



Blue Mounds Area Project

Conservation and Community. Together.

Fall 2020

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Advice from an Old Friend: It's Time to Get Scrappy

Cindy Becker



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Spring through fall is the time when members of conservation organizations get together and get to work, sharing their efforts, experience, and the joy of managing natural lands. But as we BMAP members well know, this treasured form of communal effort came to a screeching halt in March.

I have watched the environmental groups I work with struggle as they jettison their programs. What do we do now?

The pandemic-forced isolation calls for contemplating the bigger picture, our sense of self, what community connection means, and what actions we can take.

Change is in the air.

This year started with so much hope. Late February I coordinated plans for some stimulating exhibits and family-friendly events to "Celebrate the Grasslands!" with four area libraries. I gave a presentation at The Prairie Enthusiasts Annual Conference, surrounded by fellow prairie lovers and landowners.

In early March I was part of a small group of county, state, and federal representatives gathered at the home of a local conservationist to share home-cooked food and discuss funding opportunities for rural Dane County. I was motivated and excited for the coming months, and whistling the tune, "Change is in the air!"

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President's Message

Amy Alstad, BMAP President

Greetings,

This year has certainly thrown more than its fair share of curve balls. Cancelled plans, unfamiliar routines, and a layer of uncertainty and anxiety over everything. Has that been your experience too?

Personally, one silver lining of the pandemic is that my family has spent a lot of extra time at our property near Ridgeway. We skipped some March travels and logged a lot of hours on the chain saw. A July work trip got cancelled, and we grabbed our parsnip predators and dispatched a tremendous pile of parsnip and other weeds. The bump in forward progress on our restoration projects -- paired with our best-ever vegetable garden -- has injected a



Photo by Eric Udelhofen

Amy Alstad, President

welcome dose of accomplishment, control and groundedness. And I imagine we could all use a bit more of those feelings right now.

In a typical year, BMAP would be wrapping up our season of summer tours and potlucks at member properties. For me, these events showcase the very best that BMAP has to offer, featuring conservation lessons and success stories as well as a supportive community of

fellow land stewards. I very much regretted the necessary but disappointing decision to postpone.

In place of summer potlucks, the board of directors has pivoted to reimagining new, COVID-compatible fall and winter events. We have also been digging into several of the priorities from our recent strategic plan update. In the coming months, stay tuned for updates on a new website, expanded partnerships, and more exciting ways that we're improving our services to members.

I'm hoping we can all tap into the solace and satisfaction of the natural world this season, and truly look forward to a time when we can reconnect in person. In the meantime, I wish you and your families good health.

Ecologist's Report

Micah Kloppenburg, BMAP Ecologist



Micah Kloppenburg

The summer site visits conducted by the staff ecologist, and occasionally joined by a BMAP board member, are a cornerstone service that we've maintained and improved across our organization's 24 years. Over this span of time BMAP

has supported more than 260 members with direct, in-person consults that cover landscape histories, plant inventories, habitat management, and restoration guides. This past summer I had the opportunity to visit fifteen BMAP-member properties, six of which were less than 10 acres in size.

In the 1970s a still-ongoing conversation among conservationists began about the best use of resources to conserve biodiversity and protect intact, native habitat: a single large reserve vs. several smaller ones. (Really, the answer is "both"). Although soundly exploring a wide range of ecological principles including island biogeography, dispersal and migration, and habitat preference (edge vs. interior) this conversation is impractical in its simplicity and in its application. In my mind, the gist of this conundrum is less an either/or choice and more of a single message, an exercise in project planning: it's important to consider how and where we can best mobilize resources and form partnerships to establish, improve, and expand protected areas. In other words, consider how everyone can get involved.

Isolated, small-acreage habitat plantings clearly help form a

broader, more complete conservation strategy. Among the property owners I've talked with, these islands of restored and planted habitat are, in both ecological and cultural terms, a significant stepping-stone. Culturally, my informal survey of property owners who practice conservation on their own property shows that they are more likely to be active in conservation in their larger community, either as stewards or in other volunteer capacities. And ecologically, these islands provide a temporary harbor for flora and fauna while we collectively work to restore corridors of habitat across the larger landscape, linking the single large reserves (think State Parks and Natural Areas or The Nature Conservancy properties) with many small ones diligently being managed by BMAP members.

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BMAP On Line

BMAP's web site: bluemounds.org

BMAP's Facebook page for info on BMAP events and other environmental news:

facebook.com/BMAPcommunity

BMAP's Facebook group to share photos, land restoration ideas, and activities with fellow members:

facebook.com/groups/BMAPcommunity

BMAP's monthly eBulletin for announcements, habitat restoration tips, and other BMAP-related info:

bluemounds.org/ebulletin.html

ECOLOGIST *from page 2*

Many plants are adaptable, resilient, and mobile, especially if we help them along. I've caught the blur through my car window of roadside blooms of western sunflower (*Helianthus occidentalis*), prairie phlox (*Phlox pilosa*), hoary puccoon (*Lithospermum canescens*), Michigan lily (*Lilium michiganense*), and swamp saxifrage (*Micranthes pensylvanica*) among many others. One delightful discovery this summer (and later mirrored by a board member's surprise finding on their own property) was the appearance of downy rattlesnake plantain (*Goodyera pubescens*) in the full shade of honeysuckle overgrowth, an advantageous and ironic pairing. Plants can surprise us with their tenacity, and we should give them every opportunity to do so, whether on a large or small scale.

If you'd like to organize a site visit, would like a sample Land Management Calendar, have questions on weed management, or would like guidance in developing a restoration plan, please contact me at ecologist@bluemounds.org. Large aspirations or small, I'm looking forward to it.

Thank You, Julie Raasch, for 15 Years of Newsletter Design

Amy Alstad, BMAP President

This newsletter marks a transition. After designing more than 40 newsletter issues for BMAP, Julie Raasch is passing the torch for newsletter layout to Denise Thornton and Doug Hansmann, newsletter editors. I'd like to share our gratitude and appreciation of Julie and her many contributions to BMAP over the years.

Julie's creative vision is behind much of the look and feel of our organization. In addition to the newsletter, she has shared her skills as a graphic designer in creating our logo, contributed hundreds of photographs from BMAP events to the newsletter and the website, and



Photo by Julie Raasch

managed the BMAP Facebook page. You'll continue to see Julie's photos gracing the pages of our newsletter, and our new website, currently under construction.

Lowery Creek Watershed Leads the Way

Denise Thornton

This current issue of the BMAP newsletter is a departure from the past. Beginning with Cindy Becker's inspirational call-to-action cover story, followed by Board President Amy Alstad's plans and hopes for the future, you'll find strong encouragement for greater engagement and sense of purpose.

Micah Kloppenburg's Ecologist's Report brings in the importance of knitting together restoration projects, large and small. The work done by neighboring land owners along Lowery Creek is a great example of the kind of dedicated, holistic effort that could well be the future of conservation.

"A stream does not exist in a vacuum," says Katie Abbott, Iowa County Conservationist. "It is impacted by the land next to it and the uplands around it. Everything in a watershed is tied together by the geography of the stream."

About five years ago a group of neighbors met around a table at the General Store in Spring Green to share their love of nature in the Lowery Creek Watershed, a relatively undisturbed area with a strong sense of history, culture, innovative agriculture, and rugged natural beauty.

Everything in a watershed is tied together by the geography of the stream.

Looking for guidance, the grassroots group reached out to the Driftless Area Land Conservancy (DALC) to help coordinate their efforts. DALC enlisted students in the UW-Madison Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies to spend a summer assessing the attributes of the watershed.

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But later that same month I began experiencing some now-notorious symptoms: completely lost my sense of taste, felt exhausted all the time, and fevers every other night - all diagnosed by my doctors as the flu. And beyond my sick bed, the world was officially going remote. Change was indeed in the air.

These last months have been a scramble to identify new ways of inspiring and communicating, and staying committed.

These last few months have been a scramble to identify new ways of inspiring and communicating, and staying committed while social distancing. For individuals interested in land conservation and land ethics, these are challenging times to feel supported in our beliefs.

We don't find our role models on the TV or in film. Natural calamities and human woes fill the news hour. Climate change isn't much of a news or political topic these days. Meanwhile, institutional mechanisms put in place to protect the environment are stealthily being erased.

I have had to search deep into the written world to find guidance. My new favorite is not a feel-good book about the human condition, nor one to snuggle up with, peacefully theorizing about nature and the environment.

Rather, it decries the catastrophic blows being dealt to the land by various occupations and ways of life, and the inability of agencies to address these problems with genuine solutions. This book is filled with the spit, vinegar, and fire of the compelling argument that

if we individually fail to change the ways that we manage land and wildlife, view power, identify wealth, and re-design our society to be respectful of the living biota on this earth, all is lost.

If you are about to flip the page, uncomfortable or annoyed by this bleak description of our current affairs and the accusations raised - hold on just one more sentence. This book is not the work of some unheralded present-day zealot, but instead, a compilation of essays, public addresses, and teachings, dated 1904 – 1947, *The River of the Mother of God and Other Essays* by Aldo Leopold, edited by Susan L. Flader and J. Baird Callicott (1991).

Like many of you, I have read and re-read *A Sand County Almanac*. I admire the simplicity of the writing style, the ways in which the changes across a year's time are woven into a beautiful story with a deep sense of place. Leopold's warm philosophical musings can linger in my mind for days. Yet, they don't energize or invigorate me to speak or act.

"If we individually fail to change the ways that we manage land and wildlife, view power, identify wealth, and re-design our society to be respectful of the living biota on this earth, all is lost."

The River of the Mother of God has had the opposite effect. It is making me feel scrappy, ready to speak up and speak out. That is a good thing, I think. As Leopold states in his 1938 essay, *The Ecological Conscience*, "Everyone ought to be dissatisfied with the slow spread of conservation to the land."

His essays discuss issues - not as hollow beliefs - but backed by science. He states in *A Biotic View of the Land* (1939), "A sketch of land as an energy circuit conveys three ideas more or less lacking from the current balance of nature concept: 1) that land is not merely soil; 2) that the native plants and animals kept the energy circuit open whereas others may or may not; and 3) that man-made changes are of a different order than evolutionary changes and have effects more comprehensive than is intended or foreseen."

Leopold's views here have never been widely embraced, and are often dismissed by policy makers. But while all opinions deserve consideration, those that have

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been shown through research to be false can no longer be part of our conversation. I am now paying more attention to what's being said, and whether it is truly part of positive change.

We can no longer afford to engage in "both-siding" (the belief that there are equally valid perspectives to every issue, and that they all deserve the same amount of time and attention).

Both-siding has had terrible consequences, and conservationists are notorious for taking this approach! However, as Leopold says in *The Ecological Conscience*, "The basic defect is this: we have not asked the citizen to assume any real responsibility." Truly, in today's climate, we must stand up for sound ecological management practices.

Unregulated septic systems and manure spreading are toxifying our waters. Suburbanization of the rural landscape is contributing to the decline of grassland birds.

Pesticides are not only a threat to our native invertebrates, they are killing us slowly through cancer. There is enough evidence for all of these statements, but not many of us want to step into the role of advocating for the earth.

Just what more am I willing to do to walk my talk?

No group can stand on the sidelines and feel they have done their part by pointing a finger. We are all part of the problems described here. We are all shuffling our feet when we need to be changing our practices. We must ask ourselves: Just what more am I willing to do to walk my talk?

A parting thought: Consider a world where the rights of the environment are part of the dis-

Consider a world where the rights of the environment are part of the discussion.

cussion. Aldo Leopold tells us in *Conservation: In Whole or in Part* (1944), "Conservation is a state of health of the land ... The land consists of soil, water, plants, and animals, but health is more than a sufficiency of these components. It is a state of vigorous self-renewal in each of them, and in all collectively. ... In this sense, land is an organism, and conservation deals with its functional integrity or health."

Inspiration can come from diverse sources. The Community Environmental Legal Defense

Fund (CELDF), a global movement, helps communities craft laws that consider the rights of the environment as part of any process. And, as the Lorax character created by Dr. Seuss warns us, "Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, it's not going to be better. It's just not."

Returning to my current source of inspiration, Leopold wrote in *Conservation: In Whole or in Part* (1944), "The power to injure land-health [grows] faster than the consciousness that it can be injured. Land, to the average citizen, is still something to be tamed, rather than something to be understood, loved, and lived with. Resources are still regarded as separate entities, indeed, as commodities, rather than inhabitants in the land-community."

That was 76 years ago. Folks, it's time to get scrappy.

BMAP EVENTS

Winter Tree and Shrub ID

Field Workshop

November 7, 2:00 pm to 4:00 pm

Pop's Knoll Shelter, Donald County Park

1945 Hwy 92, Mt. Horeb

Attendance may be limited, and advance registration is required!

Back after last year's well-attended event, this will be a field workshop in identifying trees and shrubs after leaf-off. Winter is a great time to enjoy and to work in the woods, and we will tour savanna, woodland, and mesic forest habitats, sharing tips for identifying native and invasive trees and shrubs.

We will be following COVID-safety guidelines during the workshop, and masks will be required. To ensure that attendees can experience close observation and easy communication, several workshop leaders will be present.

To register, RSVP by November 2. You can email Linda Millunzi-Jones at lindamillunzijones@gmail.com or leave a voice message with BMAP at 608-561-2627.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Volunteer Opportunity

BMAP member John Raasch is seeking volunteer advice and labor for an effort to preserve a small prairie/savanna remnant at Mount Pleasant Cemetery on Bowers Road in Primrose Township.

Over 40 prairie/savanna species were IDed on this site (surveyed by John Curtis in the 1950s). The town stopped mowing a few years ago when a resident noticed shooting star, gentians, and other native forbs. Without a follow-up plan, the unmowed cemetery has become weedy. The town board has voted to give volunteers the opportunity to create a management plan that respectfully preserves both human and natural history.

Time is short, so if you can help, contact John at jaraasch@tds.net or 608-219-7731.



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WATERSHED from page 3

Covering 8,400 acres, the Lowery Creek watershed stretches from a few miles north of Governor Dodge State Park, past Taliesin, down to the Wisconsin River. “The most exciting part is the community building that has started,” says Barb Barzen, DALC’s point person for the Lowery Creek Watershed Initiative. “Lots of great conversations between neighbors, and hopefully some new awareness happening for people who have an interest in doing restoration but don’t know how to begin.”

The water quality of Lowery Creek is also monitored at five sites by the Water Action Volunteers Stream Monitoring Network. A hands-on citizen science effort coordinated by the WDNR, WAV keeps track of the quality of over 650 streams throughout the state.

“Landowners within the watershed are doing natural restoration work, which contributes to the fact that we have a self-sustaining native trout population,” says Natural Landscape Coordinator of Taliesin Preservation Inc., Mike Degan.

Richard Cates, whose father started the family farm in 1967, enjoys a nearly 3/4-mile stretch of Lowery Creek running through his pasture land. “When we came to the realization that Lowery Creek is

one of several streams in the Driftless Area that still harbors native brook trout, we knew we had a true treasure here, and that makes protecting this stream even more significant,” says Cates.

The most exciting part is the community building that has started, ... lots of great conversations between neighbors.

Daniel Marquardt and his wife retired to the Lowery Creek area to raise grass-fed cattle on slopes previously rotated between corn and beans above the creek. “There was a lot of erosion loaded with excess nutrients,” says Marquardt. “Now it is permanent pasture with deep roots. Now, when it rains, the soil acts like a huge sponge, and what runoff does filter down to the creek is much cleaner.”

Partnering with DALC, the DNR, and Taliesin, landowners in the Lowery Creek Watershed Initiative intend to make a difference in the quality of their unique and fragile ecosystem. And they hope that more area landowners will follow their example to come together to improve the quality of other Driftless Area watersheds.



Lowery Creek from the air, in Iowa County's Wyoming Township

Photo: courtesy of Driftless Area Land Conservancy

Our Mission:

Blue Mounds Area Project is a community-based organization that seeks to inspire, inform and empower private landowners in the southwestern Wisconsin region to enjoy, protect and restore native biodiversity and ecosystem health.

Our Objectives:

- 1) Promote understanding, appreciation and conservation of native woodlands, prairies, wetlands and savannas and their special species in an economically viable manner, through community outreach programs and private contacts.
- 2) Act as a clearing house for information from people and organizations involved in preserving native biodiversity including information about plant, animal and habitat identification, management, restoration, seed sources, native plant nurseries and invasive, nonnative species.
- 3) Encourage cooperative, volunteer restoration and management activities.
- 4) Identify public and private land use changes that may affect ecosystem health and promote community-based stewardship of the unique natural heritage of the Blue Mounds and the southwestern region of Wisconsin.

The Blue Mounds Area Project Newsletter is published three times yearly. We welcome your comments, submissions, and advertisements.

Deadlines for submissions:

Winter Newsletter — November 1, 2020

Spring Newsletter — March 1, 2021

Fall Newsletter — August 15, 2021

Newsletter co-editors: Denise Thornton & Doug Hansmann

contact us at: ddhansmann@gmail.com

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ecologist@bluemounds.org

If you are interested in assisting or volunteering with the Blue Mounds Area Project, please contact us at:

info@bluemounds.org

608-561-2627

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Blue Mounds Area Project Membership Form

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

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Membership Status:

☐ Renewal ☐ New Member ☐ Gift Membership for

Membership Level:

☐ Student \$15 ☐ Basic \$30 ☐ Contributor \$50 ☐ Supporter \$100 ☐ Sponsor \$500 ☐ Patron \$1000

☐ Other contribution to further the BMAP mission _____

TOTAL _____

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☐ Yes, I would like to receive information about site visits.

Please consider making a tax deductible contribution.



Blue Mounds Area Project

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Blue Mounds Area Project Fall 2020 Newsletter

“What we stand for is what we stand on”

— Wendell Berry



www.bluemounds.org

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