**Legacy Prairie & Woodland Update: November 2026**

***By, Peter Antonie***

September, October, and early November were busy months in the Prairie & Woodland!

**NRCS Grant:** We were awarded a 3-year Natural Resources Conservation Service grant in early 2024 to remove and manage invasive trees and brush, mostly Black Locust and Buckthorn trees and Honeysuckle, from about 15-acres of woodland along the northeast portion of our property and 5 acres in the wetland near Vermont Creek. The initial forestry mowing in the woodland and wetland took place during the winter of 2024-'25. The result of the woodland mowing is witnessed here:



The picture shows only one portion of the woodland mowing which was done primarily to open the woods for more Oak trees to germinate and for the forest floor to be planted in prairie grasses, ultimately returning the mowed woodland to the Oak-Savannah it once was.

During the warm months of 2025 and 2026, any invasive species regrowth was chemically treated, in accordance with the NRCS grant. As the work progressed, an NRCS representative came out to see what had been done, recorded the work accomplished, and made payments to the church to reimburse us for the work done.

**Wetland Mowing:** The initial forestry mowing in the wetland opened the creek area, as shown here in early 2025:



As you can see, after removing the unwanted invasive trees and shrubs, there were not many native trees or shrubs along the creek or throughout the wetland.

Again, the NRCS grant provided reimbursement to chemically treat regrowth of any invasive species during the warm months of 2025 and 2026.

Unlike the woodland, where we knew there were mature Oak trees that would drop acorns to germinate and repopulate the woods, we used Legacy funds to purchase appropriate native trees and shrubs, in the spring of 2026, to plant this fall.

**Wetland Planting:** Prior to planting, we had EC3, the company we hired for much of the development work of the Prairie & Woodland, do another forestry mowing to assure that any invasive regrowth was set back and to create a clear planting area, as seen in the following picture along the creek east side trail.



Here is part of the EC3 crew getting ready for planting. Note the wire cages to be be placed around each tree and bush to make sure they get a good start.



The trees and shrubs planted in the wetland were all selected as common in wetlands and suitable for their ability to thrive in that environment; namely, Swamp Burr Oak Cross, Swamp White Oak, Tamarack, and White Cedar trees, and Hazelnut, Nannyberry, Red Osier Dogwood, and Winterberry shrubs.



Tamarack



Red Osier Dogwood



White Cedar, highway 78 in background

In addition to the planting in the wetland, a few trees and shrubs were planted in a flat area near where the first Vermont church was built above Fjeld's View along church road. Here we planted some White Oaks, Sugar Maples and White Pine.



Sugar Maple



White Pine

**Collaboration:** The Prairie & Woodland has created interest from other like-minded groups in the area which has also provided an opportunity for collaboration with them. Since last spring, we've hosted the Care for Creation team from St. John's Church, in Oregon, members from the Blue Mounds Area Project (BMAP), and the annual picnic for the Black Earth Creek Watershed Association (BECWA). We've also reached out to other groups to learn what obstacles they've overcome and how they have succeeded.

For each group that has come for a visit, we've given them a short PowerPoint presentation describing the development of the property, beginning with why we undertook the project:

- A gift to the community
- A demonstration of stewardship of God's creation
- An opportunity for collaboration
- A place to marvel, meditate and be in nature
- An educational tool
- A legacy honoring the gifts of our founding members and a blessing for our future members

All these groups are appreciative of what we have done and recognize the potential for collaboration to strengthen all of us. To that end, we have a meeting scheduled to begin the collaborative process with BMAP and BECWA.

Here are a couple of pictures from the BECWA Annual Picnic.



It was a perfect day for the picnic and hiking down by the creek.




Me thanking Bobbie Pekarsky, BECWA chairperson, and the group for their kind attention during the PowerPoint presentation describing the property development.

**Future Plans:** Development of the Prairie & Woodland over the last four years has taken place at a feverish pace, primarily to get the property into a highly visible and usable gift to the community. The NRCS grants, advice and funding from the Dane County Land and Waters department, as well as collaboration with groups like BECWA, Trout Unlimited, and the Wisconsin DNR were all instrumental in guiding the decisions made to bring the vision to fruition.

The Legacy Fund Committee feels that we are moving from the development phase to the ongoing maintenance phase of the project. This means giving serious thought to funding that maintenance going forward to assure the future of the Prairie & Woodland.

And now is a time when we can start thinking about volunteer days for such things as collecting prairie flower seeds, educational events, trail challenges, or guided tours, etc.

If you have ideas of things you'd like to see happen, we'd be happy to hear from you!

The Legacy Fund Committee: Peter Antonie, chairperson, Karsten Haugen, secretary, Gary Olsen, Greg Herrling, Larry Ziemer, Leaonard Schaub, Jim Herrling