

Wisconsin Native Plant Certification Report

FOR THE LOVE OF NATIVE ECOLOGY

By Luka Ursa, Wisconsin Native Plant Certification Graduate

Originally this project started to be a simple, small pollinator garden. Spurred on by the desire to support migrating monarchs, it developed into a desire to encourage as much life as possible. The rabbit hole of native ecology runs deep, especially when you start to notice things that were once invisible to you. Ground nesting insects had moved in almost anywhere there was bare soil; once-empty bee houses exploded with activity. One notable change was a visitor that I'd never before seen in person, and one that I'd never provided habitat for in the past: a hummingbird.

While taking my first Wild Ones class, the Ultimate Butterfly Garden, and being around like-minded people who sought to do the same thing as me, I knew I had no choice but to take it further. I had the perfect excuse to begin planning for a hummingbird-specific addition as the next step of expansion. Though unable to take his class about them, I gathered useful hummingbird information from Randy Powers' printed materials which informed my plant selection— picking both for their nectar and bugs attracted, and what was most suitable to grow in my preexisting conditions. It was also his Native Plant Establishment and Management class that taught me how to determine an order of action alongside my garden plan, or what I had to prioritize before anything new could be planted, including removing invasive buckthorn which was present across my yard. Luckily I had already learned some methods during Emma Neuman's Terrestrial Invasive Management class and could get to work right away. So far it has been successful without the use of any herbicide as I hope to keep the garden entirely herbicide, pesticide, and fertilizer free, particularly after learning the harm they cause to native fauna, insects, and the water supply.

Now that the garden as a whole has crept into view of my neighbors' backyards and is no longer wedged between garages, I get asked what it is I'm doing with a mix of curiosity and skepticism. After coming across an example of a milkweed seed library posted online, I saw an amazing opportunity to educate whoever happens to pass by even if I'm not around. Not only could I explain what native plants are and why they're valuable in an accessible way, I could offer free seed and an identification guide showing off birds and bugs one might witness in my yard.



Photo courtesy of Luka Ursa.

After a few months of labor to plan, build, paint, weatherproof, write and arrange the contents, my Native Kiosk & Seed Library (shown above), as I lovingly call it, was mounted to the fence running along the alleyway edge of the garden. The kiosk's design is simple: tall yet narrow enough to accommodate a selection of seed packets with designated spots for the laminated informational packet and interactive guide. All of the information inside was summarized via a combination of sources including Wild Ones courses (notably Paul Whitaker's classes on Native Plant Form/Function and Ecology/ID) and livestreamed presentations, publications under Xerces Society and UW extension, and Doug Tallamy's work. It also includes spotlight pages of hummingbird facts and the life cycle of monarch butterflies to give direct examples of what one can experience firsthand only a few feet in front of them. Though the cold season arrived before the kiosk could attract full attention, it is my goal for it to embolden others to add natives to their own yard and interact more with mine as an example of what is possible.

New Board Member Serves as Program Chair

By Nancy Benkoske

Raised on a farm in the driftless area of WI, I hiked and explored the hills and valleys of Pine River. I came to love the outdoors and nature. Here at my home in the Fox Valley, I have a creek in my backyard that intermittently flooded and caused erosion...which I did not love.

After our kids were grown and I retired from nursing, I wanted to find a solution to the erosion and find a way to reconnect with nature. So, four years ago, I joined Wild Ones and applied for a Winnebago County Land and Water Conservation grant. With their help and a good native seed mix, I was able to plant a riparian strip along

the creek edge. Now there is no more erosion and I can enjoy the nature in my backyard again. The foliage and flowers, and even more importantly, the birds and pollinators make me happy.



As the program chair, I hope to make available the knowledge and practical advice and encouragement that Wild Ones has to offer. We're here to support others in their own native garden projects. **Happy gardening to all!**

WILD Center Update

By Kathleen Hallett, WILD Center Committee Chair

The WILD Center Committee (WCC) has been hard at work this summer and fall, continuing its efforts to support the WILD Center, headquarters of the national Wild Ones organization in the village of Fox Crossing.

MAINTENANCE & VOLUNTEERISM

A key focus remains addressing **maintenance priorities at the WILD Center**, and recent months have seen significant progress thanks to the dedication of our volunteers and the local WOFVA chapter.

- In September, we successfully hosted **student volunteers** from St. Mary Central HS in Fox Crossing as they tackled a variety of indoor and outdoor work.
- Our **2nd Thursday of the month workdays** have been successful as volunteers have worked hard on doing weeding of the prairie and gardens as well as other maintenance tasks.

Our shared potluck meals on these workdays have been delicious and fun! Special thanks go out to **Pat and Rich Fischer** and **Dave Edwards** for their extensive work repairing the ramp to the Center's main building, to **Sharon Duerkop** for leading work on the restoration of the turtle habitat area, and to **Merrie Schamberger** and **Ron Jones**, working on various aspects of the NRCS EQIP federal grant. Thanks also go to **Jeremy Rappaport**, *secretary for the National WO organization*, who also came to provide input for the forestry plan needed for this grant. The **NRCS EQIP grant** we are applying for will be to address the impacts of emerald ash borer through strategic removal of dead ash trees and replanting with biodiverse and sustainable species of shrubs and trees.

SUSTAINABLE FRAMEWORK

WCC members have also been busy with organizational tasks as we strive to **create a framework that will help sustain the WILD Center** and it's ecological, financial and programmatic value into the future.

BOARD OPPORTUNITY

We are still in need of people to fill 2 positions on our board which involve a 1-2-year commitment:

- Volunteer Coordinator
- Finance and Development officer.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

- We welcome all volunteers and need to develop a committed volunteer base including people with expertise or training in different areas such as maintenance, construction, woodworking, photography, and other areas to make this successful!
- We have also been asked if volunteers could clean the WILD Center on a monthly basis and are starting to implement this now.

The WILD Center Committee looks forward to building on these achievements and invites all members to **join upcoming meetings and volunteer opportunities**.

The WILD Center is open to the public and all are invited to visit and walk the grounds of this beautiful, ecologically significant property. Please contact me via email for more information: kmahallett@gmail.com.