

Wisconsin Native Plant Certification Report

A GARDEN FOR LEPIDOPTERA

By Maria Thompson, Native Plant Certification Graduate

This article is a blend of her Landscapes for Tomorrow Report and her Capstone Report.

Wild Ones of the Fox Valley became a great educational resource to me prior to my enlisting in the Wisconsin Native Plant Certification courses, and I would like to begin by stating my gratitude for the dedication of those involved in providing this significant and accessible educational opportunity to the public. The courses, coordinators, instructors, and lessons have further opened my eyes to the significance of environmental education and inclusion.

The Capstone Project I chose for the conclusion of the certification program is an ongoing Butterfly Garden Restoration Project at Ledge View Nature Center. The project began in 2022 and has progressed over the last few years thanks to the insights and guidance of these courses and my mentor at the facility. I felt that this project aligned highly with the classes provided throughout this certification, and the gracious support of the Native Landscapes for Tomorrow grant further solidified my understanding of the project's alignment with Wild Ones as a whole.

The Butterfly Garden was initially installed on the grounds over two decades ago, with the significance being a space that would provide native pollinators with native plant resources. These resources were well thought out as they not only served as nectar sources, but also fruit and host plant sources for a diversity of species. The location of the site was chosen along the west side of the entrance to the property so that visitors could venture into the site and learn about the species there. As the grounds at the nature center continued to develop, this area became overgrown with dominant native plant species and a few invasive species. The goal of the project has been to restore the site by removing invasive species, thinning overgrowth from dominant species, and bringing in native plants not currently in the site to promote biodiversity of pollinator populations. Thankfully, a wide variety of species was already present prior to the installation of new ones.

This allowed the new plants to be carefully researched to provide a range of flowering times and specific host-plant resources for Lepidoptera species specifically.



A full inventory was taken of the plant species found in the site in the fall of 2022. Of course, given that native plants have a variety of flowering times, there were a few areas of the garden that were not inventoried until the following spring and summer. During the winter of 2022-2023, research began on the reliance of Lepidoptera on host plants, which species of Lepidoptera are found in Wisconsin and where, what their life cycle needs are, and which plants could be brought into the site to be of the greatest service. The Native Landscapes for Tomorrow grant was applied for after this research began, thus beginning the association of the garden with Wild Ones.

Classes provided through the Wisconsin Native Plant Certification Program guided the development of the site and its two 18x24" educational panels throughout the spring, summer, and fall of both 2023 and 2024. One of the first classes I attended was "The Ultimate Butterfly Garden," and luckily enough for me, the class was held right at Ledge View. I was able to learn more information about the great diversity of Lepidoptera species found throughout Wisconsin and what native plants could be of use to them. This further solidified the information I had begun to research through the previous winter and helped to guide my development of a workshop for the public. This workshop was called "Planting for Pollinators" and dove into the great variety of native pollinating species found in Wisconsin, what their life cycle needs are, what a host plant is, and a planting session in the Butterfly Garden. At this stage, Wild Ones had awarded the nature center with funding to purchase a list of native plants for the garden. Following the conclusion of the presentation, members of the public were welcomed to help plant these species on site.

This project was graciously supported by Wild Ones grant funding, a previous report was sent in that provides more details on the plant species chosen and the educational panels I created for the site. The information in this report is significant as it pertains to the development of the site and its significance to both human, plant, and animal communities that visit the center.

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Following the Planting for Pollinators Workshop, Wild Ones continued to guide my understanding of pollinators in a class called "Pollinators after Dark." I discovered just how spectacular and diverse moths are, and that they are often overlooked as important pollinators due to their largely nocturnal nature. As an educator at Ledge View, this information was of great use as the restoration project continued. During my time as an educator at Ledge View, I took particular care to discuss, teach and interact with students and families in relation to understood or overlooked flora and fauna. Other classes taken during my time with the program provided insights into the significance and extraordinary nature of native plants. From diving into the scientific backgrounds of botany, to exploring ecology and plant identification, to discovering the fungal world, to assessing Wisconsin forests, to practicing hands-on nature teaching strategies for all ages - every single class lent itself to the practical use and application of education and conservation in this site and beyond. These classes both built upon my previous knowledge and expertly taught information that was entirely new to me. As a restoration project, the management of the site is ongoing and further development and maintenance will continue as time moves forward. Thanks to the gracious support of Wild Ones, through grant funding and the accessible education from this certification program, I am confident that the site will serve both people and pollinators for years to come.

WILD Center Update

By Kathleen Hallett, WILD Center Committee Chair

EXCITING NEWS! Our group working to keep the WILD Center within the Wild Ones organization is now formally the "WILD Center Committee" under Jen Ainsworth, National Wild Ones Executive Director. We have been working on a charter document for a committee for months.

The WILD Center Committee structure and activities will be in accordance with the mission and vision of the National Wild Ones organization. It will serve as a model for moving forward to help make the WILD Center sustainable as a programmatic, ecological and financially stable asset. Although nothing is certain, for now the WILD Center property is not being sold. This is our opportunity to be a part of the solution and make things happen! Jen is supportive of our work and we will collaborate closely with her.

The WILD Center Committee's purpose is planning and implementing strategies for the creative use of the WILD Center space, for example: a grounds maintenance plan engaging volunteers, educational programs for all ages, garden and prairie tours all at the WILD Center. This would involve fundraising, public engagement, and planning for long-term stewardship of the WILD Center.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

- **Chair:** Kathleen Hallett
- **Secretary:** Leslie Bellavance
- **Volunteer Coordinator:** Ivy Fischer
- **Grounds Maintenance Co-leaders:** Pat Fischer and Merrie Schamberger
- **Community Engagement and Programming Co-leaders:** Sue Peck and Vicky Redlin
- **Wild Ones Chapter Representative at Large:** Linda Shuster (*Grand Rapids Chapter*)

- **Wild Ones Local Chapter Representative:** Deb Benada
- **Development Coordinator:** Vacant (*Interested? Contact Kathy to Volunteer*)

VOLUNTEER WORKDAYS

Short term priorities include addressing maintenance of the gardens and conservancy areas. We need more help with this. Our volunteer workdays are already underway.

Please join us (as your schedule permits):

- **2ND THURSDAY OF THE MONTH:** Work from 3-5:30 pm, break for a potluck dinner (*come even if you can't bring anything because we have plenty of snacks and food available*) and optional work from 6-7 pm.
- **SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 20:** Work from 9 am - 12:30 pm with optional potluck at 11:30 am.

Can't make it? If you can't make it one of the days above but have weeding and gardening experience, contact me to set another time for you to come.

OPEN MEETINGS: PROGRAMMATIC DEVELOPMENT

Another priority in the next few months is to create a vision and plans for the programmatic development of the property. Open meetings will be at the WILD Center and we welcome continued support.

Feel free to share ideas with the committee members or contact me at kmahallett@gmail.com. Let me know if you are interested in the work of the WILD Center Committee and share this with anyone you think might be interested. Thanks and hope to see you soon at the WILD Center!