



# SPRINGS

Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy Newsletter

## Reaching Out: New Education Committee Efforts

By John Daly

The January 2016 issue of National Geographic Magazine features an article titled, "This is Your Brain on Nature." In it author David Gessner reports that "Science is proving what we've always known intuitively: nature does good things to the human brain. It makes us healthier, happier, and smarter."

In this same article, environmental psychologists Stephen and Rachel Kaplan at the University of Michigan submit that elements in nature that appeal to our senses reduce stress and mental fatigue. They found that a 50-minute walk in an arboretum, conservancy or forested area has the potential to improve attention skills,

such as short-term memory. "Imagine a therapy that had no known side effects, was readily available, and could improve your cognitive functioning at zero cost," the researchers wrote in their paper. It exists and it's called "interacting with nature."

The FOPBC Education Committee has been reflecting on the fascinating research of brain health and the

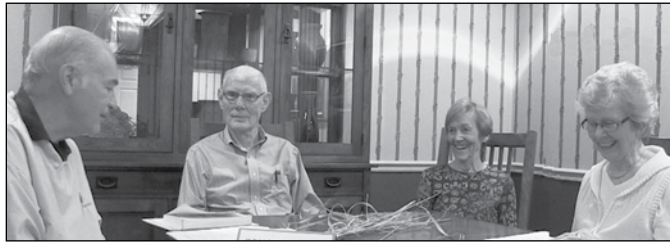
relationship between positive well-being and the natural environment. This is a natural progression of the commitment to promote lifelong learning for all ages and one of the committee's strategic planning goals and objectives.

*Goal Three: Improve Use of the Conservancy in Environmental Education*

*Objective B: Enhance environmental education programming for adult audiences and families.*

In Spring 2015, the Education Committee decided to extend its focus to two underserved populations – senior citizens and individuals with Alzheimer's disease and dementia. During

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*FOPBC Board Member John Daly meeting with seniors at Middleton Glen Retirement Community*

## "Prairie Chase" 2016 Run/Walk - A Family-Friendly "FUNdraiser"

By Tom Crozier

This June 25, 2016 the Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy will be hosting its second annual "Prairie Chase" Run/Walk event starting at Orchid Heights Park, Middleton. The event includes a 5K/10K Run on the limestone trail that circles the Conservancy and a 5K Walk that will go off into the prairie in and around Frederick's Hill. Registration

begins at 7 AM at the Orchid Heights Shelter. The race will start at 8 AM.

Last year, we had 250 participants -- 25 of whom were children 18 years or younger! We hope that we will attract more families with children this year. All children will receive a free gift included in their race packet. Last year they received

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Protect. Restore. Promote.



## FROM THE PRESIDENT...

Dear Friends,

One enjoyable aspect of being president of the FOPBC is meeting members. When I mention the Pheasant Branch Conservancy, people's faces light up as they tell me about their experiences. It seems that anyone familiar with Pheasant Branch Conservancy is an enthusiastic supporter. When you are there on a daily or weekly basis, you become keenly aware of the passage of seasons. You feel a personal ownership of the land as you notice changes in the trees, prairies and wildlife. Many, like you, support the Conservancy through your membership. Some are more active by volunteering on one of our committees. The Restoration and Management Committee work is just beginning. They meet the third Saturday of the month April through October. Naturalists are needed when the Education Committee sponsors field trips for school children of all ages. If you are interested and want more information, go to our website.

"Conservancy Days" presented by the Education Committee is program series open to the public. One event this winter featured our local bird expert, Mike

McDowell. His talk about owls was so popular there were more people than the room would seat. If you were there you heard many interesting facts about owls such as: when baby owls leave the nest they spend several weeks on the ground. Besides baby owls there are many ground nesting birds including cranes that are also vulnerable in the spring and this is why all dogs must be kept on leash when in the Conservancy. No exceptions. This rule must be followed if we are going to continue to allow dogs on the path in the future. I am pleased to say that I think most dog owners behave responsibly when it comes to picking up after their dogs.

Speaking about picking up, I know someone who walks on the path daily and picks up every piece of trash, no matter how small, then takes it home to discard. You can see that there are many ways to be a good member of the Friends and I am very proud of our membership.

Sincerely,

Dagny Myrah

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# Mike Healy: Bock Forest Restoration Ecologist

By Stefanie Brouwer

Anyone who has volunteered at the Bock Community Forest or Bock Community Gardens will recognize the name (and probably the face) of ecologist Mike Healy. Mike and his company Adaptive Restoration LLC are the ecological consultants in charge of restoration efforts at the Bock Forest. The Friends help pay for these services with grants received from the Bock Foundation. Mike has been involved since 2009 when his company began implementing the “Bock Forest Ecological Assessment and Management Plan” for the City of Middleton. The plan describes and analyzes the overall condition of the forest as well as the individual survey units within it, such as the “Oak Woodland Unit” and the “Hay Field Unit;” proposes a desired future for the forest; and lays out management recommendations along with a five to seven year implementation schedule. Progress is evaluated each year and the schedule of tasks is adjusted to adapt to on-site conditions, like weed abundance and seedling establishment, as well as uncontrollable circumstances like weather. The plan was required as part of the agreement between the Friends and the WDNR when a Stewardship Program grant was awarded for acquisition of the

property and subsequent transfer of ownership to the city.

As lead ecologist at Adaptive Restoration LLC, Mike plans and implements



restoration projects, from prescribed burns to native plant establishment. Additionally, he conducts native plant surveys, ecological assessments and wetland delineations. Prior to moving to Wisconsin, Mike served for five years as the Naturalist for the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority (NVRPA), where he helped manage a 67-acre park and planned and presented educational programs for over 10,000 visitors each year. Mike also brings experience in water resource management, from his work monitoring and mapping hundreds of miles of streams and rivers with the Connecticut Department of

Environmental Protection and the Pennsylvania-based Alliance for Aquatic Resource Monitoring.

Mike holds a M.S. in Environment and Resources from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a B.S. in Environmental Science and Biology from Dickinson College. His graduate research focused on wetland restoration, native plant establishment and invasive species management. This work is published in *Restoration Ecology*, *Invasive Plant Science and Management*, and the *Natural Areas Journal*. Mike has over a decade of prescribed fire experience and his wildland firefighter training includes completion of The Nature Conservancy’s Crew Boss and Engine Boss Academies.

Mike lives on 10 acres in southwest Dane County, near Mount Vernon, with his wife Anna, son Henry, 2 cats, 14 chickens and a team of Suffolk draft horses. When he isn’t fighting invasives or burning prairie, Mike can occasionally be heard playing saxophone with a local country band, The Feralcats.

“I developed a close connection to water at a young age. It’s exciting to be a part of restoring and protecting the wetlands, prairie, woodlands and savanna of the Pheasant Branch watershed.”

## New Education Efforts...

the months from October 2015 to February 2016, dialogues were established with various retirement living communities and senior centers. These senior facilities and the Dementia Friendly Community Coalition of Middleton have helped us to identify several important considerations for the Pheasant Branch Conservancy including activities, enhancements, materials and programs. Some of these include:

Activities: Senior Days and Dementia Friendly Days during the summer and the fall in the Conservancy with topical programs and guided tours

Enhancements: Signage and designated areas to experience the environment

Materials: Descriptive maps with references to estimated length and time for a hike or a “slow walk”

Programs: Conservancy Days focused on the needs of senior audiences

To date, the following collaborations have been established in Middleton and the west side of Madison:

- Attic Angels Place
- Dementia Friendly Community Coalition
- Heritage Senior Living
- Oakwood Village–University Woods

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- Middleton Glen Retirement Community
- Middleton Senior Center

In addition, separate meetings have been scheduled with the Dane County Parks Department staff and the Middleton Public Lands Recreation & Forestry Department staff.

There are some very exciting ideas being considered. The Pheasant Branch Conservancy can play an important part by reaching out to our seniors and those with cognitive challenges. The Education Committee will keep you posted.





## NATURALIST NOTEBOOK: News of Nature in the Conservancy

### Spring Renewal in the Conservancy

By Dale Klubertanz

The spring prairie fires have come early this year, following in the wake of a mild, uncertain El Niño winter that swept in and out several times, even as April arrived. Steady prevailing southwest winds played host to perfect burn conditions, with the snow that had accumulated over the last of winter melting and streaming into the chain of lakes, beginning with Lake Mendota. The warm temperatures and humidity, both in the air and in the remnants of last year's dried grasses and forbs, made for flames that reached high and hot against the relentless wind. Its fury held fast at the blackened margins of strategically placed back burns. Those who watched with smoke-filled eyes agreed that it was the most spectacular controlled burn they've ever seen.

The inaugural burns of the Bock prairie and savanna took place earlier in March, with dark-russet native forbs that had recently peeked through the cover of snow, now filled with restless tinder and anticipation. These native plant communities, which had bloomed gloriously for the first time last summer, now stood ready for transformation in preparation of another cycle of seasons. The city's restoration crew began work with widening back burns at the northwest edges of the prairie and then set free a blaze that quickly swept over the land against the wind. The white, blue-black smoke obscured the view of human communities and homes along Highland Way and Valley Ridge Road, clouds rising high above the prairie and obscuring much of the sky. In a short while, the burn was carefully

finished as fire workers turned the tangle of dried wildflowers surrounding Bock Community Garden to ash.

In late March, it was the northern prairie's turn near the springs and wetland, around and under the ancient burr oak savannas of Frederick's Hill.

*"When the Earth is sick, the animals will begin to disappear, when that happens, The Warriors of the Rainbow will come to save them."*

~ Chief Seattle



*The recent Bock Forest burn*

In almost symbolic reverence to past native human communities, who had once fostered the great prairie fires of North America, the burn began in mid-morning near the Indian mounds atop Frederick's Hill. Smoke rose over the highest part of the hill, signaling the start of the burn down through the savanna communities that cover the tree-laden slopes. Soon the flames had turned much of the Conservancy's native grasses and dried flora into bursts of hot crackling infernos and bellowing smoke. All who observed could only feel a sense of awe and perhaps an unconscious, primal affinity with the powers of nature and its breathtaking phenomena.

Soon the ground was left blackened and

laid bare in silent, windswept anticipation of a new generation of growth stirring deep in the soil. What had been taken from the earth by last year's prairie was now returned to nurture new life in the fire-warmed, fertile silty-loam. In doing so, the prairie's own phoenix will rise again from the flames and ashes to renew

a yearly promise to bloom gloriously in the seasons to come, as it has done for millennia. Those who have endeavored to join the prairie's restoration become a part of a long

evolution of grasslands that once rose from fading woodlands leeward of the Rocky Mountains, and nurtured by the warm, moist southern winds coming from the Gulf of Mexico. The prairielands of the Conservancy belong to this grand sweep of tall grass prairielands reaching upwards through Illinois into Minnesota and the boreal forests of Canada.

The prairie and savanna's longstanding relationship with fire is founded in a long-held heritage and integrity. This inheritance carries the genetic imprint of the forces of wind, lightning and the legacy of native human communities whose spirit is carried in the soul of the tall grass prairie. Now these native plant communities solely depend upon the caring, restorative hands of those who have understood that by tending to these wilderness environments, the essence of human experience is thus advanced within a common legacy. Human warriors, attending to the spring prairies with the renewing forces of wind, fire and hope, offer future generations the perennial spirit held within the healing of the land.

# A Spectacular Burn to Rejuvenate the Prairie

By Janet Kane and Stefanie Brouwer

What an awesome sight for anyone within the viewshed of the Conservancy on March 29, 2016... a spectacular burn blazed over 70 acres in the Conservancy's Dane County North Unit including Frederick's Hill. The weather was perfect with gentle winds from the south, morning temperatures in the 40's, and a relative humidity of 46%. With only a few days notice from the burn contractor (Quercus Land Services), Susan Gruber (County Liaison) quickly informed neighbors and Janet Kane (Chair of the Restoration and Management Committee) organized FOPB volunteers to monitor conditions along the main trails throughout the day, advising Conservancy visitors to avoid routes close to fire and smoke. When flames are close to the trail, the smoke and sparks can harm eyes and throats and even burn holes in clothes. A successful burn is entirely weather dependent and cannot occur if it's too rainy, windy or dry.

Conducting burns early in the spring minimizes harm to animals, birds and insects. Prescribed burns are carefully planned in discrete units with "escape routes" and "not-to-be burned" areas to serve as refuges. Even when most of an

area is burned, the fire front progresses slowly enough to allow plenty of time for animals to escape. However, burning can reduce the population of overwintering insects. Many studies document reduced



*Three members of the Quercus burn crew*

numbers of selected butterflies and other pollinators. Often the population numbers bounce back, especially when there's a nearby unburned area to provide a source for re-population. Burns are "spotty," meaning that there are always small patches of vegetation missed by the fire. These areas serve as mini-refuges for overwintering insects and other animals.

With a crew of 12 trained personnel, Quercus conducted the burn in just

under 4 hours. All crew members have completed the standard federal Wildland Firefighter certification. In the weeks before the burn, Quercus created firebreaks by widening some existing trails and adding some new breaks. They also cleared around landscape features, like wooden decks, steps, posts, signs, benches, and fences. The carpets covering the Indian mounds were protected, and locations of logs and brush piles were noted for monitoring during the burn.

Fire is a powerful management tool for prairies and oak savanna:

- Clears litter that shades new seedlings, promoting early growth
- Warms the soil and promotes mineralization of nutrients
- Controls unwanted woody species
- Maximizes growth of many prairie grasses
- Increases species richness and diversity

Fredericks' Hill will be burned for several consecutive years until the aggressive woody invasives like honeysuckle and buckthorn are well controlled. Other areas will be burned on a 2, 3 or 4-year cycle depending on the conditions and resources. Spring burn season is from mid-March to mid-May.

## Prairie Chase...

an illustrated booklet on birds, which was very popular.

All of this year's participants will receive a free t-shirt (up to two per family). In addition, after the race, we will be hosting a live bluegrass band and giving away free prizes -- as well as the usual bagels and bananas! Also, the winners of the men's and women's 5K and 10K run will win a prize. Registration is \$45 for a family, \$30 for an individual and only \$15 for a student.

None of this would be possible without the generous gifts of our sponsors and



*Race Chair Tom Crozier starting the run with a pheasant call*

*Continued from page 1*

with the permission of our partners in conservation and restoration -- Dane County and the City of Middleton. Our sponsors so far this year are the American Transmission Company, Fleet Feet Sports, Harbor Athletic Club, Fontana Sports and the Prairie Cafe. We are actively looking for more sponsors so if you are interested, please contact Tom Crozier by sending him an email to [development@pheasantbranch.org](mailto:development@pheasantbranch.org).

To register for this healthy and fun event, please go to our web site: [www.prairiechase.com](http://www.prairiechase.com).



## EDUCATION CORNER: Kids for the Earth Program News

By Colleen Robinson Klug, FOPBC Education Coordinator

Thank you to members, donors and volunteers... you ARE our education program! 2016 promises to be our biggest year yet, in terms of the programs we offer, audiences served, students and volunteers and innovations explored!

Our student intern this year, Meghan Yancey, is a huge help. She is currently a junior at the University of Wisconsin-Madison majoring in Zoology with certificates in Education and Environmental Studies. Since November 2015 Meghan has led field trips, planned Conservancy Day programs and attended committee meetings for special projects. She has a can-do attitude, loves learning about the Friends and appreciates the Conservancy as the unique environmental gem that it is. We are happy to have her!

### Conservancy Day Programs

One loyal constant... join us every third Thursday of the month. Programs coming up in 2016 include bird hikes with renowned bird guide Mike McDowell, presentations by the International Crane Foundation, a tour of a local manure digester, the wonders of bees, mammals, prairie and water resources and more! So far 150 people have participated in programs this year. Stay tuned at [www.pheasantbranch.org](http://www.pheasantbranch.org). You can sign up to receive once-per-month email reminders by sending a message to [education@pheasantbranch.org](mailto:education@pheasantbranch.org).

### K-12 School Field Trips

We continue to host high school service learning programs for photography and advanced composition. As of 2015, we also have visual arts production students involved! One intern will videotape field trips this spring.

Field trips are already scheduled for students in K-8 grade to visit the Conservancy this spring! And, several

projects are kicking off to make these programs even more accessible. For example, teachers and Friends education program members will work together to create a middle school field trip curriculum that can be used by teachers, based out of Kromery Middle School. We are also creating improved materials kits to be housed at Kromery. It all means more programming for more students and teachers, and more positive impacts on learning and the Conservancy.

### New projects

Thanks to our own Pulver endowment fund, originating from generous donations, 2016 will see the creation of brand new curriculum and tools for 4K outdoor learning.

Grant money from the American Girl Fund for Children will fund self-guided

backpacks on several topics for a wide-range of age groups. These will be available late this year for community members, families, home school leaders, and scout leaders to use in the Conservancy.

*Tunes on Tuesdays* - the Education Committee is working with music teachers from high schools in the area (Waunakee, Verona, Middleton) and Glacier Creek Middle School to create a program featuring student musicians performing in the Conservancy from 6-8 PM on summer evenings. It will run weekly from June 21-July 26.

Join the education program as a volunteer naturalist, committee member, intern, or specific project lead. We know you have something amazing to share! Contact Colleen to explore opportunities.

### New York Students Awed by the Conservancy

By Deb Weitzel

Genesee Community Charter School of Rochester New York is exploring best practices in sustainability in anticipation of applying for the Green Ribbon Award from the US Department of Education. In a nationwide search for sustainable districts to visit and gather ideas, four sites were located to send teams of teachers and students. Boston, Portland OR, Washington, DC and Middleton/Madison were the chosen few.

On Tuesday, January 19th, 2016 fourth graders at Park Elementary, Cross Plains hosted seven sixth grade students and two teachers from Rochester, New York to demonstrate the work Park students and staff do in order to maintain their Green Ribbon status earned in 2014. The next day the group traveled to Kromrey Middle School to tour the school and meet with Brian Miles and members of the student council, who are working on their own Green Ribbon application. While Park School is 51 years old, the school performs well and has an energy star rating over 90. Kromrey is brand new and offers the latest in green technology such as geothermal heating and cooling and solar panels for hot water heating. This contrast was very interesting to the group who thought an old school couldn't be labeled green.

The final pillar in Green Ribbon is environmental education so the sixth graders were introduced to the Pheasant Branch Conservancy and the educational field trips provided to MCPASD students.

*continued on page 7...*





## GET OUT THERE: Restoration Volunteer Opportunities

By Janet Kane, FOPBC Restoration & Management Committee Co-Chair

Welcome to Rob Baller, the 2016 Pheasant Branch Conservancy Coordinator for Dane County Parks. Rob sets restoration and management priorities based on the county's objectives, supervises the summer interns, and works with R&M volunteers. He's recently worked with the Prairie Enthusiasts at Mounds View Grassland as a Restoration Ecologist/Crew Leader and with Quercus's prescribed burn crew. He's volunteered with Wisconsin's Bureau of Endangered Resources to catalog sites with rare plants, chaired the Prairie Bluff Chapter of the Prairie Enthusiasts and invented the Parsnip Predator, a tool we use often!

Welcome to Forrest Weesner too. He's joining Janet Kane and Jim Loving as a R&M Co-chair. Susan Gruber is continuing as Dane County Liaison and contact for youth projects. The Restoration and Management Committee also includes Tom Bernthal, Jane Cummings-Carlson, Emil Haney, Tom Klein, Dale Klubertanz, and Pam Shannon.

What about you? New volunteers are always welcome – and needed! Plan to join us for some of the monthly workdays, see sidebar for more details.

### **Spring Burn**

The best burn ever! See the article on rejuvenating the prairie on page 5. Temperature, wind speed and direction, relative humidity, skilled contractors and

Friends volunteers all came together on March 29 for a spectacular controlled burn. (Check out Dale Klubertanz's video at <https://vimeo.com/161037829>.) The burns are funded through the Friends annual budget. Sincere thanks to members and other contributors!

The Pheasant Branch prairies are looking spectacular. What a joy to experience the changing landscapes through the year. Volunteer stewardship is essential to this amazing place. Now that the Friends' have passed our 20th anniversary, we're looking for the next generation of stewards. For more details, see [pheasantbranch.org](http://pheasantbranch.org) and scroll down to the section "2016 Restoration Workdays", or click the tabs for Restoration Volunteers or Prairie and Savanna.

### **Trails**

Trail erosion is becoming a serious problem along steeper, high-traffic portions of the grassy trails. And bicycles on these pedestrian trails only make it worse. This year the R&M Committee has a special subcommittee to address trail erosion - both immediate, low cost fixes and longer-term solutions that might require significant investments.

Recently, some trails have been rerouted around steep, eroding areas. It's a challenge to get walkers to use the new routes. Do your part by avoiding blocked areas. If you think a trail is needed somewhere, please send a note to [restoration@pheasantbranch.org](mailto:restoration@pheasantbranch.org) and we'll pass the suggestions on to Dane County Parks or the City of Middleton.

## UPCOMING WORK DAYS

**From April through October we meet on the third Saturday of the month from 9 AM - 12 PM.**

**Mark your calendars:**

**May 21, June 18, July 16, August 20, September 17 and October 15**

Meet at the parking lot in the Dane County part of Pheasant Branch Conservancy, 4864 Pheasant Branch Road - 1.2 miles north of Century Avenue.

We do different things, depending on the needs at the time. Usually we'll spend at least part of the time knocking back non-native invasives.

Workdays are great opportunities to get off the trail and into the landscape, learning about what it takes for restored areas to flourish.

No experience needed, just a desire to sustain these special lands.

Dress for the prairie: closed-toe shoes, long pants, a hat and work gloves. We'll have extra gloves and provide the needed equipment.

Workdays are weather dependent. If you let us know you're coming, we'll let you know if we have to cancel.

**For regular announcements about volunteer opportunities, send an e-mail to [restoration@pheasantbranch.org](mailto:restoration@pheasantbranch.org) and ask to be added to the R&M list.**

### **New York Students Awed by the Conservancy...**

*Continued from page 6*

The City of Rochester gets its water from a reservoir so the visitors were not familiar with sandstone aquifers. After a hands-on activity with water soaking into sandstone to demonstrate the storage ability of aquifers, the group hiked to the springs at the Conservancy. The springs always have a "wow" factor for visitors and these sixth graders were no exception. Even with 12F air temperatures, gloves came off and hands were placed in "boils" to get the full experience. After getting up at 3 am, traveling and sitting most of the day, nature gave the group a shot of adrenaline and sent them back to their hotel excited and smiling.

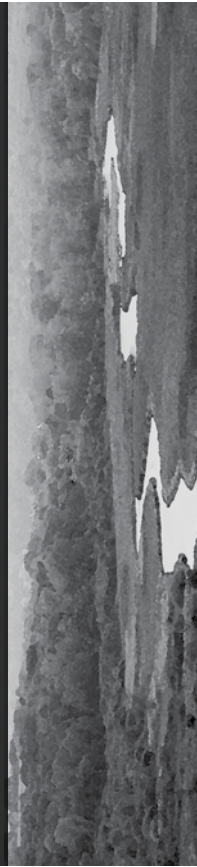
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# PHEASANT BRANCH CONSERVANCY SPRING - SUMMER 2016 EVENTS



## CONNECT WITH NATURE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

### MAY

- 19th - Conservancy Day Program (TBA)
- 21st - Restoration Work Day (page 7)

### JUNE

- 16th - Conservancy Day Program (TBA)
- 18th - Restoration Work Day (page 7)
- 25th - Prairie Chase (page 1)

### JULY

- 16th - Restoration Work Day (page 7)
- 21st - Conservancy Day Program (TBA)

### AUGUST

- 18th - Conservancy Day Program (TBA)
- 20th - Restoration Work Day (page 7)

**PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE**

[www.pheasantbranch.org](http://www.pheasantbranch.org)

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*Prairie Chase Run/Walk Scheduled for June 25... details inside!*