest mountain filmmakers."

"Exhilarating and provocative, the 2015 World Tour is a must-see for mountain enthusiasts and those with a spirit of adventure. Through the big screen you will experience the highlights of adventure sports such as climbing, kayaking, alpine skiing and mountain expeditions and also visit remote cultures and some of the world's last great wild places."

Stay tuned; tickets are due to go on sale before Christmas. The event sells out each year, so be certain you get your tickets early. All proceeds (once costs are deducted) will benefit the Alliance.

Here's a glimpse:
<https://youtu.be/L4O-RJ-UfCc> ♦

DNR Finalizing Master Plan for Sauk Prairie Recreation Area

On August 11, the DNR released the Draft Master Plan and Environmental Impact Statement for the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area (SPRA). The property, comprising 3400 acres and 46% of the entire Badger property, lies adjacent to Devils Lake State Park and is bordered by lands now owned by Ho Chunk Nation to the north and Dairy Forage Research Center to the south. The draft plan took DNR several years to complete and comprises 160 pages. The public was given 45 days to offer comments.

The conceptual map of the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area that accompanied the DNR's Draft Master Plan for the property.



The Alliance had been anticipating the plan's release, and immediately convened its "response team" to read, review and analyze the contents of the plan. Knowing that the majority of the public would not take time to read the entire document, we very quickly created a summary analysis that we shared with our members, with partner organizations, with the media and with the general public. This analysis was printed prior to the DNR's public hearing on September 10th, and was offered to citizens as a way to better understand some of the plan's contents. Our publicity about the hearing paid off; at least 175 people attended and approximately 35 individuals testified, most of them supportive of the Alliance's position.

What do we like and dislike about the draft plan? We were pleased that DNR is planning to restore the majority of the property to prairie, savanna and oak woodland, mimicking the pre-settlement vegetation of the Sauk Prairie-Baraboo Hills interface. The restoration component of the plan is ambitious, with a 50-year time frame. Alas, no dollars were budgeted in the plan expressly for restoration work, and we fear that restoration will take a back seat to development of infrastructure (roads, parking areas, etc.).

In its formal response to DNR, the Alliance stated its opposition to off-road (dual-sport) motorcycles, rocketry, snowmobiles and dog training (that requires the discharge of firearms), as these are all considered "high impact" recreation activities. In its original application for the land at Badger through the National Park

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Transitioning Forward

by Rob Nurre



As the year comes to an end, we reflect back on a very busy year! We offer some highlights in this newsletter. During this season the Alliance coordinated eight volunteer work days and a “weed monitoring” weekend at the “Hillside Prairie,” the last high quality prairie remnant at Badger. We focused a great deal of time and energy on responding to the DNR’s draft master plan for the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area in August and September, and we’re now deeply involved in strategic planning for the organization to better define our role going forward. With land ownership on the 7,400-acre Badger lands all-but-certain, our current focus is to encourage all landowners to adhere to the values and principles they agreed to in what is known as the Badger Reuse Plan (2001). Since the DNR’s property comprises 3,400 acres and represents 46% of the of the former ammunition plant, it was important for us to give considerable attention to their draft plan released in mid-August.

Although we are currently in the middle of our strategic planning effort, there are some early observations and considerations for our future direction. Through a series of questionnaires and interviews, it has become obvious that our organization is widely recognized for its unique role in promoting a conservation future for the former Badger lands. We will continue to encourage collaborative conservation by the various landowners while engaging members of the community in restoration and appreciation of the combined lands.

In this issue we reflect on the loss of one of our founders, “Prairie Godmother” Mary Yeakel, who gave the organization a visual depiction of our vision with the iconic “Sauk Prairie Remembered, A Vision for the Future” painting. We’ll miss Mary dearly, but we are grateful to her for her tremendous contribution to the organization and to the future of the Sauk Prairie landscape at Badger.

On a lovely weekend in late August, the Alliance partnered with The Prairie Enthusiasts to sponsor a day-long prairie celebration that included a series of morning presentations and a visit to three prairie remnants that afternoon. It was a great event. Over 140 folks came to the presentations and over 80 continued on the excursion. We are grateful to the National Environmental Education Foundation for support of this successful event. Below are a few images from that day. ♦



LEFT: Alliance president Rob Nurre shares the DNR’s map of the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area with participants in the Sauk Prairie Day tour to the Badger Hillside Prairie.



BELOW: Rich Henderson, DNR grassland ecologist, describes the ecology and flora of Schluckebier Prairie, owned and managed by The Prairie Enthusiasts, a remnant prairie close to Badger.



BOTTOM: Ken Lange, retired naturalist at Devil’s Lake State Park, gave an overview of the geography and geology of the original Sauk Prairie to a crowd of over 140 at the Ruth Culver Public Library in Prairie du Sac for the Sauk Prairie Day in August.



Remembering MARY YEAKEL

by Mimi Wuest

Only small remnants of the once great prairie that ranged from Texas to Alberta remain today. Some of those remnants can be found at the old Badger Army Plant south of the Baraboo hills. Seeds of the once great prairie still remain, and the meadowlarks still sing the songs of the prairie. The birds continue to sing in part because of the prairie Godmothers who have watched over the Badger land for decades. With the death of Mary Yeakel in September, we lost one of those Prairie Godmothers.

Mary Yeakel was well qualified for Godmotherhood; she was wise and determined and devoted to the land. She was also a deep believer in the connectedness of all things and the many unseen mysteries around us. When the Army first declared its intention to leave the property, Mary had a vision of what that labyrinth of buildings and pipes and roads could become. She could see the prairie that lay beneath the army plant and she dedicated herself to its rebirth.

Mary and her friend Virginia Metcalf, another prairie Godmother, commissioned a painting called "*Sauk Prairie Remembered: a Vision for the Future*" that has inspired generations of nature lovers and that still remains an icon for the conservation community. (See accompanying article on next page.)

Artist Victor Bahktin shows Mary Yeakel (l) and Virginia Metcalf (r) the progress on his painting (1998)



Mary played a key role in the creation of the group now called the Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance and the development of the Reuse Plan for the Badger property. She was a unique combination of visionary and colonel. She was, in fact, Colonel in the Army Medical Specialist



Corps. In retirement, she helped found a conservation movement that will shape the future of the Sauk County landscape. She used elements of her commanding persona along with her deep eco-spirituality to guide the grueling process of saving the prairie.

She wrote letters. She attended hundreds of meetings. She compiled documents and literature on prairie restoration. And on behalf of Badger, she badgered everyone from the United States Department of Administration, the U.S. Army and the DNR, down to her dear friends and colleagues. No one was spared her opinions and her directions.

In large part due to Mary's determination, energy and vision, we now have the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area and the Ho Chunk Nation's parcel, an extensive combined natural area where prairie will be restored and once-endangered species will recover. Those of us who knew and loved Mary will hear her guiding us from the great beyond, ever true to her belief in listening to the land with love and respect. Aldo Leopold would have loved Mary Yeakel, just as all her friends in the conservation world did. Along with her role as prairie Godmother, Mary was also a midwife to the rebirth of the Great Sauk Prairie. May she watch over it forever. ♦

Prairie Godmothers and the Origin Story

by Gail Lamberty

For their vision and care for the land at Badger, we long ago dubbed Virginia Metcalf and Mary Yeakel our “Prairie Godmothers.” Their invaluable contribution to the future of Badger has been lovingly dubbed “The Painting” but its full name is “*Sauk Prairie Remembered: a Vision for the Future.*” With this painting, the memory of the past landscape creates the imagined future landscape.

After moving to Wisconsin from Maryland and Texas in 1988, Virginia and Mary planned to retire from the Army to a leisurely life of golf and travel. However, they heard about the proposal for decommissioning the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant and started attending and participating in many of the community meetings. They never imagined the prairie pathways tied to Badger that lay ahead for them.

With a shared vision for Badger’s future, these two remarkable Prairie Godmothers changed the course of Badger’s future by commissioning *Sauk Prairie Remembered* by Russian artist Victor Bahktin. Virginia now lives in Gig Harbor, Washington, but her heart remains on the Sauk Prairie. With Mary Yeakel’s passing in September, we wish to share a few of Virginia’s remembrances of “The Painting.”

Virginia Metcalf shares this story:

Mary and I thought a picture depicting what the Sauk Prairie might have looked like 200 years ago and could look like again after the BAAP was decommissioned and all the buildings removed, would help to convince people that reindustrializing the prairie was not in the best interest of the land, the people or the ecosystem. Many voices were speaking at the meetings in favor of development, fish farms, paint factories, chemical plants, rail-car storage, train car repair pits, and other high impact activities. But many were also speaking for conservation, preservation, protection of the land and what 7,000-plus contiguous acres adjoining the Baraboo Hills, a once in a lifetime opportunity to restore the Sauk Prairie, might look like. Voices and passions were sometimes raised in examining alternatives.

We called George Archibald at the International Crane Foundation to meet with us and Charlie Luthin over lunch to discuss the idea. World-



Virginia Metcalf

renowned Russian wildlife artist Victor Bahkin joined us. We chatted, laughed and considered options while George sketched a drawing on a napkin. Victor came a bit late but brought along his sketch book. From that napkin was born “The Painting.”

Mary and I discussed how Victor should incorporate typical prairie flora and fauna, and George recruited the help of botanists, conservation biologists and others to help Victor make the painting authentic to the original prairie of 200 years ago. Although Mary and I were originally thinking of a much smaller size—maybe 18x24 inches—we ultimately agreed on a much larger size, 5 foot X 7 foot!

One day Mary and I stopped at Victor’s house outside of Baraboo, and Victor had the painting outside so he could work on it in the sunlight. It looked magnificent in the sunshine, and the grasses of the painting flowed into the grasses of his yard. While we were there a beautiful butterfly landed on the part of the painting that was prairie. We took that as a message that we were on the right track!

We coordinated with the Alliance (then called Community Conservation Coalition for the Sauk Prairie, or CCCSP) to plan a gala unveiling of the painting in fall 1998, in Baraboo. Over 200

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Godmothers

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people attended and saw the painting unveiled by Victor. It was a spectacular evening.

The painting created a life of its own that consumed much of our time. Mary and I started an amazing journey with the painting all over Sauk and nearby counties: to the UW-Stevens Point

Artist Victor Bahktin with painting at Mary Yeakel's memorial service.



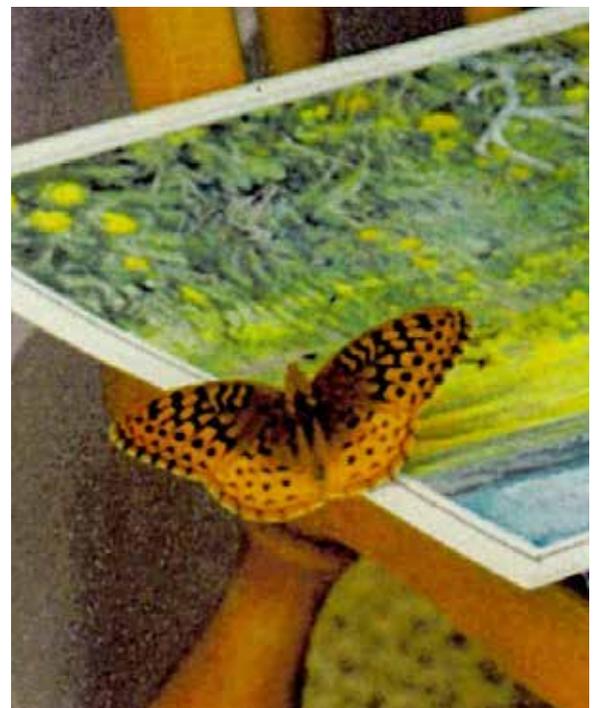
where it remained in the library for two weeks; to the Ace Hardware in Sauk City for Earth Day; to a presentation in Spring Green Library; to the Voyageur Inn, Reedsburg; at the Catholic Church in Reedsburg for Life Day Sunday; to Forest Products Lab in Madison; to Aldo Leopold Foundation, Baraboo; to the Expo Center in Madison for Garden Expo; at ICF for their 25th anniversary gala; to UW-Baraboo for several events; to St. Clare Hospital, Baraboo; at Sauk County Courthouse many times for meetings; at Ho Chunk Casino for meetings; at Ski Hi Apple Orchard, Badger Army Ammunition Plant, Sumpter City Hall, Sauk County Museum, Sinsinawa Mound, Dellona Town Hall, North Freedom Earth Day and Bunch Art Gallery in Prairie

While a sketch prepared for his acrylic painting was drying, a Gulf Fritillary butterfly alighted on the drawing. Virginia and Mary saw this as a good sign!

du Sac, to name a few. The painting helped get the message out there for what the Badger landscape once was and can become again. Public support was unified around the painting and its message of a restored Sauk Prairie.

Although Mary passed away on Sept 14th, our vision for the painting lives strong. The painting has quite a story of its own and the final chapter is yet to be written. Mary and I always dreamed and envisioned that the painting would be hung above the entry way of the (yet-to-be-realized) Sauk Prairie Museum on the former Badger lands, a museum similar to the one at Bayfield which has an elevated deck that looks out over an expansive marshland, but the Sauk Prairie Museum would look out over the prairie. We have hoped that Dairy Forage Research Center, the Ho Chunk Nation, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (the 3 principal "owners") working together can construct a museum to tell and share the story of the Sauk Prairie lands and its people. The geologic past would come alive as would the story of the First People, the flora, fauna and subsequent life of all sorts on the prairie. What stories there will be to tell! I plan to live long enough to visit the Sauk Prairie Museum and Welcome Center at Badger. May the vision endure! ♦

The Sauk Prairie Remembered—a Vision for the Future limited edition prints are available for a \$200 donation to the Alliance, and posters of the painting are offered for a \$50 membership. Make a gift at saukprairievision.org or call 608.643.8017 for further details.



Support the Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance!

The mission of the Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance is to promote the conservation of the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant lands and the greater Sauk Prairie landscape through ecological restoration, education, research and low-impact recreation.

Yes, I would like to support a sustainable future for the Badger lands and the greater Sauk Prairie landscape with my tax-deductible gift of

\$ _____.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

PHONE _____

EMAIL _____

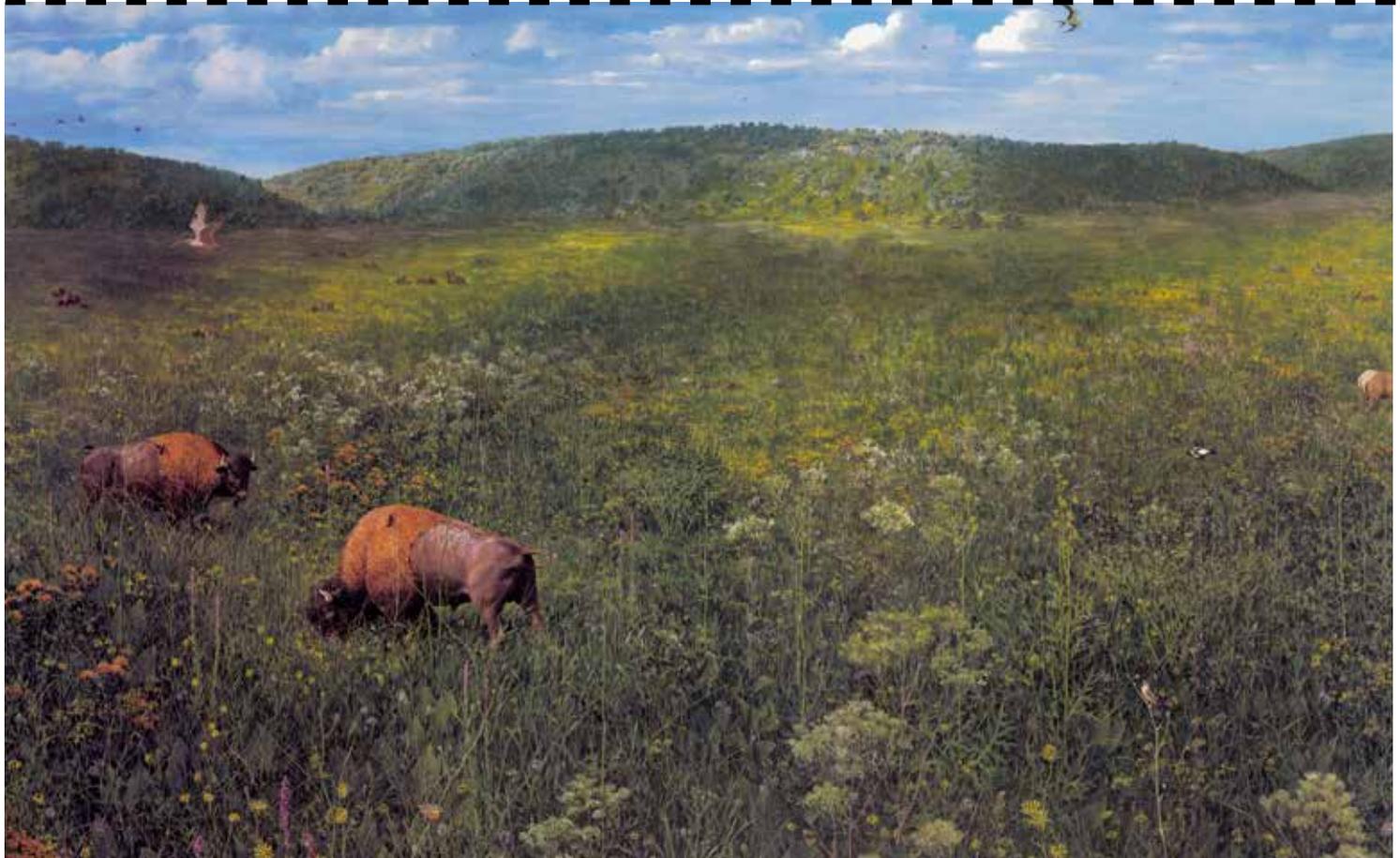
Members joining or renewing at the \$50 level or higher are eligible to receive a one-time gift of a poster of Victor Bakhtin's painting, *Sauk Prairie Remembered: A Vision for the Future*. For a donation of \$200 you will receive a signed limited edition of the Bakhtin painting.

Please send me a poster (\$50 or more) a signed print (\$200 or more).

Please make checks payable to:
The Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance (TSPCA)
PO Box 403, Baraboo WI 53913,
or donate online at saukprairievision.org
Thank You!

The Alliance, a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, dates back to 1997, when a meeting was held in Baraboo among conservation-minded individuals and organizations to discuss possible options for the soon to be decommissioned Badger Army Ammunition Plant. Since that time, countless volunteers have worked tirelessly to promote a conservation future for the 7,300 acres at Badger, and that fate is now all but assured! The Alliance continues to advocate for the most appropriate and compatible land uses on the former Badger lands, now managed by four primary landowners—Wisconsin DNR, USDA Dairy Forage Research Center, Ho Chunk Nation, and Bluffview Sanitary District. The Alliance **undertakes on-site ecological restoration** through its robust volunteer program, **leads tours and offers educational programs**, and **supports important research** on lands at Badger, emphasizing support for native ecosystems with abundant wildlife, while offering low impact recreational opportunities for all citizens.

Please support the Alliance with your donation today at saukprairievision.org! A limited edition, numbered print of Victor Bakhtin's painting, *Sauk Prairie Remembered: A Vision for the Future*, is available for a one-time donation of \$200 or more. Members joining at the \$50 level or higher will receive a one-time gift of a poster of the painting.





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DNR

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Service (NPS) Federal Lands to Parks Program, DNR was explicit in stating that only “low impact” recreation would be planned for the property. We are holding DNR to that commitment. Our attorney with Foley and Lardner law firm in Madison wrote a letter to DNR on the Alliance’s behalf indicating the potential legal implications of contradicting its original proposal to NPS.

Next steps? DNR has compiled and posted all of the public comments it received—a total of 1,900 that includes postcards, electronic submissions and letters. DNR staff are reviewing the public comments and are revising the plan. We anticipate that the final plan will be available to the public by the end of the year. The final plan needs to be approved by the Natural Resources Board, perhaps at its January 28th meeting in Madison.

More about the draft master planning process for the SPRA and the Alliance’s response can be found on our website: www.saukprairievision.org. The complete master plan and maps, together with a summary and all of the public comments received on the draft plan are posted on DNR’s website, dnr.wi.gov/topic/Lands/MasterPlanning/SaukPrairie/. ♦

A Sneak Peek at the 2016 Alliance Calendar

The following are the probable dates of Alliance volunteer training and restoration work days next year. Details of work days and any changes will be posted on our website: saukprairievision.org. The events listed all occur on a Saturday unless otherwise noted. Generally, work days occur on the second Saturday of almost every month in spring, summer and fall.

- March 5:** Volunteer Training Workshop
- March 12:** Volunteer Work Day—release the prairie nursery
- April 9:** Volunteer Work Day
- April 12-13:** Banff Mountain Film Festival, Barrymore Theater, Madison proceeds to benefit Alliance. Get your tickets early!
- May 14:** Volunteer Work Day
- June 11:** Volunteer Work Day
- September 10:** Volunteer Work Day
- October 8:** Volunteer Work Day
- November 12:** Volunteer Work Day