

Lakeshore Nature Preserve E-Newsletter Spring 2011

By Adam Gundlach and Bryn Scriver

Volunteer with the Friends of the Preserve!

The Friends of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve and Preserve staff need your help to remove invasive shrubs like buckthorn from East Bill's Woods and around the Heritage Oak. We want to prepare these areas for spring planting on May 15 and 16--mark your calendars!

Please join us from *9AM-Noon, on Sunday March 20 and/or Monday March 21*. Meet at the entrance to Picnic Point next to lot 129 on University Bay Drive. Tools, gloves, and training will be provided.



Volunteers enjoying hot cocoa at the February volunteer workparty. Photo by John Magnuson.



SAVE THE DATE for a Listening Session about Bicycle Use on Picnic Point

Monday, March 21st 2011, 7-8:30 PM at the Memorial Union. Please check the Today in the Union (TITU) for exact meeting room location.

The Lakeshore Preserve Committee seeks public input on a recurrent issue, that of bicycle access to the trail running along the spine of Picnic Point.

The Committee last considered the appropriateness of bicycle use in this area of the Preserve in 2005. Driven by concerns that a subset of inconsiderate bikers either rode too aggressively, or exacerbated erosion and spread invasive species by riding off the designated trail, the Preserve Committee opted for infrastructural changes and a trial period of education to encourage bikers to ride responsibly or consider enjoying Picnic Point as pedestrians.

Walkers and runners constitute the majority of Picnic Point path users. Nonetheless, recent user surveys indicate a subset of bikers who ride without concern for others remains a cause for concern and a threat to the long-term ecological health of Picnic Point. Thus, the Preserve Committee has decided to reconsider the appropriateness of bicycle access to Picnic Point.

You may also add your voice via email to the Committee Chair, Bill Barker, at barker@geology.wisc.edu.

Eagle Heights Gardens Inspiration for Art: Wisconsin Film Fest Features Documentary on Relationship between Mothers and Food

In July 2010, the Eagle Heights Community Gardens, in the Lakeshore Nature Preserve, was the site and inspiration for a series of workshops which explored the relationship between food and the expectations of mothers in various cultures. Over 27 women from 10 different countries (many from the Eagle Heights Community) participated by creating cyanotypes on fabric (a photographic process) and writing. The workshops culminated in Good Eater, a site-specific installation in the gardens arbor, and a community potluck opening.

Madison-based documentary filmmaker Brijetta Hall Waller captured the experience in *At the Table: Mothers Sharing Stories Through Art*, a short 9 minute documentary, which premieres at the Wisconsin Film Fest on *Thursday March 31 at the Bartell Theatre at 5:00pm*. Check the film fest site for ticket information.



A short documentary playing March 31 as part of the Wisconsin Film Festival features art and artists in Eagle Heights Community Gardens. Photo by Mindy Stricke.

Heritage Oak Restoration

Restoration work has begun in a section of woodland in northern Bill's Woods around the "heritage oak." The project was proposed and is funded by contributions from the Friends of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve. Its focal point is a large, open-grown bur oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*) that has over time been engulfed by competing trees. A 1927 air photo shows the oak standing alone on the edge of a field; however by 1962 the air photo shows the tree has been lost in the surrounding vegetation.

Many of the heritage oak's lower branches have died back due to the increasing shade cast by surrounding trees. Several smaller bur oaks located nearby are also struggling under the shade of competing trees. The understory is heavily dominated by shade-tolerant buckthorn (*Rhmanus cathartica*) and sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*) saplings, which have choked out most herbaceous groundcover. Continued dominance by these shade-tolerant species would prevent oak regeneration into the future.



(Left) The heritage oak prior to brush removal, November 2010. Note buckthorn still green in understory. Photo by Bryn Scriver.

(Right) Heritage oak following initial removal of brush, February 2011. Photo by Adam Gundlach.

With the help of volunteers, the dense undergrowth of brush has started to be removed under the charismatic oak. Over the next few years, selective tree removal in the surrounding environs will open more light to the oaks and to the ground layer. As undesirable vegetation is brought under control, the area will be planted and seeded with a mix of native woodland and savanna species. Management in the years to come will meld the area with the restoration of Biocore Prairie and the oak woodland of Bill's Woods, creating a continuum of prairie, oak opening, and oak woodland.

Burn Season Draws Near

Although a bit of snow still lingers this time of year, warmer days will soon be here to stay. With the spring thaw comes ephemeral wildflowers and the ephemeral opportunity to manage the landscape with fire. This year, Preserve staff plan to expand the use of prescribed burning to areas other than Biocore Prairie. We have our sights set on burning the prairie planting at Raymer's Cove, a small opening in the upper portion of Bill's Woods, as well as the southern edge of Second Point Woods bordering the prairie. Fire will serve multiple purposes in these areas, including removing leaf litter, aiding in control of undesirable vegetation, improving germination of native seed, and stimulating growth of fire-dependent species. The importance of fire as a management tool will continue to increase as more acreage of the Preserve is restored to fire-adapted communities.



Biocore Prairie burn in progress in March 2010. Photo by Cathie Bruner.

Coming off the largest prescribed burn in its history in 2010, Biocore Prairie managers plan to burn a smaller total area of the prairie this year, leaving larger pockets of refugia within the burn zone for insects and wildlife. The Biocore managers also aim to experiment with fall burns in certain areas of the prairie to determine the impact such burns have on the plant community.

The prescribed burns will again be carried out under the direction of Quercus Land Stewardship Services. If you happen to see smoke over the Preserve in late March or early April, rest assured it signals the return of a vital ecological process.

Willow Creek Woods Savanna Emerges

This past winter, the final round of tree removals was completed at Willow Creek Woods. The oak trees that remain offer the gestalt of a southern Wisconsin prairie-savanna-woodland landscape, if only in microcosm. This spring, a variety small trees and shrubs typical of the savanna community will be planted in the eastern section. Ongoing management will focus on improving the composition of native herbaceous species in the ground layer, and continuing biomass removal in select plots as a way of assessing the impact of soil nutrient loads on plant composition.



Willow Creek Woods savanna restoration facing toward Picnic Point. Photo by Adam Gundlach.

A pair of great-horned owls successfully fledged two owlets in Willow Creek Woods in the spring of 2010. Owls have once again been spotted in the area, so keep your eyes peeled as you pass through.

Picnic Point Improvement Project To Begin this Summer

On November 30, 2010 the Lakeshore Nature Preserve Committee approved moving forward with the proposed improvements to the eastern tip of Picnic Point, made possible by the Ebling Charitable Trust. The project has received significant public input over the past three years with various options debated and reviewed.

The project work includes removal of the existing fire pit and benches, and creation of a new stone fire circle gathering area blended into the hillside using natural materials. Severe soil erosion from the compacted soils and overuse of ad hoc trails down to the water's edge will be addressed with a naturalized stone stair and overlook. Historic views out to the water and back to downtown Madison and the UW campus will be opened up with the removal of invasive buckthorn and honeysuckle. Native trees will be preserved and additional native shrubs and groundlayer plantings will be added to protect the erodible slopes and provide for wildlife habitat. The existing lake safety light will be relocated to also enhance views, yet still provide the storm warning service to boaters on Lake Mendota. The gathering area will be fully accessible for those with disabilities and will meet the needs of large groups who often use the space.

Pedestrians will still be able to access nearly all of the trails up to the tip of Picnic Point, but should expect increased truck traffic during construction. Questions about the project can be directed to Gary Brown at gbrown@fpm.wisc.edu.



The frosty tip of Picnic Point viewed from the WARF building in January. Photo by Adam Gundlach.

See the complete article “Picnic Point Improvements Project Moves Forward” by Gary Brown at http://waa.uwalumni.com/lakeshorepreserve/newsletter/03_11/newsletter1.html).

Budget News

On February 22, the Lakeshore Nature Preserve Committee approved both the operating budget and a capital budget for March 2011 through February 2012.

Capital Improvements in 2011:

- The restoration of eastern Bills Woods and “The Heritage Oak” project funded by the Friends of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve.
- The Picnic Point tip restoration (described above).
- Improvement and protection of Picnic site 2 adjoining the big oak tree along the water, funded by the Class of 1959.
- Natural landscaping to enhance the parking lot of Frautschi Point funded by the Class of 1946.
- More improvements in Tent Colony Woods funded by the Class of 1955,
- More plantings along the Lakeshore Path from Willow Creek to Picnic Point funded by the Class of 1953.
- More plantings in Willow Creek Woods savanna.

Small access improvements that will be accomplished by UW Grounds staff include:

- Culvert improvements to improve access inside the stone wall at the Picnic Point entry.
- Limestone trail replacement along the southeast side of the Class of 1818 Marsh.
- A turnout in the limestone trail for bird watching at the base of Bills Woods.

A Preserve Mystery!



“Evidence” in Second Point Woods. Photos by Bryn Scriver.

On an early March walk in Second Point Woods, I spotted a tree that stood out against the white snow and the dark trunks of other trees. It was a sunny yellow having had much of its bark gnawed down to the cambium—at least 15 feet up the tree! Whatever did this had to be something that climbed. Could it be *Erethizon dorsatum*, aka the common porcupine?

My quick survey indicated the culprit preferred thin barked trees like young sugar maple and boxelder. I looked for tracks in the snow but didn't find any; maybe “it” was still holed up after the recent snow fall. I did find rather fresh bark shavings at the base of some trees.

According to Alan D. Martin in a Feb. 1996 article in *Wisconsin Natural Resources*, porcupines are known from the northern two-thirds of the state in a territory that extends in a V-shape from Pierce County down to Wisconsin Dells and back up toward Green Bay. Could it be some have ventured south and taken up residence in the Preserve?