

# Friends of Wisdom Prairie

2018



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## **Friends of Wisdom Prairie Annual Report 2018 and the State of Wisdom Prairie**

The purpose of the Friends of Wisdom Prairie is to help the sisters at Holy Wisdom Monastery care for the earth. It has been a rich and fulfilling year, and a lot has been accomplished.

### **Master plan**

The main way in which the sisters care for the earth is through ecological restoration. The latest long range plan for land management was created in 2014. This plan calls for the restoration of prairie, savanna and oak-hickory forest on more than 190 acres of land. This land includes the 53 acre parcel that was acquired in 2012, which was comprised mostly of farm land and needed to be restored from “scratch.” It also includes the 60 acre North Mendota Wildlife Area, owned by Dane County Parks, but maintained by Holy Wisdom Monastery. The sisters started restoring prairie more than 20 years ago. As a result of their persistent efforts there are now more than 90 acres of well-established prairie and an additional 33 acres of relatively new prairie that was planted on the new parcel’s agricultural land in 2014 and 2015.

The Land Management Advisory Council, chaired by Prioress Sister Mary David Walgenbach, initiated a master planning process for Holy Wisdom Monastery with assistance from Dean Proctor, a professional architect and landscape designer and Julie Loehrl a landscape architect. This 10 year master plan for Holy Wisdom Monastery will explore effective ways of dealing with many design issues related to the physical presence of the monastery’s land. In 2018 studies of parking and the red barn were undertaken.

### **Maintaining the prairie**

Prescribed burns were conducted on approximately 111 acres of prairie. Several Friends of Wisdom Prairie volunteers participated in this important process and prairie management tool. Recent prairie plantings were monitored. We were very pleased to find over 110 different kinds of prairie plants growing in the 33 acre south and central prairie which is now in its fourth season. Other more recently planted prairie areas were mowed to control weed growth and weed seed production.

### **Prairie seeding**

New prairie was sown along a half mile of former trail through the North Mendota Wildlife Area. The seed was given to Holy Wisdom Monastery by Dane County Parks, to whom we are very grateful for their generosity and collaboration.

### **Seed collecting**

Volunteers from Holy Wisdom Monastery and Dane County Parks collected seed at the monastery and in several county-owned parks this fall. We have developed a cooperative agreement with Dane County Parks to help them collect prairie seed. Friends of Wisdom Prairie volunteers also participated in the seed cleaning and processing with Dane County Parks.

### **Savanna restoration**

We are in the midst of savanna restoration on several areas of monastery land. Thirty five bur oak trees were planted in the new savanna restoration area in the old field south of the white house and a portion of the south prairie. This old field south of the white house was burned in spring 2018 in anticipation of sowing understory seed in November 2018. Last fall and winter, weedy trees and shrubs were removed from a remnant oak savanna on the south, east and north sides of the woods. The trees were removed using a low impact forestry practice, where the logs were skidded out with a team of horses. The method was very effective and picturesque. A grant from the John C Bock Foundation made this work possible. This work was further subsidized by the sale of saw logs to a lumber mill. We are very appreciative of the thoughtful generosity of the John C. Bock Foundation. An inventory of savanna species in the remnant was conducted in late summer. Based on the results of this

inventory, a desired seed list was drawn up in anticipation of planting in 2019. When there is sufficient fuel in these savanna areas in the next few years, prescribed burns will be conducted.

## **Woods**

Weedy trees and shrubs were removed from our existing oak-hickory woodland. We will let fire run through this woodland within the next couple of years.

## **Surveys of the biota**

The Friends of Wisdom Prairie initiated a program of systematic surveys of various elements of the biota at Holy Wisdom Monastery. A frog survey was conducted in the spring, bird counts we carried out at several times during the year, an inventory of the savanna plants was conducted in the logged over areas on the south, east and north sides of the woods. Using a sonar sound identification and GPS instrument borrowed from the Wisconsin DNR, a bat survey was conducted. Four species of bats were found to be living on Holy Wisdom Monastery land. A photographic mapping system that uses a camera mounted on a drone helicopter surveyed the land where the logging occurred in the winter of 2017-2018. In future years, the same photographic mapping system can show changes in the landscape compared to the one taken this year. We are very grateful to Michael Kienitz for conducting this photographic survey with his sophisticated equipment and his considerable skills in making it all work.

## **Nature trails**

A new trail system has been developed for the monastery, including the new parcel of land and its prairie and savanna areas. Some of the new trails were mowed into existing prairie areas. Some of the old trails are being eliminated and have been planted to prairie. A committee has been formed to devise an interpretive system for Holy Wisdom Monastery which will include signs on the trails, maps and access to information about the inhabitants of our prairies, savanna and woodlands. A new map brochure has been available to visitors this year.

## **Volunteering**

During the year, the Friends of Wisdom Prairie helped care for the earth by providing more than 1,400 hours of volunteer service to the monastery.

## **Donating**

During the year, many Friends of Wisdom Prairie members and others from the Holy Wisdom Monastery family gave generously to support our land management work. From these donations we were able to acquire several pieces of equipment that are helping us be more efficient at caring for the earth. We purchased a Utility vehicle and a walk behind tractor with a brush mower and harrow attachments. We also made further progress in the development of the trail system.

## **Friends of Wisdom Prairie Council**

The Friends of Wisdom Prairie Council helps guide the activities of the Friends of Wisdom Prairie. The following people were members of the Friends of Wisdom Prairie Council in 2018:

President – John Van Dinter | President Elect-Paul Slota | Treasurer – Mary Trewartha | Secretary - Sue Bradley  
Members – Charles Bradley | Peg Davey | Jeannine Desautels | Ron Endres | Howard Fenton | Julie Melton  
Sylvia Marek | Rex Merrill | Michael Shinnars | Judy Troia | Kathleen Wessels | Ex-officio – Greg Armstrong

## **Environmental education**

The Friends of Wisdom Prairie hosted a series of lectures to educate participants about the environment and the spirituality of caring for the earth. Robert Birmingham spoke to us about the archeology of our area including the major Indian mound group on Holy Wisdom Monastery land. Robin Wall Kimmerer spoke to us about What Does the Earth Ask of Us and indigenous people's spirituality. This event was the largest Friends

of Wisdom Prairie event to date with 325 people in attendance. Claudio Gratton reported on the native bees of Wisconsin and their conservation. Michael Kienitz shared images he took of the vanishing glaciers in Iceland at the Friends of Wisdom Prairie Annual Meeting in November.

This year a new program of spiritually infused environmental education was developed and conducted—Caring for Common Ground. People from different religious traditions and spiritual practices were invited to learn together about how to do ecological restoration that helps to heal the land, and to share how their faith perspectives inform their care for the environment. This faith based ecological restoration training program was funded by a grant from the High Winds Association Foundation to whom we are very grateful for their thoughtful generosity.

### **Phenology blog**

Friends of Wisdom Prairie Council member Sylvia Marek completed her monthly phenology blog of plants and animals normally seen in our area. Visitors to our website can learn about what they might see before they come out and walk the trails.

### **Nature note cards**

Note cards with beautiful images of Holy Wisdom Monastery's native beings, including prairie plants, birds and butterflies were printed and sold as a fund raiser at events and throughout the year. The note cards are selling well from self-serve display racks in the Monastery and Retreat and Guest House.

### **Prairie Seed Necklaces**

Friends of Wisdom Prairie Council member Ron Endres, put together hundreds of necklaces with glass vile pendants filled with various kinds of prairie seeds. Ron has contributed all of the materials and his time and talent for this fund raiser project. At the beginning of October 2018, \$1,490 from necklace sales had been contributed to the Friends of Wisdom Prairie. The Friends of Wisdom Prairie are grateful for Ron's talent, energy and generosity.

### **Earth Day exhibit**

The Friends of Wisdom Prairie had a booth at the Nelson Institute Earth Day event at the Monona Terrace. Sal and Judy Troia sponsored our booth. Friends of Wisdom Prairie members were at the booth all day to talk to visitors about the virtues of the Friends of Wisdom Prairie and to hand out Friends brochures and packets of prairie seed that had been collected at Holy Wisdom Monastery by Ron Endres.

The Friends of Wisdom Prairie asked attendees at the Earth Day Conference to complete a survey about how many children they personally would affect with their environmental programs for kids. Those that took the survey will affect 101,203 children's perspective on the environment.

### **Friends of Wisdom Prairie membership**

This year 221 people joined the Friends of Wisdom Prairie. Annual membership starts with the annual meeting in November each year. Individual memberships cost \$30, family memberships cost \$40 and student memberships cost \$15. Memberships also make great gifts.

### **Photos (from cover)**

1. Participants at the first Caring for Common Ground program learn about plants and restoration.
2. Robin Wall Kimmerer (in pink) draws more than 300 people here for What Does the Earth Ask of Us?
3. The oak savanna restoration continues with the planting of 35 oak trees.
4. Friends of Wisdom Prairie Council member, Judy Troia sells photo note cards to raise money for the Friends.

-Submitted by Greg Armstrong, director of land management and environmental education