

Hook Lake Savanna Will Evolve Slowly

by Doris Rusch, DNR Wildlife Biologist

Converting more than 500 acres of crop land and "weedy" woodlots to oak savanna is going to take many years and a lot of patience. Patience was never one of my virtues, but if we can wait, if we can get all the management done, we'll see a glimpse of our history.

The landscapes will resemble what our great-grandparents saw (minus the bison and tepes). Perhaps I'll not be around to see the little bur oak seedlings grow into giants with massive spreading branches heavy with acorn mast, but my daughter will.

Actually, the Hook Lake landscape on the old McMannus parcel has already changed, but it's a transitory change, and not at all what we want for a final vista. For the next few years, we're going to have to live with the hundreds of little white tubes stuck upright all over fields like headstones at Arlington Cemetery.

We'll have to live with standing dead box elder, looking brown and ugly to some. We'll have to live with piles of honeysuckle brush. We'll have to live with weeds (lambsquarters, pigweed, and thistle) in the fields. We'll have to listen to the buzz of chainsaws, and smell the smoke of early spring fires.

Let's take stock of what has occurred on the land since the McMannus parcel was purchased by the state.

1. A controlled burn in spring 1991 killed many of the little box elder saplings growing in set-aside fields. The fire also killed or hurt some of the honeysuckle and exotics growing in woodlots. It reduced the fuel load (dead wood and plant matter) and thus the risk of an uncontrollable fire in the future.

2. Three 10-acre fields were prepared in the spring of 1991 by our field worker, Jim Lunde, for seeding prairie grasses and flowers. Donations from the Dane County Land Conservation Committee, Pheasants Forever, Audubon Society and others allowed us to plant \$30,000 worth of prairie seed on the three fields. With a gang of volunteers, we broadcast planted 27 species of prairie seed by hand. All seed was from plants of Wisconsin genotype and cost \$60 to \$150 per ounce! Is this seed worth more than gold?

3. For two weeks, a Wisconsin Conservation Corps crew pulled honeysuckle out of the woodlots and stacked it into brush piles. We also tried to kill all mature box elder to keep them from spreading seed far and wide

into our new prairie fields. We used a small bulldozer to clear the woodlots behind the McMannus residence and at the edge of Hook Lake. Cleared earth under the oaks was planted in flowers and grasses.

4. We received a \$15,000 grant from the Small Business Association for planting trees — 2,700 young bur, white and black oak, complete with tubex shelters to increase survival.

5. We hired two seed collectors, who spent the late summer collecting great bagfuls of prairie seed, and spent the winter cleaning and preparing the seed for this spring's planting.

6. Several research projects were begun by UW students on the site, including an inventory of birds and mammals, population and distribution of ruffed grouse, and survival of young oak stock with and without tubex shelters.

What's next? What work is planned for this spring and summer?

A controlled burn is planned for this spring. The burn will favor the prairie species by eliminating the competing cool season plants. The burn will also reduce the brush invasion into fields, and further set back the honeysuckle growth in the woodlots.

The property is difficult to burn because a south wind is needed to keep smoke from Rutland-Dunn Road and from developments to the east and west. South winds in spring that do not carry moisture are rare. If a south wind favors us, landowners nearby will find a yellow notice of the burn on their door knob.

Another 30 acres will be prepared for prairie seeding by Jim Lunde. Since we have great stores of cleaned prairie seed this year (thanks to our collectors),

we'll need to buy only a few species.

Work will continue in the woodlots all season to clear out the exotic species and to open up the oaks. Little oaks can then regenerate and other native prairie species can grow.

Neighbors of a wildlife area enjoy the benefits of direct access to a "huge yard" to ramble in that, for most of the year, has few other visitors. However, these neighbors also put up with the strangers who use the public lands. There may be occasional trespassing, littering, and dog confrontations.

For the most part, members of the public are responsible and have great integrity — but there are always some who have little respect for property or rules. If problems arise, we can usually

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Advisory Committee Members Sought for Park Dunn Heritage Park to be seeded in grass this summer

Parks commission members and program presenters practically outnumbered residents at a special information meeting about funding and design of the Dunn Heritage Park on March 11, 1993, at the town hall.

The meeting was called to inform residents about a new plan to help finance the park's development, to give the parks commission a sense of the direction residents wished for that development, and to request that residents form an advisory committee to more directly guide the park's design. None of the 10 or so neighbors at the meeting offered their assistance. They did, however, request that the land be seeded into grass this spring.

The proposed 28-acre park is located between Tower Road and Jordan Drive on the south shore of Lake Waubesa. Last year, the parks commission had hoped to raise 50 percent of the funds for the park's development with Wisconsin Stewardship Fund money and had hired a design firm to propose a design and file the necessary paperwork. Those plans fell through when the project was not selected for state funding and when neighbors decided the plan would make a more active recreational park than they wanted. The designer had added many features to the plan to gain "points" in the competition for Stewardship Fund dollars. At last month's meeting,

Suzanne Wade from the Yahara/Monona Priority Watershed District and Duane Wagner from the Dane County Land Conservation Department explained a possible alternative funding source under the state's Nonpoint Source Water Pollution Abatement Program.

A watershed is all of the land that contributes water to a particular point; the Yahara River watershed is made up of hundreds of small watersheds that contribute to it. In the case of Dunn Heritage Park area, the watershed is 400 acres and includes the Spartan Hills, Waubesa Heights and Burmeister Woods subdivisions and farmland.

Under the NSWPA program, Wagner said the town could receive 70 percent funding for improvements made to the land that would help eliminate nonpoint source pollution. Primarily, that would include any water routing on the lower portion of the park land. He also said the program could cover more of the costs if townspeople contributed labor to the project to make up the remaining 30 percent.

Nonpoint source pollution is primarily water runoff that contains soil or other materials collected as it flows over farm fields, yards and streets. In addition to the solid materials in the water, it also carries phosphates and fertilizers that cause weed growth in the lake. Since the park is within the Yahara River

Watershed, the nonpoint source pollution that enters Lake Waubesa as silt from this land helps it qualify for funding. Wagner said a farm to the south of the park is the primary contributor to the nonpoint source pollution entering the lake through the park land, and that by his working with the land owner and with the town, funding could be received to control the runoff, which would essentially be most of the earth moving needed in the future park.

One restriction to this funding comes from the NSWPA program's regulations, which might require water retention ponds to be built on a watershed of this size. As Wagner explained, the area would require two ponds as large as 200 feet by 200 feet and two to three feet deep to hold all the runoff from a 25-year storm. This option would require more engineering, more maintenance, more expense, but would use the least amount of park land.

Residents, however, opposed the ponds and requested that shallow scrapes be built to retain the water, or a grass strip be installed by the farm owner to reduce the sediment flow. Ten or 11 scrapes would be needed to hold the same amount of water as the ponds. Residents favored such an approach because it uses natural processes to slow water flow and remove sediments and will require less engineering and

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Spring Reaffirms Plan Commission's Importance

by Steve Greb, Plan Commission Chair

Occasionally during Plan Commission meetings, when the hour is late, I look around the room at the bloodshot eyes and listen to the strained voices and I wonder whether our work is worth it.

But then spring comes along. I can once again sit on my back porch; the air has lost that cold winter bite. The loud rattling call of the sandhill cranes echoes across the nearby marsh as they settle in for the night. Soon choruses of spring peepers will fill the night air.

These sites and sounds, I feel, are in part the fruits of the Plan Commission's labor. Fifteen years ago, the town of Dunn enacted a strong land-use policy, which sought to preserve and protect the agricultural and natural features of our township.

Today, through strict adherence to that plan, we have kept our township the enjoyable place to live that it is. Collectively, the town's residents have developed policies that determine the future of land use in our township, and the Plan Commission will continue to carry out those mandates.

I know I speak for all the commission members when I say that we appreciate all of the support we received during the past year. We welcome everyone to attend our meetings, held on the second Monday of every month. Enjoy your spring! I know I will.

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help. The DNR folks who manage state-owned properties respect the neighbors and the community. We need their help to monitor activities, wildlife health, unusual events, and developing problems. We like working in an atmosphere of neighborly good will and a shared vision.

The DNR folks who are working on the Hook Lake Wildlife Area are: Mike Foy, the new Dane County Wildlife Manager (273-6275); Dennis Gengler, Wildlife Technician (273-5943); Mark Martin, Natural Areas Manager (266-8916); and Doris Rusch, Area Wildlife Biologist (273-5944).

Tornado and Theft Losses Are Deductible

A copy of IRS Publication 547, *Nonbusiness Disasters, Casualties, and Thefts*, is on file at the town hall. This publication explains how to treat casualty and theft losses for tax purposes when the losses are not business related. You have a casualty loss if you suffer damage to your property as a result of disasters such as tornadoes, fires, car accidents, and similar events. You have a theft loss if someone steals your property. You may be able to deduct the loss if you file Form 1040 and itemize your deductions of Schedule A. You can also obtain a free copy of this publication by calling 1-800-829-3676.

Town Legal Expenses Detailed

Recently letters have been published in area newspapers that have been misleading as to the amount of money the town has spent on legal fees. In an effort to clear up any confusion, we are presenting a break-down of all legal expenses for the past two years. The biggest single legal expense (75%) has been incurred in our effort to prevent the Libby Landfill from being built on the western shore of Lake Waubesa. Fortunately, over the past two years we have had several allies, such as the Lake Waubesa Conservation Association, which donated \$20,000 (of which \$5,000 came from the village of McFarland) toward legal fees in September of 1991 and will present an additional \$10,000 later this month. In addition, Dane County has donated \$25,000 plus attorney time; the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation has donated one-half of the lead legal firm's costs; and many citizens have contributed through individual donations.

As a result, while the town's legal costs may look large at the end of the year on the expense side of the budget, the number does not reflect the amount offset by donations, which appears on the revenue side of the budget. Beyond the Libby Landfill issue, the town's legal fees are for a range of issues including such things as an assessment appeal, holding tank dispute, ordinance updates, and condemnations of dangerous trees and structures.

Detail of Legal Expenses in 1991 and 1992

Date	Libby Landfill	Misc.	Watzke Assessment	Aberg Suit Ordinances	Land Use Issues	Cemetery	Cable TV	WTA Annex.	Total
Feb. 1992	494.14	671.20	595.00	3950.20	586.50	1937.00	541.10		541.10
Mar. 1992	791.52								
Apr. 1992		351.50	323.00	755.60		2665.60		178.50	178.50
May 1992	8208.59								
June 1992	3786.94	228.50	229.90	800.15		719.65		18.50	18.50
July 1992			1007.50	237.50				8.50	8.50
Aug. 1992	3824.80								
Oct. 1992		1885.40	367.60	152.30	367.50				
Nov. 1992	8557.47			4153.60					
1992 Total	25663.46	3136.60	2523.00	1742.15	954.00	5322.25	568.10	348.50	568.10
Less revenue	-9747.21								
Net expense	15916.25								15916.25
Jan. 1991		357.00							
Feb. 1991		161.50							
Mar. 1991	1352.13	87.50							
Apr. 1991	2372.12	42.00							59.50
May 1991	1770.68	404.50							
June 1991	10818.07	654.50							
July 1991	7650.41	102.00				8.50			
Aug. 1991	18198.81	374.00							
Oct. 1991	22728.64	76.50				110.50			
Nov. 1991	10441.60	212.50				544.00			
Dec. 1991	5321.21	188.33				59.50			
1991 Total	80653.67	2660.33				722.50	59.50	119.00	2616.00
Less revenue	-35252.79								
Net expense	45400.88								45400.88
2 year total	61317.13	5796.93	2523.00	1742.15	954.00	6044.75	627.60	467.50	2616.00
									82089.85

Heritage Park Goals

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 Residents also seemed to feel that the scrapes themselves, when planted in wetland vegetation, could be a major step toward their goal of restoring the wetlands along the lake.

Residents were insistent that the land be planted with a perennial grass this spring, and felt that the change from corn could help them better visualize what they want the park to eventually look like. Bill Gausman has volunteered to seed the land with timothy this spring as soon as his own crops are in.

Other parts of the project discussed by the neighbors were restoration of the oak savannah and prairie restoration on at least part of the property. The Dane County Parks Department has offered a training session for residents to learn about collecting and planting prairie seed.

Wagner said he will be contacting the farm contractor who rents the farmland to the southwest of the park to ask for help in controlling the runoff. If he gets the support of the farmer and the landowner, the parks commission will be able to pursue the NSWPA program funding.

Residents willing to volunteer on an advisory committee should contact parks chair Elaine Andrews at 222-2255 or contact the clerk's office in the town hall.