



# The Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance

Creating a Conservation Future for the Badger Lands



## *Behind the Fence*

### National Park Service & DNR Differ on Master Plan

In August 2015, the Department of Natural Resources released its Draft Master Plan for the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area for public comment. In May, the National Park Service provided a 10-page summary of comments on the Plan. In that letter they identified a number of concerns and deficiencies in the Plan that need to be addressed before the Park Service will sign off on the Plan.

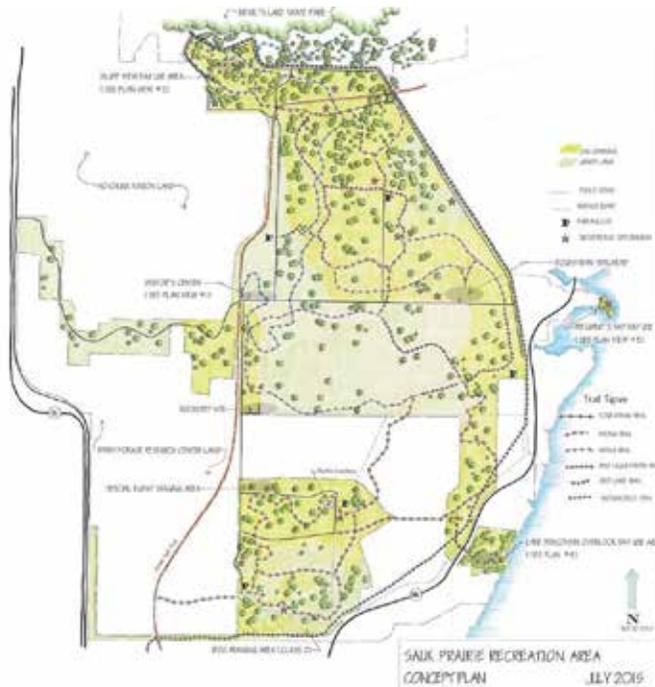
In 2005, DNR received the land through the Federal “Lands to Parks” Program administered by the National Park Service (NPS). In its application to NPS and based on the Badger Reuse Plan signed by DNR and others in 2001, DNR highlighted “low impact recreation” for the property, and DNR offered a number of examples (hiking, biking, picnicking). In its draft plan ten years later, DNR included some recreational activities that would arguably be considered “high impact,” such as off-road motorcycling, rocketry and Class 2 dog training (that entails

the potential discharge of firearms throughout the year). The Park Service told DNR that it must either amend its original application to include such activities or remove them from the Plan. Furthermore, were DNR to pursue high impact recreation, the revised plan must contain considerably more detail addressing the potential environmental impacts and user conflicts that those activities would entail. Furthermore, NPS indicated that potential conflicts with neighboring landowners (e.g., USDA Dairy Forage Research Center) must be addressed.

In its response to NPS, DNR stated outright that it didn’t need to amend its original application nor undertake any further environmental analyses once a slightly modified plan is presented. “The master plan does not deviate from the DNR’s application to receive the property through the Federal Lands to Parks Program. As such, there is not a need to amend or change the [application].”

The two most contentious activities—rocketry and off-road motorcycles—were addressed in DNR’s response: “...the DNR developed an initial draft property plan that included many outdoor recreation activities common to DNR properties as well as two—rocketry and dual-sport motorcycles—that are uncommon. After considering input from the public on the initial draft master plan, the DNR is clarifying the conditions and guidelines for several of the recreation activities proposed at SPRA (including rocketry and dual-sport motorcycles). The DNR believes that the collection of recreation opportunities proposed for SPRA, and the parameters by which they can occur, meet the intent of using the property for low impact recreation.”

The Alliance would like to see all reference to any high impact recreation be removed from a modified master plan for the SPRA. DNR indicated that it would seek approval for its plan “within several months.” ♦



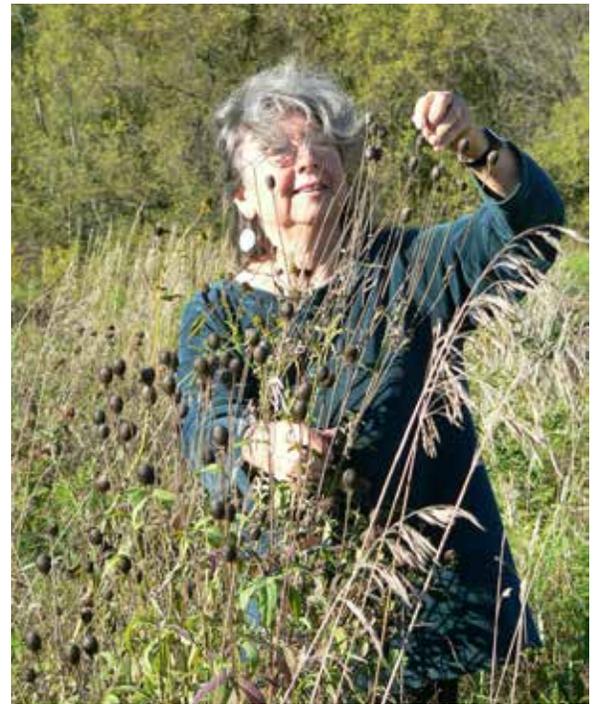
The conceptual map of the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area that accompanied the DNR’s Draft Master Plan for the property.

## Meet the Board: Mimi Wuest *in her own words...*

I was groomed for the Alliance since childhood, having been in the Girl Scouts for 10 years and president of the high school conservation club. I was introduced to the Alliance by friends Virginia Metcalf and Mary Yeakel. I have vastly exceeded my lifetime allotment of meetings, but I just keep hoping for a conservation future for the Badger Lands.

I particularly enjoy working on the land at Badger. The land has seen so much and it bears witness to it all. I feel that we in the Alliance are the voices of the meadowlarks and the prairie clover. My other interests include rescuing chestnut trees, writing columns for two newspapers, participating in a small craft business and teaching sociology at Madison College. I believe the restored Badger Lands will be our gift to the future. ♦

Mimi Wuest has served on the Alliance Board of Directors for almost 15 years, and she is a past and current president of the organization.



## Volunteer Spotlight: Brett Schmidt



Brett Schmidt has participated in volunteer restoration workdays since April 2013. Brett has been volunteering with environmentally-minded organizations since the age of 13. Brett studied environmental engineering in college and served as an active-duty U.S. Army Officer. Brett is an engineer for a manufacturing company in Beloit while also continuing to serve in the U.S.

Army Reserve. He began volunteering with the Alliance after returning from a year-long deployment to Afghanistan, his third overseas combat tour. "I wanted to find a volunteer opportunity with a conservation organization that involved physical outdoor work and where I could make a tangible impact. I knew a bit about prairie restoration after planting a small prairie gardens at my houses in Illinois and Colorado."

Brett particularly enjoys the satisfaction of seeing an area cleared of brush or invasive species after several hours of work. "I've got a desk job as an engineer, so spending a Saturday morning out in the prairie is a welcome change of pace and place." Brett also volunteers doing trail building with the Ice Age Trail Alliance.

Brett's wife, Tessa, has also volunteered on a number of restoration workdays. Brett and Tessa live in Stoughton with their daughter Annika. Tessa is a librarian with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. Brett says that they both share a strong sense of service, and encourage others to give back to their community. "There are many ways to serve, whether it's something life-changing like joining the military or the Peace Corps, or occasionally volunteering for your local library, the Alliance, or another community organization. The important thing is to give back and encourage others to do so. Please join us at a restoration workday. With 5 acres down and 5000+ to go, we need all the help we can get, and it'll be a fun, rewarding experience for them." ♦

# Badger Lands Update

Currently, three major landowners— Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Ho-Chunk Nation and USDA Dairy Forage Research Center—own large tracts of the former 7,400-acre Badger Army Ammunition Plant. Here is an update on land management activities on the Badger Lands.

## DNR AND HO-CHUNK NATION CONDUCT EFFECTIVE CONTROLLED BURNS AT BADGER



The Ho-Chunk Nation, in cooperation with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), completed prescribed burns on 680 acres of tribal land at Badger this spring. Approximately 480 acres were previously burned in the spring of 2015 to control unwanted woody vegetation. An additional 200 acres on the north side of tribal land and along US Highway 12 were included in the spring burn in an attempt to top-kill invasive woody vegetation. The burns in these areas will be followed up by forestry mowing of shrubs later this summer. In May, staff also revisited the permanent photo-points that were established throughout the parcel in the fall of 2015. The Nation plans to photograph the parcel throughout the various seasons to capture changes on the landscape stemming from management actions.



LEFT: Nancy Frost, DNR's wildlife biologist for Sauk County, visits a planted prairie site that was part of a 183-acre burn on DNR land at the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area in early spring. She was pleased with the proliferation of native wildflowers and the reduction of brushy growth on the site. Nancy has responsibility for habitat management at the 3,500-acre Sauk Prairie Recreation Area at Badger. Until there is a final Master Plan for the property, her management activities are limited to control of invasive species, with a focus on woody invasive shrubs like honeysuckle, autumn olive and multi-flora rose.

The Nation continues to assess remaining infrastructure and will be working with WI Power and Light in the upcoming month to safely deconstruct and recycle several unwanted power lines and transformers. This is one of many deconstruction efforts that will be required in the upcoming years to assure safety and ready areas for land management and restoration. ♦

FAR LEFT: This image shows the effectiveness of early spring burns on the control of small shrubs on Ho-Chunk grasslands at Badger. Photo: Randy Poelma, Ho-Chunk Nation

## ALLIANCE HOSTS WORK DAYS AT HILLSIDE PRAIRIE AND PRAIRIE NURSERY



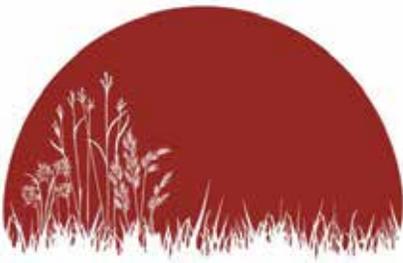
ABOVE: Dozens of loyal volunteers have participated in regular restoration work days throughout the spring on various parcels at Badger, including at the remnant "Hillside Prairie" on state land and a once-abandoned prairie nursery on Dairy Forage Research Center land that is being nurtured back to health by the Alliance.

## Charlie's Corner

by Charlie Luthin, Executive Director.



We've had a busy spring and early summer! We've been diligently tracking the status of the master plan for the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area (see lead article). We've already conducted nine volunteer work days at Badger, planned a great program series starting later this summer (thanks to Alliant Energy Foundation) and initiated work on a "Visitor Guide to the Sauk Prairie Recreation Area" (thanks to our outdoor partner, REI). The latter will provide a detailed map to the 3,500-acre public area with some recommendations on recreational activities that can be conducted there. Our goal is to make the guide accessible in print and electronically to accommodate all users. In June, the Wisconsin Invasive Species Council honored Alliance volunteers with its "Invader Crusader" Award. I am proud of our many dedicated volunteers over the past 15 years. Thanks to our donors and volunteers for their support.



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## Alliance Volunteers Receive Invader Crusader Award



On June 9th, the Wisconsin Invasive Species Council recognized the many Alliance volunteers over the past 15 years for their dedicated work removing invasive species from the Badger prairies. In a ceremony at the Horicon Visitor Center, the Council presented the “Invader Crusader” Award to the Alliance and to several other organizations and individuals from throughout the state. Congratulations, Volunteers!



Membership expiring?  
Not a member yet,  
but like what you see?

Make a donation or  
JOIN the ALLIANCE online at  
[saukprairievision.org](http://saukprairievision.org)

## Upcoming Restoration Events

NOTE: The Alliance has planned a monthly series, “We Are Sauk Prairie” supported by a grant from Alliant Energy Foundation that starts in late summer. Members will receive a forthcoming flyer announcing the program series.

- September 10** Excursion to Nachusa Grasslands and Nygren Wetland Reserve (Illinois)
- September 24** Alliance/REI Volunteer Work Day
- October 8** Volunteer Work Day at Badger
- November 12** Volunteer Work Day