



# The Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance

Creating a Conservation Future for the Badger Lands



## Behind the Fence

### Badger Bluebirds

by Donna Stehling

*About the time we first hear the Robin's ringing welcome to spring we may listen for the Bluebird's more gentle greeting. No bird's song is more associated with the return of Spring than the Bluebird's.*

—Frank M. Chapman, *Birdlife*, 1897

John Schubring was a guard at Badger Army Ammunition Plant when he was asked to assist a biologist with a wildlife study on the impacts of munitions production chemicals on wildlife. He put up bluebird houses and helped monitor them for several seasons. John got hooked and kept monitoring the bird houses, reporting results each year to the Bluebird Restoration Association of Wisconsin (BRAW, [braw.org](http://braw.org)). He became the Sauk County Bluebird Man.

Before he retired, John asked if Bill and I would like to monitor bluebird houses, and so began our involvement with bluebirds at Badger. Monitoring begins when the snow is gone in March or April and includes checking, cleaning, spraying, repairing, moving (as necessary) and clearing brush from the bluebird houses. When John retired from monitoring his "bluebird trail," we inherited his houses and acquired more. It takes two hours a week to monitor 60 houses on our 10-mile trail through the Badger Lands. That has become our weekly vacation. Monitoring continues through August, coinciding with the third nesting.

Eastern Bluebirds are cavity nesters that prefer open landscapes or woodland edges with short grass and few trees. Hollows in trees that were created by woodpeckers, insects, disease or natural disasters can serve as nest cavities for bluebirds. Bluebirds are poor competitors with other cavity nesters like house sparrows, starlings, wrens and tree swallows, and for many years their numbers dwindled across the country. However, bluebird populations have



increased significantly with the widespread use of artificial bluebird houses. In 1986 BRAW was formed upon the encouragement of the DNR to increase the Eastern Bluebird population in Wisconsin. By 2010 the bluebird population increased 180% from their lowest levels.

In April we find male bluebirds are already hanging around the houses. Nest building happens when the females arrive. As houses become inhabited, Bill notes which bird species is nesting by the nest type: grassy cup [bluebird], grassy cup with feathers [tree swallow], or lots of small sticks [wren]. He counts eggs, hatchlings, and notes conditions of the birds which I record on log sheets. I take photos. At the end of the season, I total up the number of eggs, chicks and fledglings. Due to a high percentage of fledged bluebirds, we've maintained a "trail of excellence" or a "trail of honor."

There is no typical monitoring day. One summer day Bill opened a house and quickly closed it. He told me to bring the camera. "There's a frog in the box," he said. There was a silver dollar-sized tree frog—chartreuse green with lemon yellow and white stripes—in the nest. It apparently

*Continued on next page.*

**TOP RIGHT:** John Schubring checks one of his bluebird boxes on his "bluebird trail" at Badger.

**BELOW:** Bluebird eggs in one of our bluebird boxes.

PHOTOS: Donna Stehling





# Volunteer Training Workshop



**TOP:** The Alliance hosted 15 participants at our pre-season Volunteer Training Workshop on March 5th at the University of Wisconsin Baraboo/Sauk County campus. The Workshop and Volunteer Handbook produced this winter were generously supported by a grant from REI.

**RIGHT:** Baraboo Range Preservation Association Director Todd Persche (left) leads Alliance workshop participants through a woodland restoration project on the UW-Baraboo campus.



## Bluebirds

*Continued from previous page.*

dined on the wren's eggs in this house. Tiny suckers on its feet helped this frog climb the 6-foot steel post inside the PVC predator guard to get into the bird house 5-feet off the ground.

We've been watched by turkey vultures, escorted by bucks, and we disrupted coyotes. A badger even charged our car! On one August visit we were surprised to find a mouse had taken over a birdhouse and was stocking it for winter. Another day as Bill closed the car door by a birdhouse, a baby wren flew from the bird house through the open car window and immediately disappeared; several miles later we eventually found it hidden under the console above the gas pedal, but we were able to get it back into a birdhouse where a wren was fledging her chicks.

Of our 60 bluebird nest boxes monitored in 2015, 35 boxes contained bluebird nests, 215 eggs were laid, 143 bluebird eggs hatched and a total of 128 bluebirds fledged. In addition, 174 wrens and 36 tree swallows fledged from our boxes. ♦

## LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

### A Shared Vision at Badger

*by Charlie Luthin*



Since 1997, when a group of conservationists met to discuss the possible future fate of the soon-to-be-decommissioned Badger Army Ammunition Plant, a core shared vision emerged that would carry this growing group of concerned citizens through the countless discussions, meetings and tumult over the ensuing years. The vision of a restored and healed landscape at Badger resonated deeply within the communities in the vicinity of the Badger Plant, and many citizens and decision-makers have come to embrace that vision. The vision prevailed during the meetings of the Badger Reuse Committee that offered its Final Report (Badger Reuse Plan) 15 years ago this month. The same vision has prevailed as lands were divided between three major landowners and as planning of those parcels subsequently ensued. And that vision is thriving today!

I am fortunate to have been involved in those early discussions to help develop that vision almost 20 years ago, and I'm delighted to have recently been invited by the Alliance Board of Directors to serve as the organization's first (part-time) executive director. My singular focus is to keep the vision for the Badger lands alive as embodied in the core values of the Badger Reuse Plan. The strategic plan that the Alliance Board of Directors completed late last year promotes and supports the vision, as well. The three pillars of our strategic plan include public education, ecological restoration and continued vigilance and advocacy for the tenets of the Reuse Plan. Our clear long-term goal is to help facilitate the restoration of more than 5,000 acres of prairie and savanna at Badger—representing the largest restoration of its kind in Wisconsin. Now THAT'S a vision to work toward!



# Volunteer Spotlight: Alison Duff (in her own words)

I remember clearly my first introduction to the Alliance and its dedicated volunteers. The board of directors was meeting at Ski-Hi Fruit Farm, and it was a sunny, early fall evening in 2004. We were sitting outdoors, our backdrop the Baraboo Hills in beautiful color. The apple cider was excellent, and the board members were warm and welcoming.

Like so many of us, I was introduced to the organization by a friend. Amanda Fuller had encouraged me to learn more about the story of the Badger lands, and the people working to advance its conservation future. Like many aspiring conservationists, I was intrigued by the idea of 'community-based conservation'; here was an opportunity to see it in action! What I've learned in the twelve years since that first introductory meeting is that community-based conservation isn't a panacea to the challenges we face in protecting the places we love. It is the product of hard work, persistence, and showing up. For every major event—a dedication ceremony, a prairie planting, a signed agreement—there are innumerable small actions that led to the big day. Thousands of letters written, calls made, meetings attended, and conversations shared. These actions are the foundation of community-based conservation, and they require the collective effort of many people.

I have had the privilege of serving the Alliance in a number of ways. I followed Amanda Fuller as the organization's coordinator (2005-2008), was a member of the board of directors (2008-2013), and I am now a volunteer leader in the organization's ecological restoration program.



Through the ecological restoration program, I have met many more inspiring individuals who share their time, energy, and expertise in service to an idea—that together, we can make a positive difference in our community, and leave a conservation legacy for future generations.

The mission of the Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance is unique, in part because of the rich story of the Badger landscape. Yet it is the people behind the organization—its founders, board of directors, volunteers, members—that have kept me involved for more than a decade. They are my friends and mentors, and have shared with me invaluable lessons in civic responsibility. I look forward to another decade of warm memories and discoveries on the Badger lands. ♦

Footnote: While serving the Alliance in many ways as a dedicated volunteer, Alison worked hard toward and received her PhD in Environment & Resources from the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies at UW-Madison; her PhD research topic was a conservation/agriculture case study - Healthy Grown Potato Project. Her previous degrees include a MS in Land Resources from UW-Madison (her thesis was done at Badger, "Identifying site priorities for the ecological restoration of the Badger Army Ammunition Plant.") Her BS degree is in Ecology, Evolution & Behavior from the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities.

## BRIDGING CONSERVATION & AGRICULTURE on the Badger Lands

TUESDAY, MARCH 29, 2016  
RUTH CULVER LIBRARY, PRAIRIE DU SAC

**6:00pm.** Brief meeting of Members to nominate new members to Board of Directors

**6:30pm–7:30pm: PUBLIC MEETING**  
*Snacks and refreshments provided*

**MIKE STANEK**, the new management agronomist/farm manager at the U.S. Dairy Forage Research Center Farm,

will discuss DFRC's evolving role in lands at the former Badger Plant.

**CHERRIE NOLDEN**, farmer and PhD candidate, will discuss the research she has been conducting on the use of goats to reduce shrubby invasive species on Dairy Forage land at Badger.





# Ho-Chunk Shares Plans for Badger Lands in 2016

*by Randy Poelma, chair of the Ho-Chunk Nation Badger Oversight Team and property manager*



The Ho-Chunk fire crew will continue managing invasive species with prescribed burns on their property on the Badger lands.

The 2016 field season is shaping up to be a busy year on the Ho-Chunk lands at the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant. Activities planned include continuing to monitor and inventory wildlife and forestry resources; invasive species management; and removal of unwanted infrastructure.

The Nation will continue efforts that began in 2015 to inventory and monitor wildlife. A variety of methods are being used including acoustic recording devices for various species, trail cameras and physical surveys. The Nation and WDNR staff recently completed winter bat hibernacula surveys for sites located on tribal lands at Badger and will be working together to improve other potential hibernacula sites. Improvements include removing woody vegetation in certain areas to create travel corridors to a suitable hibernaculum site and also improving the environmental conditions (temperature, humidity) within the hibernacula sites.

The Ho-Chunk forestry staff is in the process of completing forestry inventories and developing options for future management. The inventory work is expected to be completed in the spring

of 2016 with draft management recommendations expected shortly thereafter. Forestry staff is experiencing some difficult survey conditions due to the abundance of invasive woody vegetation in the understory. Unfortunately, most of the forestry resources within the Nation's parcel are unnatural plantation areas planted with Red Pine (1990 NE of Ballistics Pond), White Pine (1954 East of Pine Glen), White Spruce (1972 North of Pioneer and Miller Cemeteries) and Black Walnut (1978).

The majority of management efforts in 2016 will focus on slowing the rampant spread and maturation of invasive woody vegetation within the open areas at BAAP. The Nation, in cooperation with the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), will be conducting prescribed burns on the parcel this spring, conditions permitting. Focal areas for spring burning include the previously restored areas along USH 12 including the Dave Fordham Memorial Prairie; open areas on the northern tier of the parcel; and areas previously burned in 2014. Prescribed burning will be followed up by additional invasive management activities made possible by a BIA Invasive Wildlife Program Grant and cost-share funding provided through a USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contract. The Nation has successfully participated in EQIP on multiple tribal lands since 2001 resulting in the installation of conservation practices and the restoration of multiple streams, wetlands and prairie habitats. Lastly, the Nation is excited to announce that permanent photo-points were established throughout the parcel in the fall of 2015 with plans to photograph the parcel throughout the various seasons to capture changes on the landscape. ♦

## GIFTS IN MEMORY OF MARY YEAKEL

As we shared in our last newsletter, Mary Yeakel, our "Prairie Godmother," passed away last fall. We'd like to thank those individuals who gave to the Alliance in memory of Mary: Colonel Annette Cooke (Texas), Audrey Eastman (Reedsburg), Amanda Fuller (Kentucky), Stan Goldfarb (Madison), Hiroshi and Arlene Kanno (Wisconsin Dells), Bev Kuzlow (California) and Ltc. Phyllis Miller & Ltc. Frank McDonald (Georgia). Those generous gifts will be put toward public education, one of Mary's core interests with the Alliance.

# Support the Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance!

**Our Mission: Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance promotes cooperative conservation on the Badger lands and in the surrounding Sauk Prairie landscape.**

Yes, I would like to support a sustainable future for the Badger lands and the greater Sauk Prairie landscape with my tax-deductible gift of

\$\_\_\_\_\_.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY/STATE/ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE \_\_\_\_\_

EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

Members joining or renewing at the \$50 level or higher are eligible to receive a one-time gift of a poster of Victor Bakhtin's painting, *Sauk Prairie Remembered: A Vision for the Future*. For a donation of \$200 you will receive a signed limited edition of the Bakhtin painting.

Please send me ☐ a poster (\$50 or more) ☐ a signed print (\$200 or more).

Please make checks payable to:

The Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance (TSPCA)

PO Box 403, Baraboo WI 53913,

or donate online at [saukprairievision.org](http://saukprairievision.org)

Thank You!

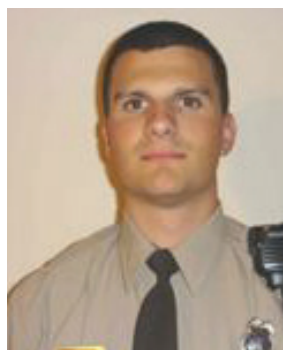
The Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance incorporated in 2002 as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charitable non-profit organization. Since its inception the organization has advocated for a conservation future for the 7,400-acres of Badger lands, and we continue to work closely with the key landowners: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Ho Chunk Nation and US Dairy Forage Research Center. The Alliance coordinates volunteer restoration work days at Badger, offers a whole suite of public education programs each year, continues to advocate for a green future at Badger, and supports important on-site research.

**Please support the Alliance with your donation today at [saukprairievision.org](http://saukprairievision.org)!** A limited edition, numbered print of Victor Bakhtin's painting, *Sauk Prairie Remembered: A Vision for the Future*, is available for a one-time donation of \$200 or more. Members joining at the \$50 level or higher will receive a one-time gift of a poster of the painting.



## New Faces at Badger

*TWO OF THE THREE MAJOR LANDOWNERS ON THE BADGER LANDS HAVE NEW PROPERTY MANAGERS. WE'D LIKE TO INTRODUCE YOU TO THESE NEW INDIVIDUALS WORKING AT BADGER.*



**JONAH MOLINE** recently accepted the Park Manager position at Devil's Lake State Park/Sauk Prairie Recreation Area. Jonah graduated from UWSP in 2004 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Resource Management and Environmental Law Enforcement. Jonah started with the DNR as a limited-term employee park ranger at Peninsula State Park, and then served as a police officer before coming back to the DNR where he's been a fulltime park ranger at Devil's Lake State Park for the last eight years. Jonah enjoys hunting, fishing, golfing, serving as a volunteer firefighter and spending time with his wife and four children.



**MIKE STANEK** of Baraboo has been named the new management agronomist/farm manager at the U.S. Dairy Forage Research Center (DFRC) Farm. He replaces Rick Walgenbach who retired early in 2016 after 26 years in this position. Stanek was raised on a family dairy farm near Hillsboro in Vernon County, WI. He received a BS from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point with a major in Resource Management and a minor in soils. He holds an MS in Agriculture from Washington State University.

For 17 years he was a soil conservationist and resource conservationist for Sauk County. He then worked for UW Extension as an agricultural agent and assistant professor of crops and soils in Dodge County, WI. Most recently he was an independent agronomy consultant specializing in soil testing and nutrient management plans.

Stanek brings his skills in precision agricultural systems and technologies to Dairy Forage. Precision agriculture uses tools such as soil sampling, aerial imagery, GIS mapping, and data collection from fields to determine the optimal times and places to apply inputs such as fertilizer. He will help DFRC scientists conduct their research; he is responsible for producing feed for the dairy herd, and he will assist with land conservation.





Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance  
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REI (Madison Store) has invited the Alliance to be its partner in hosting the Film Festival on April 12-13 at the Barrymore Theater in Madison. The Banff Mountain Film Festival is one of the largest

and most prestigious nature and adventure-based film festivals in the world. Highlights from the Festival will be featured during this two-day event; proceeds will benefit the Alliance.

Tickets are available in advance at the REI store in Madison or on the Barrymore website: [www.barrymorelive.com](http://www.barrymorelive.com). Day-of-event tickets available at Barrymore Theater.

## Spring 2016 Alliance Calendar

Details of events and work days are posted on our website:  
[www.saukprairievision.org](http://www.saukprairievision.org).

### March 29:

6:00pm-7:30pm Alliance Annual Meeting

### April 9:

9:00am-12:00pm Volunteer Work Day at Badger

### April 12-13:

7:00pm-10:00pm Banff Mountain Film Festival

### April 16:

9:00am-12:00pm Volunteer Work Day at Badger

### May 14:

9:00am-12:00pm Volunteer Work Day at Badger

### May 21:

9:00am-1:00pm Volunteer Work Day & Skills Builder

### June 11:

9:00am-12:00pm Volunteer Work Day

### June 18-19:

9:00am-12:00pm Invasive Plant Monitoring at Hillside Prairie