

Eau Claire County Success from the Field

New Partnerships Work to Restore Grasslands

Mary E. Fitz Memorial Park Trust owns 80 acres located just South of Eau Claire with Landmark Conservancy as the sole trustee. The wishes of Mrs. Fitz included creating a place of conservation for the enjoyment of the citizens of the Eau Claire area. Knowing the Chippewa Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever had a history of prairie restoration in the area, Landmark Conservancy reached out to the Eau Claire NRCS Service Center to discuss options for working together. A partnership was forged with a plan to restore the property from its current state of pine plantations and hay fields, to the historic land cover of warm season prairie. Working with Jenn Roetter, NRCS District Conservationist, and the local Pheasants Forever (PF) Farm Bill Biologist (a partnership position between NRCS, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, and PF), NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program funds were successfully acquired to aide in the prairie restoration under a new conservation effort to provide food and habitat for monarch butterfly.

Logging equipment arrived on-site and a clear cut in spring of 2017 was completed. The site was treated to remove weedy species present in the plantation area and fields. Site preparation will continue through various management techniques as aggressive non-native species are present on the site. This EQIP project will be completed with a combination of frost and drilled seeding of a highly diverse mix of prairie forbs and grasses that will emphasize species like common and butterfly milkweed, which are required for the monarch butterfly to complete its life cycle.

Signage will be developed to disclose the partners associated with the project and help explain the restoration process. A Memorandum of Understanding was developed between Landmark Conservancy and the PF Chapter to ensure management of property would continue into the future. Since the restoration project commenced, the property has been opened to the public for quiet recreation, including hiking, bird watching, and photography.

"One of the key goals of our land trust is to create more opportunities for communities to enjoy nature and this collaborative effort will add an important new resource for the Eau Claire County area," said Bob Fitzwilliam, Executive Director of the land trust.

Going forward, establishing trails and signs around the planting will encourage more of the area residents to enjoy the property and educate them on the important role prairies have in our communities.



Trustees from West Wisconsin Land Trust, Chippewa Valley Chapter of Pheasants Forever, and the NRCS/PF Farm Bill Biologist stand with the prairie restoration project in the background. The partners hosted an open house for local residents to learn about the project and get questions and concerns answered. The event was well attended and the partners hope for many more to stop and learn about the project as these and similar events are hosted at the site.



Logging off the pine plantation was step one in preparing the site for restoration. Landmark Conservancy worked with NRCS and PF to apply for EQIP funds to help restore ~60 acres of pine plantation and fields to prairie through a special initiative to provide habitat and food for the monarch butterfly.

