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E-Newsletter

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Director's Note

By Brad Herrick, Lakeshore Nature Preserve Director

Last month I celebrated my one-year anniversary as the director of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve. While it is hard to believe that a year has passed, I am incredibly proud of what the Preserve staff, students and volunteers have accomplished together. Preserve staff mentored student employees, gave field trips and lectures to undergraduate courses, and engaged hundreds of volunteers in the practice of ecological restoration. With our student staff and volunteers, we conducted hundreds of hours of invasive plant removal, seed collection and sowing, prescribed fires, facilitated research projects, and maintained trails and fire circles. In addition, Preserve staff worked tirelessly to help design, review, and communicate about the forthcoming Frautschi Center; the future home of the Preserve's office, public gathering and outreach space to be constructed at the entrance to Picnic Point.

These activities yielded new partnerships and reaffirmed old relationships. For example, we worked closely with the Friends of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve, our 501(c)3 partner organization, to better align priorities and clarify roles to maximize the effectiveness of both organizations. This lays the groundwork for future collaborations and exciting new opportunities to sustain the Preserve for generations to come. We are building new relationships with University Health Services to expand and communicate wellness opportunities for students in campus green spaces. Finally, we are developing new research ideas and projects with faculty, staff, and students.

We celebrated these and other accomplishments at a public town hall style gathering in October at the UW-Madison Arboretum. The goal of the event was to give the public (you!) an opportunity to learn something new about the Preserve and ask the staff questions about our goals and priorities. We greatly appreciated the approximately 25 UW-Madison students, staff and community members that came to the event. There were great questions and conversations, and we look forward to holding a similar event next year.

Thank you again for your support of the Preserve!

Bryn Scriver

The Preserve held a town hall meeting on October 16, 2025 to provide updates and to answer questions.

Fall Campus Outreach Events

Bryn Scriver

The Preserve participated in the University Health Services Mental Wellbeing Resource Fair. Staff and interns recommended places for respite and students made their own nature themed buttons.


Brad Herrick

Staff presented posters at the UW-Madison Sustainability Symposium on the sustainable features of the planned Frautschi Center and the wellness benefits of the Preserve.


Adam Gundlach

Our student interns engaged their peers at the University Housing & Office of Sustainability Sustain-A-Bash Showcase. Students combined prairie seeds and clay into seed balls to spread native biodiversity.

One Hundred Years Ago

By MJ Morgan, Friends of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve

In 1925, it was called Picnic Point Farm. The land swept up from the long peninsular point, ascending to rolling acres with dramatic views of the lake. Today the earth of this big hill is anchored by tap roots and root systems—planted pines and broadleaf deciduous trees that moved in to tower over the familiar path below. The hill has a managed tallgrass prairie and old meadows thick with autumn goldenrod and sunflowers. Filamentous roots grab the soil and keep it from eroding down the slopes and into Lake Mendota after heavy rain. Woodland protects the hillsides.

Yet a century ago, this significant part of the Preserve was wide open to erosion, with "no grass to speak of, and not many trees either. Cows had eaten it." Mrs. Alice Young remembered a degraded pasture dotted with boulders. The 128 acres her husband, Edward Young, bought in 1925 had been severely overgrazed. The 1945 aerial photograph below shows this; and twenty years earlier, the open land was even greater. What kept this enormous hill from further damage was likely the presence of Aldo Leopold in Madison.

Air photo of Picnic Point taken in 1945 after the university aquired it. Note how open much of the land was.

In 1925, Leopold was working for the Forest Products Laboratory. He was actively promoting conservation of land and water, as in a talk he gave to the Lions Club, "showing lumbermen that conservation means money in their pockets." Edward Young was such a lumberman.

When he married in 1924, he owned four lumber companies. Yet he was transitioning to learning how informed farming practices could preserve land. After buying Picnic Point Farm, Young began to restore the health of the big hill and the peninsular point. He planted bushes and trees at the Narrows, where "droves of cows" had trailed down to drink and bulls had pawed up the ground. This undated photograph of dairy cows on Picnic Point shows the state of the trodden, bare earth.

Cows at the Picnic Point Narrows circa 1923. Photo by Edith Jones (CLP-U0081).

Young also planted a large apple orchard on the hilltop—he knew trees, after all—as well as plum and pear. Then he put in a white pine nursery, one of Aldo Leopold's most consistent recommendations: to plant seedlings that would eventually provide food for game. However, Young was not a hunter. In fact, in 1926, he worked with the university to designate his farm and University Bay as a wildlife refuge. He also erected the rock wall at the start of the Picnic Point trail, gathering stones from all over Wisconsin. His main objective was to prevent driving down the point. Then, driving meant Model T Fords, with their hard, narrow tires digging deep ruts into the earth. By the early 1930s, Aldo Leopold, now a professor of Game Management, was publishing on land conservation in farm journals and agricultural bulletins. Although considered invasive today, Edward Young began planting acres and acres of Kentucky bluegrass with its spreading, rhizomatous root system. This lush sod began to heal the thin, blowsy soil, anchor, and enrich it.

It is almost impossible not to believe in the impact of Aldo Leopold on the owner of Picnic Point Farm.

Biocore Prairie displays its autumn colors.

The Power of Observation

By Brad Herrick, Lakeshore Nature Preserve Director

As humans, we are hard-wired to make observations. In the morning, our first peek out the window informs us whether it is sunny or cloudy. When we leave the house, we observe the temperature by how it feels on our skin. Is the wind blowing? Are flowers blooming? Are dogs barking? Are people talking? Are cars driving down the street? These observations help us navigate our respective worlds, and we collect them without much effort.

Ecologists, conservation biologists, naturalists, and land managers use the power of observation to understand the natural world. Conservationist Aldo Leopold was a meticulous observer of nature. He wrote eloquently on seasonal changes and wildlife patterns at his family shack in Baraboo, WI in his foundational text, *A Sand County Almanac*. Natural area land managers routinely observe and track changes in plant and animal populations, the establishment of invasive species, populations of rare native species, and the timing of biological events, aka phenology, such as bird migration and seed set. These observations directly influence how, when, and where land managers decide to implement management tools, from when to control non-native invasive species to when seeds of native prairie plants are ready to be collected, to the best time to conduct prescribed fire.

Observation is also the first step in the scientific method and often leads to important discoveries and new opportunities. Fifteen years ago, a visitor to the UW-Madison Arboretum was surprised to find a rare bumble bee, rusty-patched bumble bee (*Bombus affinis*) in the Wisconsin Native Plant Garden near the Visitor Center. This observation prompted Susan Carpenter, the garden's curator, to begin monitoring bumble bees in and around the garden. Other Arboretum staff, students, and citizen science volunteers were involved with the project. Through outreach, more people gained knowledge about the life cycle of bumble bees and their importance as pollinators. Monitoring extended to other areas of the Arboretum and Southern Wisconsin, ultimately informing and supporting statewide monitoring efforts with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. These and other monitoring efforts provided critically important data to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which listed the rusty patched bumble bee as endangered under the U.S. Endangered Species Act in 2017. Currently, a statewide monitoring project (Bumble Bee Brigade) involves hundreds of observers collecting robust data and yielding new understanding of bumble bee ranges, populations, and more.

This single observation continues to inform our understanding of the rusty-patched bumble bee's life cycle and natural history. Several years after the original observation, I was collecting soil samples as part of a research project in the Arboretum's Gallistel Woods in early November when I inadvertently unearthed a bumble bee preparing to overwinter in the topsoil. Newly mated female bumble bees (called "gynes") overwinter to become queens and start new colonies the following spring. Before the discovery of the rusty-patched, I would have placed the soil and bumble bee gently back in its place and moved on to the next site. This time, I snapped a few photos, hoping that Susan or another expert could identify the species. As it turned out, it was a rusty-patched…the first ever observation of the species attempting to overwinter! We recently published the finding in *The Great Lakes Entomologist*.

Similarly, as we shared earlier this summer, volunteers who participated in the Lakeshore Nature Preserve bioblitz yielded 4,462 observations, 986 species, and two species (a fungus and a midge) previously unknown to science!

Making visual, auditory, olfactory, and tactile observations of nature requires one to be in nature. So, the next time you are walking the trails at the Preserve, take a moment to stop and observe the natural world around you. Is there anything interesting happening in the folds of the bark of that bur oak tree? What animal made that footprint in the soil? What are the resident turkeys up to? Do you hear any birdsongs? I guarantee that you'll learn something new, and who knows, it might be the next great scientific discovery!

RUSTY-PATCHED BUMBLE BEES HAVE ALSO BEEN OBSERVED IN THE LAKESHORE NATURE PRESERVE, including (from left to right) on bee balm near Biocore Prairie in August 2020; on rattlesnake master at Raymer's Cove in July 2021; and on hyssop in Big Woods in August 2021.

Quercus alba-lity

By Adam Gundlach, Preserve Field Projects Coordinator

Walking Eagle Heights Woods in mid-September on the prowl for potential seed collection targets, a rain of acorns could be heard all around. Helmets are often a good idea in woods work. Still, generally, you're not worried about bombardment by a downpour of oaken embryos, each clad in its own helmet. Our plans to collect woodland wildflower seeds quickly shifted to gathering as many of those acorns as we could in an afternoon. White oak (*Quercus alba*) acorns germinate shortly after falling to the ground, establishing a stout root during the first fall.

Over the following days, our student Natural Areas Assistants returned to Eagle Heights Woods to gather more acorns from white oak stands. Hundreds of acorns were collected in total. Those showing signs of sprouting were planted within the week. Still, hundreds of others were placed in Ziploc bags and refrigerated until we had a reintroduction plan.

During the month of "Oak-tober," the student interns planted groups of 50-150 acorns in various locations around the Preserve. The chosen locations had canopy gaps (primarily due to emerald ash borer) or lay in a management unit designated for more open woodlands. Seedlings require at least 35 percent of full sunlight to grow to maturity.

White oaks were among the most abundant trees in the upper Midwest before European settlement. Without active management, oaks will continue to fade in prominence on the landscape, including the organisms that rely on them.

Perceptive planting, coupled with patient stewardship, is a powerful activity. It reminds us that we all have the *Q. alba*-lity to cultivate a thriving woodland community. In the coming years, Preserve visitors will see trees removed in some management units to open the canopy and increase sunlight reaching the ground layer. Coupled with the return of periodic fire, open woodland communities will once again provide appropriate conditions for sun-loving oaks to grow into the next generation.

Collected white oak acorns, some with sprouting root radicals, are nestled into the ground to put down roots.

White oak acorn planting locations from "Oak-tober" 2025.

Adam Gundlach

White oak seedling in Eagle Heights Woods. With luck, a few of the planted acorns will grow to produce their own acorns one day.

E-Scooters and the Lakeshore Nature Preserve

By Jeff Kirchman, Community Police Officer & University Natural Areas Police Liaison Officer

The use of electric scooters, or e-scooters, is exploding as costs come down. I've been fielding several questions about them, and their impact on the Preserve.

Wisconsin law considers e-scooters analogous to bicycles. Where a bicycle is allowed or prohibited, so is an e-scooter. Use of e-scooters on roads and bicycle paths is permitted. Neither should be operated on sidewalks, though enforcement of that is typically behavior-based; if the operation is deemed safe and respectful, UWPD and most other police departments generally leave them be.

Operation of e-scooters in the Preserve, other than the Howard Temin Lakeshore Path, is not allowed per the Preserve's Visitor Etiquette guidelines. Additionally, Wisconsin State Statute UWS 18.10(5) states that "unauthorized motor devices" shall not operate "off designated roadways, paved or unpaved, or on service roads or pedestrian paths, regardless of the surface, on university lands."

E-Scooters brought to the preserve should be left at entrances before entering the grounds. And remember to effectively lock them…e-scooter theft is rising just as fast as ownership.

Bryce Richter / UW-Madison

E-scooters have become a popular way to get around campus.

You can reach Officer Kirchman at jkirchman@wisc.edu or 608-264-2677.

Sun Nov 23 - Fall Migrating Birds - 1:30 to 3:00 p.m.
Chuck Henrikson leads you into the woods and onto the prairies to scan the lands & waters for birds heading south to warmer climes. Meet at the Picnic Point entry kiosk.

Sun Dec 14 - Preserve Trees in Winter - 1:30 to 3:00 p.m.
Paul Quinlan helps you learn about identification and ecological roles of many trees in the Preserve, as the deciduous ones enter their leafless, Shakespearean "bare choirs" stage, whence some hardy birds still sing. Hone your eye to ID trees all winter long using clues from their form, bark and buds. Meet at the Picnic Point entry kiosk.

Sun Dec 28 - Friends Favorite Places - 1:30 to 3:00 p.m.
Cruise the Preserve with Paul Noeldner to visit your favorite destinations a week after the snowy solstice. Meet at the Picnic Point entry kiosk.

Sat Jan 10 - Photo History Detectives - 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.
Join Daniel Einstein to examine and analyze historic photos of the Lakeshore Nature Preserve and glean insights into the natural history, cultural features and historic land-use patterns of the lands and waters of the Preserve. In particular, historic landscape images taken from airplanes or panoramic views taken from elevated platforms often hold mysteries or reveal secrets upon close examination—aided by enhanced magnification. If you have a historic image of the Preserve to share, feel free to send a digitized file to daniel.einstein23@gmail.com, at least two weeks before the presentation. Meet in Room 1360 Genetics Biotechnology Center, 425 Henry Mall. The event is free and open to all. *You can park for a small fee in Lot 20, 1390 University Avenue; Lot 20 is attached to the Genetics Biotech Center building for easy wintertime access. The Biotechnology Center is also served by many Metro buses: use the Orchard Street station on University Avenue.*

Sun Jan 25 - Friends Favorite Places - 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.
Cruise the Preserve with naturalist Paul Noeldner to visit your favorite destinations a week after the snowy solstice.

Public parking is free on weekends and after 4:30 p.m. on weekdays in Lot 130 (2003 University Bay Drive). The entry point is served by Metro Bus Stop #2938 outbound and #2881 inbound. See map.wisc.edu.

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- Claire Foote
- Andrea Rodriguez Quiros

Fill the Hill was a Great Success!

Thanks to our generous donors, the Lakeshore Nature Preserve received 78 gifts, totaling $5,995 during the recent Fill the Hill fundraising event. Donations make our work possible—protecting and enhancing the woods, wetlands, prairies, and savannas that make up the Lakeshore Nature Preserve and supporting student learning.

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