

Friends of Wisdom Prairie

2019



Friends of Wisdom Prairie Annual Report 2019 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 2019 studies of parking and columbarium expansion were undertaken.

Maintaining the prairie

Prescribed burns were conducted on about 95 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 more than 115 different kinds of prairie plants growing in the 33 acre south and central prairie which is now in its fifth season. Other more recently planted prairie areas were mowed to control weed growth and weed seed production.

Prairie seeding

New prairie was sown, for a second year, 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. 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 a county-owned park 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.

Many other organizations have collected prairie seed at Holy Wisdom Monastery including Middleton High School, the Clean Lakes Alliance, Alliant Energy, St. Norberts College and Lawrence University.

Savanna restoration

Seeds of prairie and savanna understory species were sown into a cool season grass turf on the 7 acre old field south of the white house. This area is transitioning from a field to an oak opening savanna. Thirty-five bur oaks were planted in this area last year. In the winter of 2017-2018, 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 low impact forestry practice, where the logs were skidded out with a team of horses. A generous grant from the John C Bock Foundation made this work possible, and we are grateful. This work was further subsidized by the sale of saw logs to a lumber mill. An inventory of savanna species in the remnant was conducted last year. Based on

the results of this inventory, a desired seed list was drawn up. Two acres of savanna understory seed and one acre of open prairie seed were sown between the white house and the red barn. When there is sufficient fuel in these savanna areas in the next few years, prescribed burns will be conducted. This will be the first burns in this fire dependent community in 180 years.

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 and toad survey was conducted in the spring, bird counts were carried out at several times during the year, and an inventory of several woodland areas was conducted. 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 DNR trail camera and two recently purchased trail cameras were deployed to record the presence of several species of animals.

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 map brochure is currently available to visitors.

Volunteering

During the year, the Friends of Wisdom Prairie members helped care for the earth by providing more than 1,700 hours of volunteer service to the monastery, 300 more hours than the previous year.

Donating

Friends of Wisdom Prairie members and others from the Holy Wisdom Monastery family gave generously to support our land management work. From this generosity we were able to acquire several pieces of equipment that are helping us be more efficient at caring for the earth. A heater and doors were added to our utility vehicle. A trailer to pull behind the utility vehicle enhanced its functionality. Two trail cameras were acquired. The materials for two bat houses and two wood duck houses were purchased. Members of the Friends of Wisdom Prairie fabricated and installed these houses in appropriate places at the monastery. 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 2019:

President – Paul Slota | Vice President - Julie Melton | Treasurer – Mary Trewartha |

Secretary – Kathleen Wessels

Members – Peg Davey | Jeannine Desautels | Howard Fenton | Drew Howick | Jan Lottig | Sylvia Marek |

Peter Marshall | Maia McNamara | Michael Shinnars | Judy Troia | John Van Dinter |

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. Professor Patty Loew spoke of the Environmental Ethics of Indigenous Cultures of Wisconsin. A panel discussion was jointly sponsored by the Friends of Wisdom Prairie and the Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy. Susan Carpenter, Randy Hunt and Jeffrey Sledge each spoke of different aspects of the Virtues of Natural Land Management. The Annual Meeting of the Friends of Wisdom Prairie had Professor Donald Waller speak about the State of Wisconsin's Ecological Communities and what we can do to Care for the Earth. In December, nationally-known professors Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim will present the Life and Spirituality of Thomas Berry.

A second year of Caring for Common Ground, a program of spiritually infused environmental education, was conducted. 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.

Outing

The Friends of Wisdom Prairie organized a bus trip to the Nachusa Grasslands, a Nature Conservancy project in North Central Illinois. With large areas of remnant prairie and savanna, covering 3000 acres, the Friends had a wonderful experience visiting this beautiful place. This experience was enhanced by seeing the large bison herd.

Art exhibit

An exhibit of Gary Eldred's art was displayed in the gallery space in the monastery building. Gary Eldred, one of the founders of The Prairie Enthusiasts organization, created pen and ink drawings of rare prairie plants. This exhibit was organized and funded by emeritus member of the Friends of Wisdom Prairie Council, Ron Endres. The exhibit was very well received.

Phenology blog

Friends of Wisdom Prairie Council member Sylvia Marek updated 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. Copies are also available in the monastery building brochure rack.

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. The note cards are selling well from self-serve display racks in the Monastery and Retreat and Guest House.

Friends of Wisdom Prairie membership

This year 206 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. Friends of Wisdom Prairie Council member Sylvia Marek led a tour of the grounds for participants at the La Movida radio station live broadcast from the monastery in July 2019.
2. Patty Lowe, a member of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Ojibwe, presented Environmental Ethics of Indigenous Cultures of Wisconsin at a dinner lecture in March 2019.
3. Friends of Wisdom Prairie members donated more than 1,700 hours of volunteer labor at the monastery in 2019. Pictured here are participants at one of the 16 scheduled workdays.

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