



## “SEED THE NEED” CAMPAIGN TO CREATE A PLATINUM PRAIRIE

*By Lloyd Eagan, Co-President and Lyman Wible, Development and Marketing Co-Chair*

The Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy is joining forces with Dane County and the Clean Lakes Alliance to raise a matching \$100,000 over the next four years to create a Platinum Prairie at the newly acquired Acker property north of the existing Conservancy. The goal for 2020 is to raise \$25,000 and the same amount each year for four years.

### SEED THE NEED: A PLATINUM PRAIRIE CHALLENGE

Great prairies grow from great seed stock. We need your helping creating a Platinum Prairie in the 160-acre Acker addition to the Pheasant

Branch Conservancy. The Clean Lakes Alliance has received a \$100,000 donation from the Alliant Energy Foundation to help restore the parcel to prairie and the Friend’s partnership with the county and the Clean Lakes Alliance hopes to raise a matching \$100,000 over the next four years. The seeding of the prairie will be done in quadrants starting this fall.



### 160-ACRE EXPANSION OF THE CONSERVANCY

In 2019, Dane County acquired the 160-acre Acker parcel for \$10M to restore prairie and wetlands that will “significantly reduce stormwater volume due to increased water infiltration into the ground... [and] improve water quality by reducing sediment and phosphorus runoff within the Pheasant Branch Watershed, positively impacting Lake Mendota.” This former dairy farm immediately adjacent to the northern border of Pheasant Branch Conservancy contains the headwaters for an intermittent stream into Pheasant Branch Creek and is a recharge area for Frederick Spring,

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## PHEASANT BRANCH CREEK CORRIDOR AND CONSERVANCY UPDATE

*By Mark Wegner, City of Middleton Public Lands, Recreation and Forestry*

While it may not look like much has been happening in the creek corridor, the city has been working on the what, where, when, and why regarding the reconstruction process. The process of working with FEMA has been slow and tedious and has played a

role in the lack of visible progress out in the corridor. For example, just getting an answer from FEMA regarding reimbursement for any master planning took the better part of six months – and unfortunately resulted in a “No”. As many of you may know, the Friends of Pheasant

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# FROM THE CO-PRESIDENTS

Dear Friends,

We expected to be celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Friends of Pheasant Branch all through 2020. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we have had to postpone three of our four special celebrations. We have also had to cancel naturalist training, pare work days back to a bare minimum, cancel Tunes on Tuesdays and Conservancy Days and use Zoom for our board and committee meetings. Finally, our membership renewals are down this year. If we look at all of the things we have lost this year, it could be pretty depressing. One could wonder, why should even we support the Friends this year?



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*Stefanie Brouwer, Joleen Stinson*

Well, lots of wonderful things are still happening. We are still actively meeting by Zoom. We helped the City of Middleton review contractors for restoration of the stream corridor and rebuilding of the trails and bridges. The City of Middleton now has contracts to prepare engineering plans for stream corridor and trail rebuilding. Water quality monitoring is occurring at three locations in the Pheasant Branch Watershed. We are working closely with Dane County on developing and implementing restoration plans for their Acker property addition to the northern part of the Conservancy. We conducted some very successful and popular writing workshops by Zoom. We are developing Virtual Conservancy Days. We have partnered with the Clean Lakes Alliance and Dane County to launch a new program – “Seed the Need” campaign to help fund seeding for a Platinum Prairie on the Acker site.

Finally, there is the people part. More and more people are finding solace in the Conservancy. We see more families with young children biking or walking in the trails. Many people are finding the Conservancy for the first time and are realizing it is a special place. Bird watching has increased in the Conservancy. Many are enjoying the Conservancy as a healthy and happy place to be during the pandemic.

It is more important than ever to support the Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy so we can continue to preserve and protect the Conservancy for now and into the future. Please renew your membership if you are able. If you have introduced a friend to the Conservancy, please encourage them to join. If you are able please consider supporting our “Seed the Need” campaign. We would like the Friends to remain strong and be able to continue and expand our programming after the pandemic. We need you help to be able to do so. Thank you.

*Lloyd Eagan Pam Shannon*

Lloyd Eagan and Pam Shannon





# ACKER FARM RESTORATION UPDATE

By Stefanie Brouwer, Board Member & Watershed Committee Chair

Dane County has made great progress this year in restoration efforts at the 160-acre Acker Farm and more work is planned for this fall. Dane county purchased the farm in June 2019, fulfilling a long-awaited dream of the Friends to expand the Conservancy north to Balzer Road. Restoration of the property will reduce sediment and phosphorus runoff to Pheasant Branch Creek, thus improving water quality within the Pheasant Branch Watershed and positively impacting Lake Mendota. By saving this property from being developed and restoring it to prairie, Dane County will prevent the runoff of nearly five million gallons of water from entering the Yahara Chain of Lakes each year, and reduce more than 550 pounds of phosphorus annually. Roughly one pound of phosphorus can produce up to 500 pounds of algae in area lakes.

The key aspects of the restoration plan include

1. demolishing all structures and using the concrete from building foundations for a future access/parking site,
2. converting all of the cropland to native prairie over a 4-year period,
3. implementing a major wetland restoration and stormwater

4. management project, establishing perimeter hiking trails that would also serve as firebreaks and connect to the existing trail system at the Pheasant Branch Conservancy.

In early spring Dane County completed building demolition through a combination of Middleton Fire Department conducted trainings and Department of Land and Water Resources staff efforts. A \$429,800 contract has been awarded to Middleton-based Speedway Sand & Gravel, Inc. for concrete removal and planned wetland restoration. This contract will allow the remaining concrete to be crushed and placed near Pheasant Branch Road for a future access/parking site. The contract also covers milkhouse waste abandonment and grading and construction of the wetland restoration. Speedway will be starting the work on September 14th and are expected to be done by the end of November. They will start with tree & fence removals and concrete removal, then move on to the grading and earthwork for the wetland restoration and stormwater management project.



*The former Acker Farm property framed by Fredericks Hill path*

This fall Dane County hopes to start seeding the southeast quadrant of the property to prairie. Dane County Parks will coordinate with the Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy and other partners on volunteer activities and events to assist with prairie seeding, invasive species removal, and other land management activities. Fundraising for the prairie and wetland restoration is currently taking place, which is estimated to cost about \$500,000 (see "Seed the Need" article on page 1.)

Visit this website for more information about the project, including plans and maps: <https://lwr.dcountyofdane.com/Pheasant-Branch-Restoration-Project>

## BECOME A FRIEND

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Membership Level:**  
*memberships purchased after 9/1 apply to following calendar year*

- \$10 Student
- \$25 Individual
- \$40 Family

**Additional Giving Opportunities:**

- \$100 Friend
- \$250 Benefactor
- \$500 Steward
- \$1,000 Hero

**Volunteer Opportunities:**

- Restoration
- Education
- Watershed
- Development & Marketing
- Special Events (such as Prairie Chase Run/Walk)
- Board Member

Please send this membership form and payment to:

FOPBC  
P.O. Box 628242  
Middleton, WI 53562





# NATURALIST NOTEBOOK

By Dale Klubertanz, Friends Member

## Seeking Refuge in Native Conservancy Lands

In September, the friendly greens of summer will begin to fade to reveal the heretofore hidden hues of reds, yellows and oranges. They have always been there, inherent within and below the verdant surfaces that make up the Conservancy. The color of chlorophyll everywhere, where wilderness lives, has absorbed the unseen blues and reds throughout summer. It has veiled the less prominent pigments of yellow xanthophyll and the oranges of carotenoids, all present in photosynthesis. Soon after, the reds of anthocyanin will follow in their own dazzling display.

Slowly then, all will blend into the many browns of late October until they are covered by a winter's snow. Each of a trillion leaves will slowly take its last bathing of sun, drink its closing drop of water, inhale a final breath of CO<sub>2</sub> and spend a concluding exhalation of its universal gift of oxygen. Here a shifting of life's carbon-bound energy occurs, tree by tree, plant by plant, retreating into trunk and root to await the promise of another cycle of renewal. In their own time, each petal will fall to mark a changing, receptive season, all surrendering to the hallowed soil. Then, for now, nature's business of

transforming sunlight into energy will be done.

The hot and humid temperament of the passing summertime, along with sufficient rains, have made for a thriving Bock prairie and savanna. Parts of the prairie community towered high over the heads of human strollers, where red-winged blackbirds chastened passersby. Through June and July, they scolded with a no-nonsense "chak chak chak" from atop last year's compass plants, weather-dried and standing tall alongside the present-day flourishing flora. For visitors, their conk-la-ree is the classic sound of wetlands and prairies alike throughout much of the summer. The Bock Forest lands have become filled with such chirps, buzzes and song, a sign that these natural communities are flourishing and have invited these creatures back home.

As if yearning and reaching for the essence its former soul, the Bock savanna has come to foretell more fully each year what will someday be the shady, old oak prairie lands of a yesteryear. Once resilient to great native fires, they were lost to the steel and grit of agriculture and development in the trajectory of human endeavors. Gradually, the bur and white oaks have proudly joined the hickories to frame out a glorious mix of grassland and woodland rich in prairie flowers. Over seven

summers, the oak savanna has been planted and nursed by those who know the promise and wisdom of timeless restoration of native plant communities.

Beneath the branches of oaks and among the prairie grasses, the ancient choreographed succession of summer blossoms within Bock Forest lands have come and gone, each radiant for a time and then fading. Autumn has fostered the arrival of goldenrods and asters, amidst the sway of dominant Indian grass and big blue stem. They are all a part of a recovering, expanding patch of wilderness, holding secrets perhaps only they can tell and ways of knowing found only in their presence.

Over the passing season in times of a recent set of crises, the voices of the recovering wilderness have drawn the human community into the Conservancy toward the calming predictability of natural cycles. When uncertainty overwhelms the familiar rhythms of human living, it could be that there is an inner beacon which summons the guest to places like the Bock Community Forest lands. They, too, could be places of recovery for those seeking refuge in an inner relationship with wilderness. This might be especially true in fall, when the natural world turns a bit more quiet and inward.

## PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS ANNOUNCED

By Deb Weitzel, Board Member & Education Committee Chair

Let's celebrate! It's official and the results are in. The State Boys and Girls Basketball Championships? Unfortunately, no results for these two events and many more due to the pandemic. But a bright spot in the wave of cancelations was the FOPBC Photo Contest with members of the Middleton High School (MHS) photography classes. Art teacher, Holly Stoenner, stressed the importance of the photo contest when

asked if it, too, would be canceled along with face-to-face school. Here's her response, "I would like to keep the contest open...many kids really look forward to doing it. Plus, this would be something they can do on their own and submit to me."

The aim of the Friends photo contest is to get students outside in the Pheasant Branch Conservancy applying and practicing skills they learned in their MHS photography

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*First place image by Natalie Cook*



# THE NATURE WRITING PROJECT

By John Daly, FOPBC Vice-President

The 25th Anniversary Celebration Committee has had to cancel all but one of the various activities and events we had planned for 2020 due to Covid-19. The lone activity is "The Nature Writing Project."

Committee members had intended to provide writing classes for individuals of all age groups with authentic experiences in the Conservancy as a catalyst to the actual writing. The pandemic did not allow us to interact with one another and with Mother Nature, but we found a way to have a virtual experience.

Troy Hess, the founder of On the Yahara Writing Center, planned and taught the online classes for adults in the spring and this summer. The classes have been funded by the Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy as part of our 25th Anniversary Celebration.

Class options have included:

- The Nature Fix: Nature Writing and Well-Being
- Touching the Earth
- Art & Nature: An Illustrated Anthology of Nature Poetry

Each class has a specific day and time, but can serve as either a 'one-time' or ongoing series, depending on your schedule and interest-level.

The committee also collaborated with a unique initiative that was started by a school district parent. The Quarantine Times, a e-newspaper with student reporters, was published several times during the summer months. One of the issues focused on nature as its theme.

Due to the popularity of these intergenerational writing classes, the 25th Anniversary Celebration Committee is planning to continue to offer them in the fall and into 2021. Watch the website for further information.

Some sample writings of the adult and the student participants are included in this article for your enjoyment.

## Spiderwebs

By Joan

Today it is cold and wet. Gray. I hear only one bright bird. I think of a day like this one, when my granddaughter Phoebe and I went ahead with our planned walk in spite of drizzle and fog. At the same moment we discovered a tiny web suspended in a bush – with each strand lined with shining drops of water. We declared it a rare find, a miracle, revealed only because it gathered raindrops while in waiting for lunch.

We soon discovered another, then another, as we walked along, making no effort to total them. Perhaps there was an element of breadcrumbs marking our trail – offering us a new destination. Yet each web, delicately woven into bush branches, was a statement of being in place, an arrival, so permanent there was preparation for surviving there.

Phoebe and I were glad we walked together, paused together, ignored the cold and wet together, as we realized it was only because of the wet we could see the spinners' work. Is this not like times of trouble exposing hidden human safety nets - in place, invisible, unappreciated?

## Excerpt from Summer Day on Clearwater Lake

By Nancy

Over an hour later we finally reach beautiful Clearwater Lake and my spirits are lifted. The hot sun glistens like diamonds on the water surface broken by a gentle breeze. This is one of my favorite wilderness lakes. The shoreline has massive granite outcropping with rock faces displaying pictographs hundreds of years old. I imagine the indigenous people hunting and fishing here. It makes me wonder what has changed over millennia on Clearwater Lake.

## Where the Animals Live

By Sofia (2nd grade)

Go and visit where the animals live.  
Where the robins fly around gathering sticks.  
Go where the animals live.  
Where the ducks fly and splash into ponds.  
Go where the animals live.  
Where the deer cross the paths trying to collect food.  
Go where the animals live.  
Where the squirrels go to collect food for the winter.  
So go where the animals live.  
You will find lots to explore.

## Nature Sounds

By Riley (4th grade)

Breakfast I wake up to the birds chirping.  
Lunch I hear the squirrels knocking.  
Snack I find woodpeckers hiding and loud.  
Dinner I see chipmunks scaring with their little feet.  
Dessert I listen for the owls "woohooing"  
Midnight snack "shhhhh" I spot the silent fox.  
Every day nature comes out now you have the time to listen and watch.



# A FRIEND OF THE FRIENDS

By Martha Frey, Membership Volunteer

Sharifa Merchant has long been a friend and supporter of the Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy. She has lived in Middleton since 1984 and has a special attachment to the Conservancy. You may not have met Sharifa, but you probably have visited the boardwalk and viewing deck with benches in the Conservancy that Sharifa's family financed in memory of her husband, Saban. The family refers to this spot as Saban's Viewpoint. From this lovely, quiet place, you can see Frederick's Hill and watch the creek as it flows from Pheasant Branch Springs toward Lake Mendota. We decided to do Sharifa's profile so you could get to know her



*Sharifa Merchant by Martha Frey*

Born and raised in Mumbai, Sharifa attended a Catholic high school there. Apart from education, Sharifa's mind opened further by travel in and outside India with her parents. She was also witness to history in the event of Indian Independence in 1947 and at a young age, realized the merits of an independent country and a democratic constitution. After graduation, she decided to stay home, and learned, from her mother, to handle her parents' investments, take care of their social engagements, as well as pursue with her mother, her

interest in gourmet cooking and flower arrangements. She was delighted to be learning new skills while helping her parents in their busy lives.

Sharifa acknowledges that her parents' values greatly influenced her. Their emphasis on integrity, on obligations to society, and on their high standards of maintaining interpersonal relationships, made a subtle but lasting impression on her and have, in fact, impacted her own life. She is certain that only good has followed from retaining these values, which in turn have passed on to her own two children.

Sharifa got married at 22 in a hybrid version of an "arranged" love marriage! A common family friend, with the approval of both sets of parents of course, arranged for her to meet Saban. They met for a year and decided they were meant for each other, and had a beautiful wedding in 1956. They had contrasting personalities, Saban being laid back, and Sharifa effusive, but with similar values they complemented each other. Their children Sabeeha and Shahrukh were born in 1959 and 1960.

In 1977 the Merchant family bravely immigrated to Wisconsin so Sabeeha and Shahrukh, who had both shown great academic promise in school, could pursue further studies in the United States. The children started at UW Madison, where Sabeeha completed her PhD in Biochemistry, followed by a post doc at Harvard, and Shahrukh completed his Bachelors in Engineering, then went on to MIT for his Masters. With both children away from home, Sharifa went back to school in 1984, while Saban happily took over the duties at home. To her own surprise, she earned her college degree summa cum laude, which she followed with an MBA in 1997, both from Edgewood College, Madison, all while working full time. In 2006, at 72, Sharifa retired from Humana after a 27-year career in health insurance. Saban passed away in



***Saban's Viewpoint is a popular destination in the Conservancy***

2009. Today, Sabeeha is a biochemist and plant biologist, and professor at UC Berkeley. Shahrukh, an engineer, is retired after a successful career in optical telecommunications.

Now, looking back, Sharifa says, "Living by the Conservancy has brought me a sense of serenity I did not know, never having lived so close to nature. Waking to the sound of birds, seeing creatures running around, and deer wandering by, watching butterflies hover over plants, all bring untold wonderment, joy and calm. The winter-wonderland beauty after a snowfall is like living in a Christmas card!! The best part is the delightful walks I have taken on the many trails in the Conservancy, some of them close to the creek, with the soft sounds of water.

My greatest reward is when friends stop and mention how much they enjoy the Viewpoint. A touching highlight in 2020 was that a couple selected the Viewpoint as the place to say their vows, since they could not have their planned large wedding on account of the pandemic."

Sharifa, at 77, took up art as a hobby and the Friends have often benefited from the proceeds she donates from the sale of her artwork, and notecards made from her art. Now 86, Sharifa, in gratitude for her surroundings, continues to give back to the Conservancy in many different ways. We are indeed grateful for her goodwill and generosity.

# LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD: INVASIVE PLANT MANAGEMENT

By Janet Kane, Restoration and Management Committee

2020 is the Friends' 25th anniversary. And for 25 years, Friends volunteers have worked to control invasive plants in the Conservancy. Twenty-five years ago, honeysuckle and buckthorn densely covered the Frederick's Hill, preventing plants from growing underneath them and suppressing oak regeneration. Guerdon Coombs, the first Friends Restoration and Management Chair, worked with County Naturalist Wayne Pauly to recruit a crew of chain saw volunteers to clear the thickest areas. The sawyers were supported by volunteers who stacked brush and then burned the piles during the winter. Middleton High School students and their Environmental Studies teachers Deb Weitzel and Mike Duren added their energy and enthusiasm to 4 work days each spring and fall for several years. Eventually the hill was cleared of these invasives and native plants sprouted from the seed bank when sunlight

warmed the ground in spring. Adding species by overseeding increased the landscape's resilience, and periodic burns controlled resprouting honeysuckle and buckthorn.

Even after 25 years Friends volunteers are still controlling honeysuckle and buckthorn, along with other aggressive invasives that have the potential to overtake Conservancy areas. You can help with these efforts! Invasives come in from surrounding

lands – some are popular landscape plants while others are planted for forage or to control erosion. The seeds are brought to the Conservancy by birds, animals, walkers, bicycles, and vehicle tires as well as by wind and stormwater runoff. Every year R&M volunteers and the summer intern crew monitor for invasives and remove them or limit seed development and dispersal to prevent even more plants the next year.

The Restoration and Management Committee has a new brochure on landscape plants that are control priorities:

Ongoing: Common buckthorn and Eurasian bush honeysuckle

New concerns: Burning bush/Spindle-tree and Chinese silvergrass

Widespread along streets and highways: Bird's-foot trefoil and Crown vetch



*Winged Burning Bush*

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## MHS PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

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classes. These nature photos (up to five) for every student are entered in the contest. Lead judge Tom Crozier with his team, Kathy Henning and Linda Pils, had their work cut out for them. With 257 diverse scenery and wildlife entries, judging was difficult but also exciting and fun! One judge exclaimed, "This was a very talented group of participants and the judging was not easy because of the demonstrated expertise."

And the winners are...Third place (\$25) to Trenton Schultz, Second place (\$50) to August Nelson and First place (\$100) to Natalie Cook, capturing a red fox youngster venturing out of hiding. Congratulations to Trenton, August and Natalie! And what happens to these images? Our phenology calendar editor, Andrea Gargas, will

be able to publish these and other contest photos for the Friends 2021 Phenology Calendar.

During a normal school year, students spend limited time in the Conservancy trying to get that perfect shot. With so many other commitments and social media, young people spend 50% less time outside in nature than did their parents. This is taking its toll on human health and wellness as the new norm became Escape to the Indoors. One silver lining in the pandemic that has caused so much misery, sorrow, and economic pain is time available to go for a walk or a bike ride. More of our community is using and enjoying the Conservancy than ever before. Students found more wildlife to capture on film than we have seen in our contest over many years.

Capturing wildlife takes patience and many trips back or possibly just luck but whatever the reason, more time in nature is a good thing for mental and physical wellbeing.

To our judges, Tom Crozier, Linda Pils, and Kathy Henning, many thanks. Jake Crozier of Picture Salon donated the prize money and we thank him for continuing the contest support his father, Tom, began many years ago. Also, thanks to MHS' Holly Stoenner and Jacquelyn Huckins and their photography students for continuing this annual event. This is the ultimate teaching and learning experience that captures the best practices in education. Students learn about a topic, apply that knowledge locally, and then are published! Another reason to celebrate!



# LAND MANAGEMENT UPDATE

By Rob Schubert, FOPBC Land Manager

This has been another great year at the Pheasant Branch Conservancy! Past efforts are really starting to show and new opportunities are arising to help restore new areas within the Conservancy. This summer we conducted a lot more work to restore the sedge meadow area of the Conservancy. This work has been funded by an Aquatic Invasive Species grant through the DNR. Efforts have focused on removing invasive hybrid cattail from the filled in ditch that runs through the middle of the wetland.

This year work began in cooperation with the City of Middleton to remove reed canary grass from high-quality sedge meadow areas in the city section of the Conservancy. Removal work consisted of a combination of mowing and grass specific herbicide application. This work was conducted by contract crews and the Prairie Partner Interns. Brush removal efforts in the wetland will continue and we will plan to continue to host winter volunteer workdays.

This year's Prairie Partner Intern crew was great and will be missed. Many hot days were spent helping to control invasive species, collect seed, and all the other minor tasks associated with land management. Last summer we



*Prairie Partner Intern crew learning chainsaw techniques*

had the west prairie mowed in an effort to reduce aggressive vegetation and promote better nesting habitat for grassland birds. The effort was very effective in reducing the aggressive prairie grasses that reduce overall diversity in the prairie and diminish nesting quality. This year another mowing is scheduled though on a smaller scale. Late summer mowing integrates well into other land management strategies and helps

to control aggressive and invasive species, create habitat heterogeneity, and prepare for scheduled prescribed burns and for over-seeding to increase habitat quality and biodiversity.

You may see several areas around the Conservancy where vegetation has been killed or removed. These are areas where invasive vegetation has been removed or are areas planned to be over-seeded this winter. We have been hosting limited seed collection workdays this summer in preparation for the seeding that is required for the existing acres of the Conservancy and the 40 acres of the Acker property

planned for this winter. Despite some minor setbacks in the prescribed burn plans last fall and spring, I am hopeful about upcoming burns. This fall a prescribed burn is planned for much of the prairie and savanna areas, while the wetland is scheduled to be burned in the spring. For every season there is a land management task to be done and a new reason to appreciate the Conservancy and stay involved.

## SEED THE NEED

presenting a tremendous opportunity for crucial stormwater management and water quality improvements. Frederick Spring feeds over 2.6 million gallons of fresh water into Lake Mendota each year.

In order to fully realize the potential ecosystem benefits of a restored prairie on the Acker parcel, it is crucial that the initial seeding be done with high-quality seed and high species diversity - a Platinum Prairie.

### A PLATINUM PRAIRIE

A high-quality prairie can be defined by its species diversity - ideally with as many as 100 plant species per acre. The deep roots of prairie grasses enhance stormwater management

through improved water infiltration and groundwater recharge, but Platinum Prairies have many additional advantages over prairies dominated by a few plant species:

- The greater diversity of plant species supports a greater diversity of animals utilizing the different flora for food and habitat.
- The variety of flowering plants provide an aesthetically beautiful landscape in bloom from spring to fall.
- Greater biodiversity contributes to ecosystem resilience, better able to adapt to disturbances and changes in climate.
- A healthy prairie provides carbon sequestration at about one ton per acre per year, with the fully restored Acker prairie offsetting

the carbon dioxide equivalent of over 16,000 gallons of gasoline each year.

- A diverse, resilient prairie will incur reduced management costs.
- Establishing a Platinum Prairie at Pheasant Branch Conservancy provides a Platinum seed collection source for future prairie restoration on other Dane County properties.

We look forward to the support of our Friends and the wider Dane County community to meet this Platinum Prairie challenge.

TO DONATE TO THE SEED THE NEED CHALLENGE, GO TO WWW.PHEASANTBRANCH.ORG.

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# VIRTUAL PRAIRIE CHASE

By Peter Witucki, Board Member & Prairie Chase Planning Committee Chair

Over the last six years, the Prairie Chase Run/Walk has become an important fundraiser for the Friends and a key way to engage PBC users visiting the Conservancy for physical activity in nature. While we were physically distant this June, Prairie Chasers rallied together virtually for a run and to support PBC.

Nearly 100 participants registered to complete a 5km or 10km run/walk between June 24-28th, either in the

Conservancy or on a route of their choosing, and many submitted their times for inclusion in the official results ([www.prairiechase.com/2020results/](http://www.prairiechase.com/2020results/)). Top finishers include



prairie chase  
pheasant branch conservancy

Wendy Johnson (26:01) and Joe Ketarkus (18:59) in the 5K and Dan Sodemann (39:06) in the 10K run.

While far from the celebration we had imagined, it was heartwarming to see our community once again express their support for the Friends, raising over \$1,000 for restoration, education, and advocacy. And we are proud to report that over 25% of our participants joined the Friends or made an additional donation with their registration!

Thanks again to all of the participants, and see you on the trails!

# CREEK CORRIDOR UPDATE

*continued from page 1*

Branch helped provide funding for the drafting of the master plan and lent assistance in selecting a consultant. The current document is the result of public input, multiple city committee reviews, and vigorous debate regarding bridges, trails placement, and methods of restoration and stabilization. This document is helping guide consultants on the next phase – design and engineering work.

August 21, 2020 marked the kickoff meeting for the design and engineering work to commence. This work is being split into two concurrent components: 1) multi-use trail and bridge work and 2) stream alignment

and upper bank stabilization. MSA Professional Services will be handling the trail and bridges while Cardno, Inc. will be taking the stream and bank stabilization component. Preliminary designs for both projects are anticipated to be submitted by the end of October of this year with resulting review and revisions taking place for the remainder of 2020. The final designs will be put out for construction bidding in January 2021 with construction to start in spring. If all goes well, we can expect to see construction activities finished by the end of next summer!

Following the construction activities, vegetation restoration will take priority. There is currently no final plan for this as the intent is to assess the state of the creek corridor after construction activities are finished. One thing is certain however: there will be a lot of buckthorn and honeysuckle removal on tap!

to the Pheasant Branch Conservancy Master Plan. The current plan was drafted in the 1990's and we all know how much things have changed in the past 20+ years. There has been great emphasis on conducting vegetation surveys to ensure that we understand the current status in the Conservancy. With great help from wetland ecologist Tom Bernthal, this survey work followed a random meander survey method and was carried out by staff from Adaptive Restoration and Thompson & Associates. The resulting surveys were then used to delineate vegetation management units and allowed for assigning management needs, goals, and objectives. Another component being assessed is the current state of the hydrology of the Conservancy. This will allow for mapping all springs, seeps, and rivulets and the path those waters take before merging into the main waterway. At the same time soil borings have been taken to determine areas of sedimentation and the effect on vegetation and hydrology. Public input regarding usage, likes, dislikes, and concerns will also be coming soon. Please keep an eye out for these opportunities to provide your comments.

The other significant ongoing project is a long overdue update



**Conservancy Plant Survey completed by Adaptive Restoration, December 2019**

# CONSERVANCY DAYS

The 3rd Thursday of every month  
January - November  
6:30 - 7:30 PM  
Virtual

September 17

**Bird Collision Corps: Working to Reduce Bird-Window Strikes**  
*Brenna Marsicek, Director of Communications and Outreach for the Madison Audubon Society*

October 15

**The Green Schools of Middleton and Cross Plains**  
*Perry Hibner, Director of Communications for the Middleton Cross Plains Area School District*

November 19

TBD

RSVP to [conservancyday@pheasantbranch.org](mailto:conservancyday@pheasantbranch.org) to ensure that you receive the Zoom link.

# WI MASTER NATURALIST TRAINING 2021

June 18-19 and 25-26  
July 9-10

Check [wimasternaturalist.org](http://wimasternaturalist.org) in early 2021 for registration news

For questions email [debraw@chorus.net](mailto:debraw@chorus.net)

# EDUCATION CORNER

By *Anne Boucher, Education Coordinator*

There have been many changes to our education program as we adjust to the new normal created by the Covid-19 pandemic. Meeting in person is something that we cannot currently do. Therefore, we are working on moving as many of our activities and events that we can to online platforms. Unfortunately, not all activities can be offered in a virtual setting. We are a resilient bunch, though, and are continuing to find ways to offer relevant programming to students and all members of our community.

Our Conservancy Day programs will be moving online. They will be offered virtually until further notice. Please join us for our monthly presentations on the third Thursday of each month from 6:30 to 7:30. The September program will be on the Bird Collision Corps, a partnership with Madison Audubon Society to enable local students to monitor window collisions at Kromrey Middle School. The October program will be on the green building practices used by the Middleton Cross Plains School District (MCPASD) in its new construction and current buildings. We will be offering them via Zoom. Simply RSVP through our website or through the link in the Friend's e-bulletins that you periodically get by email to receive the Zoom link. We are exploring offering these talks,

live, on our Facebook page. We will let you know if we are able to make this happen.

The school district has put field trips on hold for the fall semester. Regrettably, we will not be working with students in the Conservancy as we normally would in the next few months. We are taking this time to work with five teachers from the district to update our elementary field trip curriculum. We are revising it to align with the Next Generation Science Standards and the new FOSS science curriculum adopted by MCPASD.

Finally, we want to offer you ways to get a dose of nature even if you cannot make it to the Conservancy or other natural areas nearby. Look for our new Ways to Engage page under the Education heading on our website. There are two main things we are offering. One is a list of citizen science opportunities (Take Action) for which you can volunteer. These are local, national, and international opportunities. The second is a compilation of offerings (Learn and Wonder) from environmental educators near and far. You can take virtual tours, hear from scientists, and take a mini-lesson from a local environmental educator, among many other things. There are Ways to Engage for all age groups and abilities. Enjoy learning about and seeing the wonders of nature from your own home.

# INVASIVE PLANTS BROCHURE

If you have any of these on your property, you can help by replacing them with plants that aren't so invasive. If you want to keep the plant, you can remove the seeds before they mature so the plant doesn't multiply.

You can also spread the word to friends and neighbors, and be on the lookout for these plants around the community.



*Chinese Silvergrass*

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The brochure is available on the Friends' website (search for Invasive Brochure), or you can request one or more copies from [restoration@pheasantbranch.org](mailto:restoration@pheasantbranch.org).

Thanks to Bryn Scriver, Wisconsin Master Naturalist, for creating the brochure in consultation with Rob Schubert, Land Manager, and Janet Kane, R & M Volunteer. Thanks also to the John C. Bock Foundation for supporting the brochure's printing and distribution.



# RESTORATION & MANAGEMENT

By Gary Sater, Restoration and Management Committee Co-Chair

As the late summer days continue with their heat and moisture in the Conservancy, it appears that the



*Land Manager, Rob Schubert, standing next to the propagation garden. The information sign (bottom one) was funded by 2019's #Giving Tuesday campaign.*

prairie and wetlands are a bit ahead of schedule with flowering and going to seed. Some of the flora may be a few to several weeks ahead of their normal schedule. Nonetheless, I hope you are enjoying the natural beauty of this evolving Conservancy as it improves in diversity and habitat each year under the guidance of our expert Land Manager, Rob Schubert. Something I've come to appreciate about Rob is his willingness to share his knowledge with others, explain what and why we are proceeding as we are in restoring and managing the Conservancy and politely answering questions visitors to the Conservancy spring upon him while working. Rob is truly a valuable resource to in multiple ways.

During these strange and interrupting Covid-19 days, we've missed all of you who've previously volunteered to work with us in the prairie and wetlands. We look forward to reengaging you in this important and enjoyable work in the future. Starting in the late fall/winter of this year, Dane County with

the help of the Friends and the R & M Committee will begin the restoration seeding of the first quadrant (southeast corner) of the Acker Farm addition to the Conservancy. It is the section that is currently planted in soybeans, which is an excellent pre-restoration planting. To ensure the planting of a "Platinum Seed Mix" for the restoration of this addition, the Friends are launching a "Seed the Need" fundraising campaign. We hope to raise enough money to create a high-quality prairie and wetland restoration that can then be used for seed collections to share with other natural lands in Dane County. We will need you as we begin to raise money, seed and restore this new 160-acre addition.

Small work groups who can more safely adhere to the Dane County safety standards have continued to gather and do some of this work in the existing county and city portions of the Conservancy over the past few months. Much of this work has been seed collecting in the wetlands and now, more recently, in the upland prairie sections of the Conservancy.

You may have also noticed the work being done in the seed propagation garden alongside the main path near our work trailer. Hundreds of new plugs have been planted this year and many of the existing plants are now producing seeds that can be used in over seeding other areas in need of greater flora diversity. We also experienced a very successful year with our Prairie Partner Interns, which ended on August 12th. With the guidance and support of Rob Schubert and Susan Gruber, this talented and hard-working group accomplished a great deal of important

# WORKDAYS

Due to Covid-19, we have changed our workday practices.

Small work groups that safely adhere to the Dane County standards have met. These workdays are invitation-only with limited numbers and RSVPs required.

If you would like to be added to our restoration workday invitation list, please email [restoration@pheasantbranch.org](mailto:restoration@pheasantbranch.org).

R & M work throughout the summer. Thanks to all!

Lastly, Jim Loving and his wife Marilyn are leaving us in September. Jim will be sorely missed both as a board member for the Friends and as a wonderful and effective committee chair of the R & M Committee. We thank you Jim for all you've done for the Conservancy and us. You've been an invaluable resource to all in your tenure with the Friends. Additionally, as a testament to how competent Jim was in his leadership of R & M, it will take two of us as Co-Chairs to fill his shoes! Yes, I along with Hans Hilbert, another Friends Board Member, will be taking over that role as we speak. So, in the future don't hesitate to reach out to either of us with concerns or questions. We look forward to seeing you ASAP!

Be well and be in nature.



*The Middleton Fire Department came to the "drought rescue" during a dry spell in August. They filled our water cubes and watered the propagation garden.*



The Friends of  
Pheasant Branch  
Conservancy  
**PO BOX 628242  
MIDDLETON, WI  
53562**



**/FriendsOfPheasant  
BranchConservancy**

**pheasantbranch.org**

## **CALENDAR OF EVENTS**



### **SEPTEMBER**

**17 - Conservancy Day: Bird Collision Corps: Working to Reduce Bird-Window Strikes**

**Every Monday, Wednesday & Friday - Nature Writing Workshops**

### **OCTOBER**

**15 - Conservancy Day: The Green Schools of Middleton and Cross Plains**

**TBD - Nature Writing Workshops**

### **NOVEMBER**

**19 - Conservancy Day: TBD**

**TBD - Nature Writing Workshops**