

NEWS FROM FRIENDS OF
POPE FARM
CONSERVANCY

Volume 2, Issue 1

PROTECTING THE LAND AND ITS STORIES



MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

2015—A Great Year!

BY MEL POPE

It was a wonderful year for the Friends of Pope Farm Conservancy (FOPFC). Pardon the enthusiasm, but I just can't help it! Our board of directors, volunteers and each of you have made this happen! Our membership has grown 34%, and today we have 480 individual members of the FOPFC. Our volunteers logged approximately 4,000 hours in efforts to enhance and improve Pope Farm Conservancy.

The Events Committee has increased in size and certainly had their hands full this year. They increased the number of educational talks at Pope Farm Conservancy from 6 to 8 in 2015. Sunflower Days drew an unexpected 60,000 visitors to the conservancy. The Friends provided over 55 volunteers to help with the parking and to monitor our Sunflower booth. Between the FOPFC and the Town of Middleton, we were able to handle this enormous influx of people. There were many smiles by everyone as they stood in awe of the Sunflowers. Heritage Day provided a series of speakers to over 400 people, and the horse-drawn wagon rides were a hit. The events team also held a series of volunteer socials in the evening for the many volunteers who gave their time.

Our relationship with the Town of Middleton was strengthened as volunteers worked with the Town on ways the FOPFC could help them enrich Pope Farm Conservancy.

The Public Relations Committee continued their publications of the monthly news update, and the beautiful bi-annual newsletters that go to out to our membership. This year contacting the press and communicating with the public on Facebook was exciting.

Prairie Restoration volunteers took advantage of the wonderful growing season in 2015. After planting over 125 different species of prairie plants in the Paddock Oak Savanna, dozens of volunteers pulled weeds to insure the health of this remarkable young prairie. Over 30 volunteers helped collect seed in other prairies. This seed will be used to improve the diversity in all the prairies at Pope Farm Conservancy.

The Education Committee developed pamphlets to be used for self-guided tours at Pope Farm Conservancy. These are designed to improve the educational experience for the general public.

The Homestead Committee reviewed dozens of ideas on how the 15 acre homestead and the barn could be utilized in the future. The FOPFC has endorsed an effort by the Natural Heritage Land Trust (NHLT) to do a feasibility study of the property.

As we look forward to 2016, there are a number of projects that are highlighted.

- The FOPFC will manage 3 more prairies for the Town of Middleton. This will improve those prairies, and will save the Town of Middleton taxpayers approximately \$9,000. FOPFC has become a partner in the Prairie Partner Program (see page 9). A substantial commitment for us.
- The FOPFC will take over the sponsorship of Sunflower Days. We want to continue the tradition of Sunflower Days, and use this event as a FOPFC fundraising opportunity.
- The FOPFC will be looking for a part time volunteer coordinator for 2016. The person will work with committees to find members who are interested in helping.
- In 2016 the FOPFC will switch to new software called Little Green Light that is specific to non-profit organizations.

We have many volunteer opportunities, and if you would like to join us, we do have a great time. I want to thank each and every one of you! Your support has been absolutely critical, and very much appreciated. When you are out in the Conservancy, I hope you realize you are truly part of the Pope Farm Conservancy family.



Mel Pope, Chairman
Friends of Pope Farm Conservancy

FRIENDS OF
**POPE FARM
CONSERVANCY** 

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FOPFC Mission

Our mission is to contribute to the enrichment of Pope Farm Conservancy as a community and educational asset. We strive to protect and preserve the balance of the conservancy's unique natural, agricultural and historical features and volunteer as stewards to promote our passive conservancy.

Contact Us

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THE CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS SPILLWAY

The dam is a part of Dane County history that has been long forgotten. But newly discovered photographic evidence bring to life the activities of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) on the Pope farm in 1938.



PRAIRIE RESTORATION

Beginning in January, the FOPFC will also manage three additional prairies. These prairies cover nearly 13 acres and comprise almost half of the prairie acreage in the Conservancy.



MORE THAN FOOD GARDEN

This past summer's rotating heritage garden in Pope Farm Conservancy highlighted the many roles that often humble vegetables and herbs played in Wisconsin homes—from medicines to toys.



THE INDIGO BUNTINGS

The all-blue male Indigo Bunting is one of the most dramatic songbirds that nests at Pope Farm Conservancy.

Donate to Friends of Pope Farm Conservancy

I would like to make a tax-deductible donation at the level of:

- Sunflower \$50
- Rock Wall\$100
- Oak Savannah\$250
- Capital View\$500
- Other

Donor Information

Name _____

Address _____

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Please mail this form and your check (payable to FOPFC) to:
FOPFC, 10333 Blackhawk Rd., Middleton, WI 53526

We also accept donations securely online at www.popefarmconservancy.org/donate

*Spillway today*

THE (CCC) CIVILIAN CONSERVATION CORPS SPILLWAY AT POPE FARM CONSERVANCY

BY ROBERT J. MOORE

Dozens of similar structures can be found in Dane County alone. Yet the spillway on the Pope Farm Conservancy Property is special. It is most special in the level of care it is getting. Other “soil saving” dams of the Great Depression era are quietly deteriorating in farm fields all over Wisconsin. Still other have been removed. The structure on the Pope farm site is the only one in

south-central Wisconsin (and perhaps the entire state) that is being protected as an historical landmark.

As landmarks go, the concrete chute is of course not in the same league with most historical sites in the region. The dam is a part of Dane County history that has been long forgotten. But newly discovered photographic evidence bring



Spillway under construction, do you recognize any of the trees on the horizon?

to life the activities of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) on the Pope farm. That, combined with the ongoing efforts of the Conservancy to protect the structure has elevated the importance of the work that the CCC did in Dane County.

The Civilian Conservation Corps was created in 1933 as a way to provide financial relief to young men during the height of the Great Depression. The intent was to put the men (they were called enrollees) to work on forestry and soil erosion projects throughout the nation. In Wisconsin there were over 80 camps in operation, most of them located in the north woods. Each camp consisted of about 200 enrollees and was administered by two military officers.

Builders of the Pope farm spillway came from a camp at Mount Horeb (the other camp was located on the grounds of the UW- Madison Arboretum). While the military oversaw camp life, the Soil Conservation Service (SES) was in charge of organizing the erosion control jobs of the Mt. Horeb camp. The dam design, called a head flume, was suggested by UW-Madison professor Otto Zesman. It was simple and had no moving parts. The intent was merely to slow the flow of water during times of heavy rain and runoff.

Construction of the dam began in late summer 1938. A CCC crew of about a dozen young men,



CCC boys 1938, notice the earth berms are not yet built off the wings of concrete.

under SES supervision needed about 2-3 weeks to finish the project. The identities of the young workers have been lost except for one. Cross Plaines, WI resident Mertin Dauck was part of the construction crew, and like many enrollees he occasionally brought his camera to work. Thanks to Mertin Dauck, we have a photographic record of the Pope farm spillway.

However, a mystery still remains about the Pope farm and CCC work. Remnants of another project exists near the spillway dam. It too was constructed by the CCC boys from Mt. Horeb. It was a soil erosion control dam but its design and purpose are unknown. Perhaps a long-time farmer or resident can help us begin to understand that part of Pope farm history.

FEATURE

MORE THAN A FOOD GARDEN

AT POPE FARM CONSERVANCY

BY AMY L. ROSEBROUGH



To a 19th century woman in Wisconsin, a garden provided more than vegetables for the dinner plate. Gardens supplied many products that were useful to home-makers. This past summer's rotating heritage garden in Pope Farm Conservancy highlighted the many roles that often humble vegetables and herbs played in Wisconsin homes—from medicines to toys.

Playing off the fact that the eastern end of the garden has become a more-or-less permanent home for volunteer stands of chamomile, Echinacea, dill, and sage, the rest of that half of the garden was devoted to other plants used to make home

medicines. Many rural homes kept one or more medical manuals on their shelves. Books like "Our Family Physician", first published in 1869, contained advice for treating injuries and illnesses, tips on hygiene, and recipes for home medicines. Readers of the Little House on the Prairie books might be familiar with mustard poultices, but how many are aware that onion syrup was a popular cough medicine, that tomato juice was given to victims of cholera, or that strawberry root was used to treat kidney stones? Some 19th century medicines are still in use today. Capsaicin in chili peppers is used to treat muscle aches, Echinacea can be

purchased as a cold remedy, and chamomile tea is as popular as ever.

The southwestern portion of the garden was used to highlight dye plants. Thrifty settlers used a variety of plant dyes to transform drab cloth. Many were obtained from wild plants like the wild indigo that grows in Pope Farm's prairies. Others were distilled from common greens, flowers, and vegetables in home gardens. Onion skins yield shades ranging from bright, sunny yellow to golden brown. Red cabbage produces blue-green to purple dye depending on the acidity of the water the cabbage is boiled in. Carrots, spinach, fennel, marigolds,



and beets produce a range of pinks, oranges, and pale greens. Prior to this year's garden tour, the author brewed up batches of dyes and dyed strips of cotton cloth. The cabbage and onions were the clear winners, creating deeply-colored dyes that survived several days of sunlight and weather in the garden without fading.

The northwestern portion of the garden showcased plants used for cleaning and beauty products and toys. Rosemary was once a prized ingredient in shampoos. Potatoes were used as soap to clean and soothe winter-chapped skin. Lavender's prized scent was added to laundry and freshened the air in sickrooms. Less seriously, turnips were

carved into Jack-O-Lanterns by immigrants from some parts of Europe, and beans were used as game tokens by both settlers and Native peoples alike.

Though the summer's theme was "more than food", produce from the garden was destined for dinner tables rather than hair tonics and home medicines. Well over a hundred pounds of vegetables, berries, and herbs were harvested and donated to the food bank at Middleton Outreach Ministries. This summer's heat and rain created ideal growing conditions. The garden produced bumper crops, including some truly massive tomatoes. Let's hope next year's garden does just as well!



FEATURE

PRAIRIE RESTORATION

BY DENNIS SCHENBORN

AT POPE FARM CONSERVANCY

In August of 2015, Town of Middleton Chairman Bill Kolar asked the Friends if we could help the town by accepting more responsibility for prairie management at the Pope Farm Conservancy. After carefully considering our capabilities—our funding and grants, the expertise of our Prairie committee, and our many hard working prairie volunteers — the FOPFC Board offered to accept responsibility for managing the Blackhawk, Hillside, and Wheatfield prairies. By doing this, we will save the Town 50% of its prairie management costs at the conservancy. The Town Parks Commission and the Town Board unanimously approved the transfer of responsibility at their September meetings.

Our work to restore the oak savanna will continue and beginning in January, the FOPFC will also manage the three additional prairies. These prairies cover nearly 13 acres and comprise almost half of the prairie acreage in the Conservancy.

In 1942 Aldo Leopold wrote: *“Where and by whom shall the prairie be given foothold on its former domain?”*

To his challenge we answer: Here at Pope Farm Conservancy and by Town government and the Friends working together to restore and manage prairies.

Calling All Volunteers

We cannot manage these prairies without your continued help. In 2014, the FOPFC Board called for volunteers to gather and plant seeds, and more than 30 people turned out and donated more than 400 hours to get the job done. In 2015, volunteers worked to manage weeds in the savanna and planted 10 flats of seedlings. Volunteers also collected native prairie seeds that will be used in the savanna and other prairies at the Pope Farm Conservancy. In 2016, we will need more help from volunteers to control weeds and to collect and plant seeds.

A native prairie is a place rich in diverse and beautiful plant life.

“A prairie is a place rich in plant life; diverse in color and species. It is a place, both fragile and resilient, that requires our attention from time to time to keep things in balance.”



Additional Help

In 2016, the Friends will be responsible for 13-acres of prairie at the Conservancy. It's a big job that will require a continued commitment from our volunteers, but we're also calling on help from Audubon's Restoration Ecology Intern program.

Through this program, we will purchase 288 hours of labor from six paid university student interns with majors in ecology and environmental sciences. The Friend's Prairie Committee experts (Curt Caslavka, Mike Andersen, and John Andrews) will plan and direct the work of the interns. This includes routine prairie management and the Wheatfield Prairie's experimental sage monitoring and suppression program.

Here's What's Going On in the Prairies

• The Paddock Oak-Savanna (1-acre)

In 2014, the Town Parks Commission and Town Board approved our proposal to restore a 1-acre oak savanna. Oak savannas once covered much of southern Wisconsin; now less than 1% remains so every acre restored is a

victory. Last year, more than 40 volunteers collected and planted the seeds of 113 native species. In addition, seven other species were purchased and planted bringing the total to 120 species in the savanna. This year volunteers planted 10 flats of hard-to-raise species and pulled or mowed weeds.

2015 was a good year with just enough rain at the right time, and we're seeing many of the species we planted and expect to see 30-40 different species bloom next year. In 2016, we will assess what's growing well, decide what needs to be planted, plant three bur oak trees and keep up with the weeding.

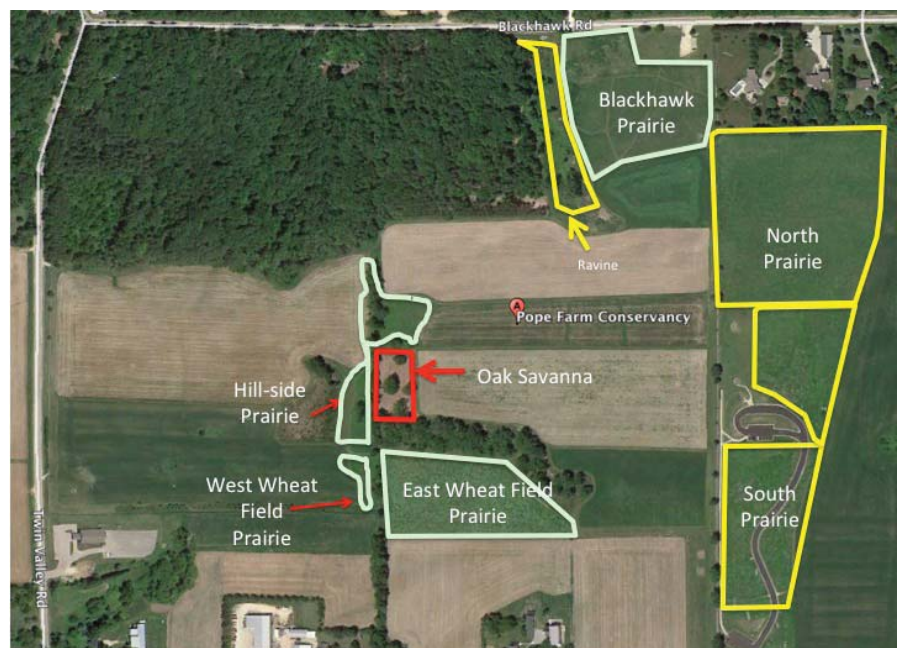
• The Hillside Prairie (2.7-acres)

The Hillside prairie curls around the north and west edges of the Oak Savanna. It is a

showcase for prairie flowers. Keeping it looking that way requires burning every few years and we need to keep a constant eye out for invading weeds and non-native species. It is likely that we will burn this prairie once every few years rather than every year. Longer burn cycles favor many prairie flower species and encourage a richer bird and insect community.

• The Blackhawk Prairie (5.7-acres)

The short grasses of the Blackhawk prairie are more typical of prairies west of the Mississippi River. It is at its most spectacular in the fall when the west wind sends ripples across the gold and amber grains of little blue-stem, prairie dropseed, and side-oats gramma grasses.



Map of Pope Farm Conservancy—The Town manages prairies in yellow; Prairies in red or green are managed by the FOPFC.



Volunteers digging weeds in the Savanna.

Wheatfield Prairie. Sage dominates and crowds out more desirable species. Photo was taken on 17 September 2015.

Our challenge (particularly along the north and west sides of the prairie) is to remove invading species and fill in bare spots with grasses that make the Blackhawk unique and beautiful. It is likely that we will only burn this prairie once every two years to encourage more nesting by grassland birds.

▪ **The Wheatfield Prairie (3.5-acres)**

In 2014 we raised concerns about the spread of white sage in this prairie. In June of 2015, sage in the Wheatfield Prairie could be seen from space (search for Pope Farm Conservancy, Middleton in Goggle-Earth).

Sage was in the original seed mix when the Wheatfield was planted in 2010. That was a drought year and sage loves dry conditions. It germinated and grew well while more desirable prairie flowers withered. The drought gave sage a big jump on its competitors, it spread and it now dominates this prairie.

We consulted several prairie experts about our concerns and will test methods to suppress sage and encourage the other species that struggle to compete against it.

Our first rule is to do no harm in the prairie so we will proceed cautiously with a program of rigorous testing and careful monitoring.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Many of you have already discovered how much fun it is to work with other Friends in the prairies. We'd like more of you to join us in that work. It's fun, you meet great people, and can see the results of your labor next year. If you can't join us in the work, please donate. We use those funds to buy plants and pay the student interns.

Thank you.

INDIGO BUNTINGS

AT POPE FARM CONSERVANCY

BY MIKE MCDOWELL



The all-blue male Indigo Bunting is one of the most dramatic songbirds that nests at Pope Farm Conservancy. Their sweet sweeping songs can be heard late spring and throughout the summer months. These sparrow-sized birds will often perch and sing from open branches, treetops, and even on telephone lines along country roads. Males defending territories will sing for hours on end, making them fairly easy to find provided you know their song.

Female and immature Indigo Buntings are brown with variable faint streaking on the breast. Sometimes females will show traces of blue on their wing feathers or rump. As the young males molt, the striking blue colors begin to emerge. Curiously, their feathers actually lack blue pigment. The color comes from microscopic feather structures that refract and reflect blue light.

Like many other neotropical migratory songbirds, Indigo Buntings migrate

during the night by stars for navigation. Using an internal biological clock as a star-compass, the birds adjust their flight angle to particular stars, taking even the Earth's rotation into account in order to find their way. During fall migration, most Indigo Buntings head for countries like Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica in Central America, while others overwinter in Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

Though there are no Indigo Buntings in Wisconsin right now, come early April they will begin to form large flocks in preparation for migration. When weather conditions are suitable, the birds will set out on their northward

journey to the United States, making a non-stop 24-hour flight across the Gulf of Mexico. An amazing feat for a tiny songbird!

Indigo Buntings can be found throughout Pope Farm Conservancy during late May, June, July, and August. Look for them along the edges of fields, the oak savannah, and especially in the woods by the CCC Spillway. You might also attract Indigo Buntings to your backyard by putting out thistle or nyjer. They're not finicky eaters, however – they'll also eat caterpillars, beetles, moths, flies, grasshoppers, spiders, various seeds, berries, and fruit. Look for Indigo Buntings this spring at PFC!



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