



Blazing Star

Newsletter for the Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District

Welcome to the Blazing Star, the newsletter for Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District. Stay up to date on our current projects and events while learning about conservation and management efforts, endangered species, and habitat restoration. Let's come together to protect our precious local flora and fauna.

Update from the Board: President's Report

Greetings friends, fall is here and we are speeding towards our snow season. As summer closes and our daily temps drop off, we enter an amazing time of year. As I write this in mid-September I have been monitoring 4 monarch chrysalises on butterflyweed and milkweed. Soon they'll emerge and begin the long journey south. Then the teal will start their journeys, and so on. The leaves change and eventually drop, and let us not forget deer movement and seasons. There is an August brood of turkeys behind my house presently, a second hatch. Something we don't see too often. Fall is a wonderful time of transition and beauty in our world. I am looking forward to getting afield with my aging Vizsla and

watching him work to his heart's content, sitting quietly in my tree stand with my bow ready while watching the quiet circus of the evening woods. And so much more. Fall is a great time to reflect on the successes of our summer and begin the plans to do even more next year.

Whether you hunt or not I hope you are able to get out to observe and enjoy all that fall offers on both public and private lands. May you enjoy the season and the fruits of conservation while you wonder about how we can make it all even better next year.

Brian Headlee
President, FSCWMD

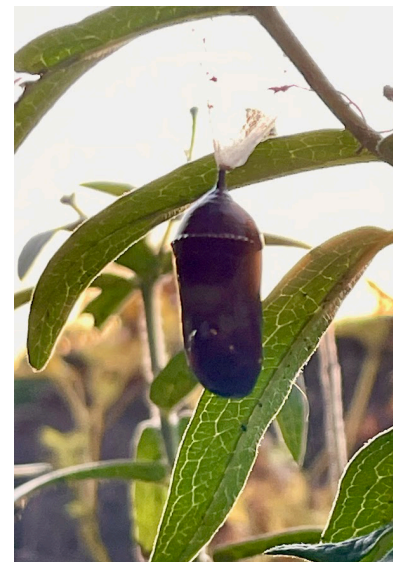


Photo by Brian Headlee

FSCWMD is a 501(c)3 non-profit associated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Thank you to all that contributed to this issue including: Jean Gfall, Brian Headlee, Caitlin Nagorka, Mike Reiter, Larry Keller, Greg Scheder, Claude Bovi and Chris Trosen Created and edited by: Jean Gfall, Anthony Howe, Allison Salas, and Greg Scheder

Community Support for Invasive Species Management

By **Chris Trosen** (he/him) - Acting Project Leader (Through November 15, 2024)

In 2011, the FSCWMD took a significant step toward environmental conservation by donating essential tools to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). This initiative aimed to bolster the St. Croix Wetland Management District's Invasive Species Program, which plays a crucial role in managing the impact of invasive plant species on local ecosystems. The donation included handsaws and loppers, vital tools that enable volunteers to participate actively in removal efforts during community events. Over the years, these tools have facilitated numerous volunteer activities focused on invasive species management. However, as time passed, the equipment began to show signs of wear. Recognizing the need for an upgrade, the Friends sought to refresh these tools. This year, a partnership with Northwood Technical College proved instrumental in achieving this goal. Students from Anthony Howe's Advanced Communications Class took on the challenge of identifying and authoring grants aimed at replacing or refurbishing the loppers and handsaws.

This collaboration not only empowered students with real-world experience in grant writing but also highlighted the strength of community support. The initiative received generous backing from local organizations, including Walmart, the New Richmond Rotary, the St. Croix Valley Foundation, and the St. Croix Valley Master Gardener Association. Their contributions underscored a shared commitment to environmental stewardship and community involvement.

Through their dedication and hard work, the students secured the necessary funding to refresh the tools, ensuring they remain available for future volunteer events. Currently, the refurbished loppers and handsaws are ready for use in various public land events aimed at combating woody invasive species.

The partnership between the FSCWMD, Northwood Technical College, and various local organizations exemplifies how collective action can drive positive change. The refurbished handsaws and loppers are more than just tools; they symbolize the commitment of individuals and organizations working together to preserve the natural beauty of the St. Croix WMD area of influence. As community members continue to take action and engage with these types of efforts, the impact on local ecosystems will be profound and lasting.

Whether through volunteering, providing support, or simply spreading the word, everyone has a role to play in this important mission.

For those interested in organizing or participating in upcoming events, the St. Croix WMD encourages community members to utilize the available tools. To check for availability, interested parties can contact Deputy Project Leader, **Chris Trosen** at **Chris_Trosen@FWS.GOV** or by phone at **715-246-7784**. This initiative is an invitation to engage with nature and take an active role in protecting the environment.

Meet Our New Assistant State Coordinator!

By Caitlin Nagorka

Caitlin Nagorka recently rejoined the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) as Wisconsin's Assistant State Coordinator for the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program (PFW). Caitlin started her new role on July 15 and is duty stationed at SCWMD. Although her PFW responsibilities are statewide, she also serves as the PFW biologist contact for 10 counties in northwest Wisconsin: Barron, Burnett, Chippewa, Dunn, Pepin, Pierce, Polk, Rusk, St. Croix, and Washburn.

Caitlin transferred from the National Park Service (NPS) - St. Croix National Scenic Riverway where she served as the Natural Resources Program Manager for the past 3.5 years. There she was responsible for the Riverway's terrestrial and aquatic programs, operating throughout 250+ miles of the St. Croix and Namekagon Rivers in eastern MN and northwestern WI. Prior to her employment with NPS, she worked for FWS for a decade as a Private Lands Biologist based out of St. Croix WMD. Caitlin started her career with FWS in 2008 and has worked at other FWS refuges and offices in Minnesota, Indiana, and North Dakota. She holds a bachelor's degree in fisheries and wildlife from the University of



Photo by Caitlin Nagorka

Minnesota - Twin Cities and a master's degree in natural resources management from North Dakota State University.

Caitlin is honored to be selected for this position and is thrilled to rejoin the PFW Program, once again working alongside SCWMD staff, the FSCWMD, private landowners, and numerous partners throughout the state to further advance the mission of the FWS and help care for this special landscape and its resources.

Spotlight: 2024 Veterans Goose Hunt

A Successful Second Annual Event

By Larry Keller

On September 13th and 15th, the 2024 Veterans Goose Hunt took place, marking the second annual event organized by the FSCWMD. This year's hunt brought together three veterans each day, providing the opportunity to engage in the therapeutic and camaraderie-building experience of hunting, even amidst warm temperatures and challenging wind conditions.

Despite the weather, the enthusiasm and determination of the veterans shone through. Guided and hosted by experienced volunteers, the participants found success in their hunting endeavors, enjoying the thrill of the chase and the tranquility of the great outdoors. Each veteran left with stories to share and memories to cherish, highlighting the event's core mission of supporting those who have served our country.

A heartfelt thank you goes out to our partners who played an essential role in making this event a success.

The FWS provided invaluable support, allowing the event to be held on the Erikson WPA near New Richmond, WI. Local businesses and partners, including Russell's Sport and Bike, Star Prairie Fish & Game, Walmart, and Bass Pro Shops, contributed resources and gear that greatly enriched the hunt. Chuck Wincek, a conservation warden with the Wisconsin DNR was on hand to assist and answer any questions the participants had about the hunt.

Troy Hill from The Fallen Outdoors, a non-profit organization dedicated to serving veterans through hunting and fishing opportunities, was instrumental in bringing this year's veterans to the hunt. His dedication and passion for helping fellow service members create a sense of community and belonging were evident throughout the event. The Fallen Outdoors



continues to bridge the gap between veterans and outdoor adventures, fostering healing and connection through shared experiences.

As we reflect on the success of the 2024 Veterans Goose Hunt, we look forward to continuing this meaningful tradition. The partnership between FSCWMD and organizations like The Fallen Outdoors ensures that we can provide veterans with the support and opportunities they deserve. Here's to many more successful hunts in the years to come, where we can honor and celebrate our veterans in the great outdoors.



Spotlight: Conservation Day

By Greg Scheder

Conservation Day 2024 started early, with over 100 Scouts and Scouters boarding busses at Fred C Andersen Scout Camp in Houlton, WI on a clear, warm morning before 8:30am. Even before that, Chris Trosen, Alex Bouthilet Warren Irle and Jean Gfall gathered the 15 - 20 Friend's volunteers at the District Office to map out the game plan for the day. As the planning discussion wrapped up, the busloads of energetic participants rolled in to begin the days adventures. After unloading, Chris and Alex outlined the project for the day,

demonstrated the correct species, assigned 2 to 4 Friend's volunteers to groups of 25 to 30 Scouts and Scouters armed with pails and bags, and cut the hoard free!

The targets for the day were lead plant, round-headed bush clover, early goldenrod and sky blue aster. And targeted they were. While the totals will take a while to finalize, the outcome was a success. At first glance, there is "probably close to 10 pounds just of lead plant alone" said seed farm manager Alex Bouthilet. And that doesn't account for any of the other species collected, "we just won't have a good idea until we can clean up the seed for storage". Follow up work sessions at the seed farm will be forthcoming to complete the process, so watch for event announcements.

This year's Scout participants were from Twin Cities Metro units as part of Northern Star Council's 2024 Conservation Camporee. While the goal was seed collection, the event also provided each participant with conservation service hours, required for rank advancement on a Scout's journey to Eagle. The additional benefit is providing awareness of the District to a new group of friends and future users of these public lands. From humble beginnings with Conservation Day in 2011 busting invasive species for oak savannah restoration with Somerset Scouts, this event has transitioned to targeted seed collection for the native seed farm in Star Prairie and a broader audience of Twin Cities Scout units across the metro.



Spotlight: Conservation Corner

How we got started and why it really works?

By Mike Reiter

The FSCWMD was formed back in 2010 to restore, protect, enhance, and expand the land and natural resources managed by the St Croix Wetland Management District. It was organized to support, assist, and promote the St. Croix Wetlands Management District with interpretive, scientific, historical, recreational, and educational activities and services throughout the eight-county district. This became the mission statement for the fledgling organization. The vision of the folks who formed the FSCWMD was to decide on what parameters the organization would need to be successful and achieve the goals laid out.

The initial board members selected were a diverse group of individuals and each brought something special to the table.

With the help of several grants (Conservation Fund and the Iowa Heritage Foundation in partnership with the Doris Duke Foundation), they laid out a pathway for the initial partnerships encompassing the eight-county focus area making up the St. Croix Wetland Management District. Then, the by-laws were developed, an IRS 501 c (3) status was obtained, reasonable membership fees were instituted, a website, Facebook and Twitter account was established, plus brochures were printed describing the group's rational and activities.

These activities needed to be diverse with something for everyone, fresh and flexible that would evolve, rather than be entrenched. Benchmarks were established with monthly acknowledgments and "thank you's" sent out to contributors because errors of omission are as detrimental as errors of commission! Partnerships were formed because the more diversified the partnerships, the better the organization can accomplish its goals.

Networking is a prime component of becoming a viable organization. Communication is paramount so that everyone is on the same page and is included in information dissemination. With the partnerships developed, a condition followed by the "letter of the law" to never be competitive or allow personalities or differing points of view to negatively affect the internal organizational decisions of the partnerships. The final decision of the Founding Fathers was to "have fun"! If something is not "fun" then we need to do something fun!



Over the last 14-plus years, the FSCWMD has followed the guidelines laid down and has been highly successful in meeting its goals. Hundreds of projects and activities have been initiated and completed and many more are being planned. Everyone is still having "fun"! Become part of the adventure!

Volunteer Spotlight: Claude Bovi & Charlotte Nicholes

By Claude Bovi

A little background might be helpful. In 2013, we moved to our present location. We learned about pollinator planting opportunities and made arrangements to plant a two-acre parcel on our property in 2014; a couple of years later we planted the adjacent four acres.

We had either cut or burned both parcels, but we had some difficulty arranging for burns, and then Covid made it very difficult to get that done.

Fast forward to this past March. We were able to get the six acres burned by the New Richmond Fire Department. It was exciting, there was a lot of material to burn, conditions were good, and they didn't start until 7:00pm, which made for a huge nighttime contrast with the fire.

Now we just had to wait until May/June to see the results of the burn. We were both disappointed with what we had seen previously. The burn must have done the trick. Our plantings never looked as good as they did this year and it was gratifying to see the progress.

A little more background: A couple of years ago my wife, Charlotte, asked me if I was interested in a prairie pollinator class offered by the New Richmond Community Education program. I was reluctant, and initially declined, probably out of disappointment with our efforts so far. Charlotte noted that it was free and probably wouldn't take that long. She talked me into it.

Our classes met at some of the waterfowl production areas, (WPAs) where a group of around twenty of us met with Alex Bouthilet. We walked around the properties and Alex explained what we were looking at, from identifying plants to explaining host plants and their insects and lots of other information.

After completing the classes, we decided to volunteer for the Fish and Wildlife Service, usually harvesting seeds. It turned out that it was much like the classes we had taken. Alex was often surrounded by a group of us asking questions as

we picked seeds. Alex was a font of information and eager to share what he knew. I eventually even began to remember plant names.

We always started at 6:00pm, so we would be walking around in the early evening on a summer day. It made for some beautiful evenings with approaching sunsets and sometimes big thunder clouds rolling in. I remember being at Ten Mile Creek. Alex had taken us to a remnant piece of prairie, we were quite a distance from the road, we could see some

threatening clouds moving in, and, yes, it poured before we could make it to our vehicles. We were soaked but it was fun.

Depending on how I felt, I could be off by myself picking, picking with my wife, or in a group of pickers. Alex was usually nearby, chatting away, either answering questions or explaining something relevant.

Prior to volunteering, I didn't know much about the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service or the WPAs. They used to all look the same to me. After having walked several of them, I can't say they all look the same and I know they are all different. I've discovered that I miss the harvesting sessions I can't make. I enjoy learning from Alex, the camaraderie of the group, and the beauty and solitude of the WPAs



Back row from left to right: Charlotte Nicholes, Claude Bovi, Jean Maher, Cathy Berling, Jean Gfall, Jarell Kuney, and Will Mahler. Front row left to right: Edward Dike, Greg Tuchel, Neil Schlegel, Alex Bouthilet, Cyndi Elias, and Sierra Stukenholtz.



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How to get involved

1 Volunteer

We're always looking for volunteers to help with our conservation projects and events.

Contact us by sending an email to StCroix@fws.gov or visiting our website to learn more (link below).

2 Upcoming Events

The Friends Group holds monthly meetings at the headquarters office on the first Wednesday of every month, 6 pm. See our calendar for more events!

3 Donate

Your donations help support our conservation efforts and make a difference. All donations to the Friends of the St. Croix Wetland Management District are 100% Tax-Deductible. Donate here through PayPal.

4 Follow Us

Stay up to date on our latest projects and events by following us on social media. Find us on Facebook, join our email list, and checkout our website (link below).

Thank you to our many partners!

For more information on our partners, please visit fscwmd.org.



FriendsOfTheStCroixWetlandManagementDistrict