

Spring 2023 Newsletter

Friends Receive 2022 "Sustainable Middleton Award"

By Lois Sater, Board Member and Development and Marketing Chair

The Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy is one of five organizations to win a "Sustainable Middleton" award for 2022. Middleton's Sustainability Committee announced in fall 2022 the creation of the award to recognize businesses, organizations, and individuals who have conducted/implemented significant sustainability actions or practices in the City of Middleton over the past year or more. Nominations for the 2022 award were due January 31, 2023. Three committee members, one local business volunteer, and Middleton's Sustainability Coordinator evaluated the submitted nominations and provided recommendations to the

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June 24th: A Celebration of Trails

By Peter Witucki, Board Member and Vice President and John Daly, Member of the Education Committee and Development and Marketing Committee

Mark your calendars for a fun, family-friendly dual event in the Conservancy on June 24 – the annual Prairie Chase Run/Walk and a celebration of Trails Day. We are partnering with Dane County Parks,

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Left to right are Hans Hilbert and Deb Weitzel with Sustainability Committee members Dick Lathrop and Chair Kristie Pulvermacher

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Photos

Peter Witucki, Gary Sater, Ken Weisner, John Daly, Mark Wegner, Paul Ludden, Chris Kubiak, Michael Knapstein, Dale Klubertanz

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From the Co-Presidents

Dear Friends,

Earth Week (April 16-22, 2023) was special this year for the Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy. Through our longstanding partnership with Dane County Parks and Operation Fresh Start Program (OFS), we took part in an educational event to provide context to the work young adults perform as part of OFS crews in parks and natural areas throughout the county. It was followed by a lunch celebrating the partnership and these young adults. These crews work full-time each week often doing difficult physical labor that land managers depend on. In the Pheasant Branch Conservancy, OFS crews cleared gnarly and invasive honevsuckle from the ATC power line easement along the east side of the Platinum Prairie, among other projects.

During the event, Dane County Conservationist, Lars Higdon, posed the question, "Why Earth Day?" Going around the room, there were many good answers: environmental awareness, giving back to the earth, keeping the environment clean. However, one answer really stood out, coming from a young conservation crew member. Her answer was simply: "To be able to take a day off work and just enjoy what we work every day doing." There may be many reasons why we set the goals to accomplish our mission "to restore, protect and promote the Conservancy and its watershed" and work hard at its implementation - but it would all be for naught if we failed to take time to appreciate what we have

accomplished. As we apply our foresight, skills, and hard work to the Conservancy and Pheasant Branch Watershed, they provide ever-renewing resources and enjoyment back to us.

Decades into the restoration of the Conservancy by the Friends, we can spend more time appreciating what we've accomplished. This summer, as our restoration workday volunteers continue to remove invasive species along the southeast corridor trail, we can look north over the creek to where our efforts began in the late 1990's, giving back while being rewarded at the same time. Our Wisconsin Master Naturalist song bird monitors will hopefully see higher counts and more species as additional habitat is restored, a reward for our work.

On the personal level, our time outside in the Conservancy makes us happier, improves our health, and gives us something to appreciate. Whether our efforts are to help a plant grow, restore habitat for wildlife, or remove pollutants from the air and water, time spent in the Conservancy makes our lives better. When we combine our collective efforts to give back for what we borrow, we can improve the health and well-being of our entire community. Together we can be proud of our accomplishments.

See you on the trails,

Pan Shannon Malitat

Pam & Hans

Co-Presidents copresidents@pheasantbranch.org

Update on Creek Corridor Stabilization and Trail Reopening

By Mark Wegner, City of Middleton Assistant Director of Parks & Recreation, Forestry and Conservancy Lands

It has been a long 5 years since the disastrous flood event of August 2018 and the end is finally in sight. City staff appreciates all of your patience and understanding during this process and understands fully the impacts this has had on the enjoyment and use of the corridor. We all will be thankful when it is completed.

Creek Corridor Stabilization

Contracts were awarded in August of 2022 for two projects – one for the stream and upper bank stabilization and another for the



Stabilization and restoration work in the creek corridor

reconstruction of the trail and bridges. Cardno Engineering was the contractor for the first, MSA Professional Services for the second. The stream work started in early September and was finished in early November. Bridge and trail work started right after Thanksgiving. Construction of new bridge abutments occurred over the winter months. All of the existing bridges were moved from their locations for this process. Bridges have now been reset on the new abutments. After some wrinkles with the design for the replacement railings, which entailed some additional bracket welding, the railings were finished in April. The bridge restoration work is now complete.

Trail Reconstruction and Reopening

Slated to begin in mid-April, removal of any remaining asphalt and grading of the trail base will be occurring section by section. Additional repairs on the concrete stream crossings will be happening as well. When possible, the trail will be widened an additional 12 inches to help lessen conflicts between different users (bicyclists, walkers, birders, runners). If weather cooperates, the entire trail will be paved in early July and opened for all regular use by the end of July!

Membership/Donation Form

Name:			
Street:			
City, State, Zip:			
Phone:			
Email:			
Send this membership form and payment to: Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy, Inc			
P.O. Box 628242			

Middleton, WI 53562

Membership Level:

Memberships purchased after 9/1 apply to following calendar year \$10 Student

- \$25 Individual
 -] \$40 Family

Volunteer Opportunities:

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



Additional Giving Opportunities

	0 11
\$	Unrestricted – use
	where needed most
\$ <u> </u>	Glen & Joan Pulver
	Education Endowment
\$ <u> </u>	Restoration
	Endowment
\$	Seed the Need

For charitable IRA donations or legacy giving, please use our legal name, PO Box address and Tax ID# 39-1838491

Celebration of Operation Fresh Start Programs

By Gary Sater, Board Member and R&M Committee Co-Chair

On April 19, 2023 the Restoration and Management Committee hosted an educational session and lunchtime celebration of the **Operation Fresh Start (OFS)** conservation training programs at the Dane County's Darren Marsh **Operations Facility. Dane County** Parks had asked if the Friends would be willing to host the event and we agreed given how valuable the OFS training programs have been to the Conservancy in our restoration and management work. Our Land Manager Rob Schubert and R&M Committee member Susan Gruber have nurtured this relationship for several years. The OFS team along with our R&M members have restored many acres



Operation Fresh Start crew at work in the Conservancy

over the years, often in the most challenging parts of the Conservancy. The OFS training programs in natural lands conservation have provided many of the interns and students with the opportunity to secure employment in this industry and possibly make a career choice in that direction. We look forward to continuing our partnership with them!

PBC Trail Called One of Best in State for Biking

By Stefanie Brouwer, Friends Member and Newsletter Editor

The website "Wisconsin Travel Best Bets" lists the Pheasant Branch Corridor Trail as one of the four best biking trails in the state. To quote from the website "This trail will take you through a tranquil wooded oasis. Pedal footbridges that pass of over bubbling streams and through wooded hills dotted



Cyclist on creek corridor trail

with wildflowers. The scenery is so pleasant you might forget you're a short pedal away from shopping, dining and a variety of attractions. This is a trail that any rider can enjoy."

The other three trails are wellknown regionally and include the Green Circle Trail in Stevens Point; the Three Eagle Trail in Oneida and Vilas counties; and the Land O' Lakes Trail in the Town of Land O'Lakes in Vilas County.

Communications & Development Volunteers Needed

By Chris Kubiak, Board Member

Do you have marketing, communications and/or development experience? Do you enjoy community outreach? Your skills can help the Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy achieve our goals to expand membership diversity, increase investment in restoration work and educational programming, and grow partnerships with other conservation-focused organizations.

To capitalize on new opportunities, the Friends are looking to grow our existing Development & Marketing Committee into two new groups: the Communications Committee and the Development Committee. As a volunteer-driven organization,



we will need leadership to help build these programs and support the Friends' strategic goals.

The Communications Committee would focus on maintaining a consistent Friends' brand while engaging with the community through various channels including social media, printed signage and more. This committee would support other Friends' committees (e.g., Education, Restoration & Management) promote activities and programs throughout and

beyond the Pheasant Branch Conservancy.

The Development Committee would focus on growing individual and business partner membership with the Friends' organization. This committee would develop campaigns aimed at expanding the community's relationship and engagement with the Conservancy, working with the Communications and other committees to achieve this goal.

Please consider supporting the Friends by joining our board and serving on a committee in a leadership role. Alternatively, joining these committees in a nonleadership capacity also offers a great opportunity to contribute and learn about the Friends organization. To learn more, contact our co-presidents Hans Hilbert and Pam Shannon at copresidents@pheasantbranch.org.

Earth Day at the Conservancy

By Gary Sater, Restoration and Management Committee Co-Chair

On Earth Day this year - April 22 the Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy, through the



Restoration and Management Committee, hosted a workday from 9-noon in the City of Middleton portion of the Pheasant Branch Conservancy along the trail near Orchid Heights Park. A very productive crew of 20 volunteers removed buckthorn and honeysuckle along the trail leading into the wetlands across from the Bock Forest.

Earth Day has a special significance here in Wisconsin. It was founded by Wisconsin Senator (and former Governor) Gaylord Nelson in 1969. Nelson initially proposed it as a national teach-in on the environment to send a message to Washington that public opinion was solidly behind a bold political agenda on environmental problems. His teach-in proposal quickly gained grassroots support through widespread media publicity. The first Earth Day on April 22, 1970 brought together millions of Americans from all walks of life and gave rise to the modern American environmental movement. Now 54 years later it continues to be a worldwide event that celebrates the environmental diversity of the Earth and highlights ways of protecting our planet. It's observed in 200 countries and coordinated by the non-profit earthday.org.

Meet the New Education Coordinator

By Deb Weitzel, Education Committee Chair

Welcome to Tim Hansel, the Friend's new Education Coordinator. Tim has lived in Madison for twenty years with his wife, two daughters age 4 and 7, and six-month-old son. Tim has a PhD from UW-Madison in Philosophy and taught logic, environmental ethics and medical ethics for 17 years in the Philosophy Department at Edgewood College. He now volunteers with the Prairie Enthusiasts - Empire Sauk Chapter



Tim Hansel

doing land management, bird and insect surveys. After becoming a Master Naturalist in 2018, he is now an instructor with the program. With a BS in meteorology and an interest in climate change, Tim studies how climate change affects fire management of tall grass prairie and oak savanna. He is an avid birder and photographer plus also enjoys backlighting for moths. We hope to develop community science projects at the Conservancy under Tim's leadership.

With field trip season right around the corner, Tim has been full speed ahead learning the many facets of this job. We are pleased to have him aboard. Our former coordinator, Cayla Matte, is now the Administrative Coordinator with the Sand County Foundation.

Good luck to both Tim and Cayla in their new endeavors!

Eagle Nest Update

By Deb Weitzel, Board Member and Education Committee Chair

Madison Audubon Society volunteers have been monitoring the bald eagle nest in Pheasant Branch Conservancy since the eagles arrived three years ago. They report that 2 adult eagles have returned to the nest and their behavior has been consistent with courtship and egg laying. However, the female is a new mate for the male who had a failed nest last year. Unfortunately, this new pairing did not produce any eggs this year. We hope they will be back in 2024 with a successful pairing. Education Committee member Paul Ludden captured stunning photos of them this past winter.



Eagle nest in the Conservancy, winter 2023

Save the date! – Shannon Prairie 20th Anniversary Celebration

Pheasant Branch Conservancy

September 30th @ 1:30-3:00pm

Join the Friends in celebrating their success in the establishment of the Shannon Prairie. Activities will include speakers, seed collection, seed sowing, guided tours, musical entertainment, and refreshments.

More details will be provided as they develop.



Stone marking Shannon Prairie site

Sustainability Award

Continued from page 1

Sustainability Committee for five applicants to receive the award.

Deb Weitzel, who has been a Friend's Board Member and Chair of the Education Committee for over 20 years, was instrumental in creating the award. She has been on the City of Middleton Sustainability Committee for five years.

Each awardee received a uniquelydesigned certificate that recognizes their sustainability accomplishments. Four awardees received their certificate mounted on a wood plaque made from trees salvaged from the Bock Forest; the Friends requested no plaque but multiple certificate copies for kiosk displays. The two nonprofit organizations (the Friends and the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District) were honored at Middleton's Common Council meeting on April 4, 2023. The three businesses were recognized for their sustainable practices at the

Middleton Chamber of Commerce breakfast on April 6, 2023.

The 2022 "Sustainable Middleton" awardees are:

Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy

For stewarding the Conservancy by restoring its wetlands and oak savanna to improve water quality, provide wildlife habitat (including for grassland birds,) and produce prairie seeds for other restorations; and by fostering environmental education and recreation.

Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District

For implementing sustainability at Pope Farm Elementary School by using geothermal heating/cooling in their new energy efficient building, by practicing recycling/ composting, and by teaching environmental principles using the outdoors as a classroom for all grades.

Purple Cow Organics

For composting 9,000 tons of plant material annually (including yard waste from Middleton,) thereby creating a product that improves soil health, reduces runoff, and sequesters carbon.

Standard Imaging, Inc.

For operating a low carbon footprint facility in Middleton by using geothermal for heating/ cooling and solar energy for 28% of electricity, by eliminating natural gas, by recycling paper and metal wastes, and by reducing/ eliminating hazardous materials.

UW-Health

For committing to improved energy efficiency at their Middleton facility by reducing greenhouse gas emissions 64% and by achieving an Energy Star score of 92 in 2022.

Friends to Monitor Runoff from New Residential Development

By Michael Niebauer – Board Member and Watershed Committee Co-Chair

On March 7, 2023 the City of Middleton Common Council approved the rezoning of the Acker Farm Development - known as Redtail Ridge - from Agricultural land to a Planned Development **District – General Implementation** Plan (PDD-GIP). The approval comes with a list of contingencies that must be met, one being that the City of Middleton Engineer must approve the stormwater management plan. On April 19, 2023 the Water Resources Management Committee (WRMC) discussed and approved the comprehensive stormwater management plan. The developer will now put together specific stormwater management plans that will require approval by the City of Middleton Engineer. This is of course of special interest to the Watershed Committee and the Friends as a whole. The Redtail Ridge development is adjacent to sensitive habitats of the Conservancy and recent restoration efforts in the wetlands. The majority of the runoff from the development will drain directly into the waters of the Conservancy and then into Lake Mendota.

The position of the Friends is that as much runoff as possible should be contained and allowed to infiltrate into the ground at the locations where it is generated such as roofs, gutters and impervious



Herb Garn sampling at the Western Tributary

surfaces. The current plan calls for 100% capture of runoff from an average size storm producing 2.5" of rain. This is known as "stayon" and is typical for current developments in Middleton, but it will not prevent significant runoff during larger storms. The Watershed Committee will continue to monitor and comment on the plans as they become available. The Friends have requested - and Dane County has approved - adding a water quality and flow monitoring point at the western tributary of Pheasant Branch Creek where it enters the Conservancy at Pheasant Branch Road. This stream will receive a majority of the runoff from the Redtail Ridge development as well as runoff from the Misty Valley Subdivision and overflow from Graber Pond. Watershed Committee member Herb Garn and his team of volunteers have established a location to monitor waterflow and will collect samples as part of an ongoing water quality study. This effort works in conjunction with Dane County's runoff monitoring program at the new 160- acre prairie restoration. Three samples have already been collected this spring during rain and snow melt events to establish a baseline condition.



Redtail Ridge development (thick dashed line), new monitoring site (star)

Happy Spring Season from the Restoration & Management Committee

By Gary Sater, Board Member and R&M Committee Co-Chair

Our new calendar of workdays and seed collection opportunities is now on our website at pheasantbranch.org/events (please also see sidebar to right). We invite you to either continue to volunteer your time with us in the Conservancy or try something new in nature. You may already know that time spent in nature is not only good for our flora and fauna, but is also clearly beneficial for your physical and mental health.

We've already conducted two very successful prescribed burns, as scheduled and managed by our Land Manager Rob Schubert. The first was completed on 3/21/23and the second on 4/8/23. Both included multiple locations including east of the springs and stream and south of the composite trail and into the city portion of the Conservancy; the very top of Frederick's Hill; Shannon Prairie west of the springs; and west of the springs and stream to the south and into the city portion bordering Pheasant Branch Road. Both burns were conducted by Quercus Land Stewardship Services. It will be interesting to see what vegetation will be first to show up and what species will be enhanced as a result of the burns.

The third 40-acre quadrant of the 160-acre addition to the north side of the Conservancy has been



Prairie burn conducted by Quercus March 2023



seeded! We are also planning a celebration of the fourth and final quadrant seeding of the Platinum Prairie to be held in 2024. We will announce more about this celebration later this year. In collaboration with Clean Lakes Alliance and Dane County Parks, the Seed the Need campaign has been a huge success. Jim Struve, in memory of his beloved wife Vicky, has contributed significantly to our campaign and is a major reason we have completed our 4-year fund drive. Thanks again to Jim and all of you who have helped us transform and restore 160 acres of farmland into natural lands once again. The Yahara Watershed is the healthier for it!

Upcoming Restoration Workdays

Saturday workdays are scheduled for 5/20, 9/2, 9/16, 10/7 and 10/21. All will be held from 9 am till noon.

This year we've also included Sunday workdays to capture your volunteer time if Saturdays are not convenient for you. The Saturday and Sunday workdays will likely be for seed collection and are scheduled for 6/18, 7/1, 7/16, 8/5, 8/20, 9/2, 9/17, 10/7 and 10/22/23, They will be held from either 9 am till noon or 1-4 pm.

The specific times for each of these days are posted on pheasantbranch.org/events. Please register online and come enjoy these activities with R&M.



Upcoming Education Events

Conservancy Days

Please see pheasantbranch.org for event registration info.

Kaitlin Svabek – Madison Audubon Society: Accessibility in Birding Wednesday May 17th, 6:00 PM Middleton Public Library

Lars Higdon – Dane County Naturalist: Update on Acker acquisition Wednesday July 19th, 6:00 PM Middleton Public Library

FUN (Friends of Urban Nature)

FUN events occur on the 4th Saturdays of the month, 1:30-3:00 PM. No need to register. Location is 4864 Pheasant Branch Rd parking lot.

"Magic of Feathers" with Kacy Zander Saturday May 27th

"Prairie Plant ID" with Lynn Persson Saturday June 24th

"Summer Tree Phenology" with Sean Gere Saturday July 22th

"Summer Flora & Fauna" with Robin King Saturday August 26th



Trails Celebration

Continued from page 1

the City of Middleton, Foundation for Dane County Parks, Accessibility Wisconsin and several others.

Prairie Chase Run/Walk 8:00 AM – 11:30 AM

Jump start your day in the morning with the 9th annual Prairie Chase 5K/10K. The 5K route takes participants around the main crushed limestone path through the Conservancy. This route is great for runners looking for a flat and fast course, and is friendly terrain for walkers and jogging strollers. The 10K route will explore lessfrequented corners of the Conservancy, with a point of finding all the hills, and in 2023 will include trails in Dane County's newly restored northern parcel. As usual, the post-run celebration will include a free kids run, refreshments, and live music. Learn more and register at prairiechase.org.

Trails Day Event 12:30 PM – 3:30 PM

We'll keep the celebration going into the afternoon with our second annual FOPBC Trails Day. This family-friendly, all-inclusive event will include the following activities: Madison Reading Project's Big Red Book Bus, kite-flying demonstrations, face-painting artist, hands-on nature exploration and crafts and material fair with information provided by the Friends and many of our community partners. These activities and more will be headquartered at Orchid Heights Park in Middleton. Trained naturalists will be leading short nature hikes from Orchid Heights to the underground springs, the Bock Forest and along the new Listening Trails.

For a complete schedule and list of all our community partners, watch our events page at pheasantbranch.org/trailsday.

We hope that this celebration of the outdoors will encourage people of all ages and abilities to discover or re-discover the Pheasant Branch Conservancy and enjoy the health benefits of being outside.

Early Signs of Spring in the Conservancy

By Dale Klubertanz, Friends' Member

Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished."

- Lao Tzu

In the wake of the feisty winds and mixed weather of March, there is a characteristic conk-la-lee! song of returning red-wing blackbirds in the air, which is pungent with the smell of burnt char and ash across the surfaces of the blackened prairies. They roost high on branches overlooking the scorched landscape and there is a determined quality in their call.

The controlled burns of mindful prairie patrons are made early before the birds have nested and in slow, measured steps as they move along the still-occupied wildlife habitat, allowing creature residents enough notice and time to flee before the flames. The burns will try their best to hold back the hurried pace of foreign invasive plants, already green and on the go. even before the prairie is waking. Still, the Kentucky bluegrass of spilled-over urban lawns is the first to peak out brazenly from beneath the ashen soil.

In the early weeks of April, the remaining prairie remnants of last year are reduced to fine, flakey particles, ready to be reintroduced in the form of nutrients most needed to foster fresh new life. The sun is free to reach the soil as it shines directly on the ground, thus



warming the dark, unimpeded surfaces. The deeply rooted grassland plants survive the flames in the face of encroaching woodland communities, which fare poorly in the fires, their life-giving energy invested mostly above ground.

Strewn throughout the dark, seared landscape are the newly fallen leaves of young white oaks, which have held fast to their branches over winter on petioles only partially detached from their abscission layers. Their red-brown, crispy shapes litter the Bock Forest native plant communities. They fall in the early months of spring as a part of a process called marcescence (holding leaves over winter) to make room for a treeful of brand new leaves. They then offer themselves to the enduring cycles of future generations.

It is the American robin, hopping along the sooty open spaces looking for prairie seed and reemerging insects, which assures a Conservancy visitor of the nearness of summer. The relative silence of the passing months is filled with the varied repertoire of the robin's dawn to dusk "Ode to Joy". It is a happy time to feel their presence in the yawning earth around us. It is especially joyful to know these robins have a summer home to nest and raise their young, finding nourishment in a native environment filled with organic food and healthy stomping grounds.

As April moves into May, the spring which brings the summer will burst out and bloom in all its fullness. In this affirmation of spring, there is a stirring of life-forces, both ancient and wise, held deep within the memory of the Conservancy's recovering wilderness communities. A visitor walking slowly along its trails with an awareness of unhurried time is invited to be part of its shared, unfolding antiquity.



Middleton, WI 53562

To sign up for a paperless newsletter, please email office@pheasantbranch.org



May

 Conservancy Day: Madison Audubon Society: Accessibility in Birding
Restoration Workday
Friends of Urban Nature

(FUN): Magic of Feathers

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June

- 18 Restoration Workday
- 19 Board of Directors Meeting
- 24 Trails Day Celebration
- 24 Friends of Urban Nature (FUN): Prairie Plant ID

July

- 1 Restoration Workday
- 16 Restoration Workday
- 17 Board of Directors Meeting
- 19 Conservancy Day: Update on Acker Acquisition

July Continued

22 Friends of Urban Nature (FUN): Summer Tree Phenology

August

- 5 Restoration Workday
- 20 Restoration Workday
- 21 Board of Directors Meeting
- 26 Friends of Urban Nature (FUN): Summer Flora and Fauna

Please see pheasantbranch.org/ events for more upcoming activities!

Follow us on social media:

pheasantbranch.org