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The Nature Conservancy's Spring Green Preserve Will Expand

The Prairie Enthusiasts Gives Rare Prairie and Oak Woodland to the Conservancy

MADISON, Wis. – The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin announced today that it has acquired 144 acres of land in Sauk County in southwestern Wisconsin that will be added to the Conservancy's Spring Green Preserve. The 144-acre property, located just north of the existing preserve, was donated to the Conservancy by The Prairie Enthusiasts (TPE), which has worked together with the Conservancy to conserve Wisconsin's surviving prairie remnants.

The Conservancy now owns and manages more than 1,000 acres in the Wisconsin River valley, an area known as the "Wisconsin Desert" because it includes sand dunes and prickly pear cactus. To the north, the landscape shifts into an oak woodland. The land donated by The Prairie Enthusiasts contains more than a half mile of ridge top with significant dry prairie remnants.

"This is a great addition to the Spring Green Preserve," said Mary Jean Huston, director of The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin. "With the collaboration of The Prairie Enthusiasts, we've now conserved a rare and picturesque landscape of bluff and prairie that is home to some of Wisconsin's rarest plant and animal communities. This gift will allow us to efficiently and effectively manage a conservation area that is now even larger and more significant."

Rich Henderson, vice president of The Prairie Enthusiasts, said TPE wanted to help conserve the site and recognized that The Nature Conservancy would be a great steward. "We're thrilled that we were able to partner with the Conservancy once again to conserve an exceptional piece of outdoor Wisconsin," Henderson said. "This is a unique and beautiful place and we've helped ensure that it will remain so for everyone to see."

The Prairie Enthusiasts purchased the property from Spring Green High Country, LLC, and donated it to the Conservancy. Funding came from Wisconsin's Stewardship Fund, which provided a grant plus matching credit to TPE in exchange for major donations of conservation easements and land elsewhere in Wisconsin.

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SPRING GREEN PRESERVE ADDITION/Page 2

Huston noted that the project would not have happened if not for TPE members Tom and Kathie Brock, who donated a conservation easement on their land to TPE, the Savanna Oak Foundation which donated land to TPE, and Rich and Kathy Henderson, who sold land at a bargain price to TPE. She also pointed out that Jim Ring, Mike Ring and Randy Diehl, the principal owners of Spring Green High County, agreed to sign a long-term option with The Nature Conservancy that afforded The Prairie Enthusiasts the opportunity to acquire the property.

“We want to thank the Brocks, the Hendersons and the Savanna Oak Foundation for their generosity and the Rings and Mr. Diehl for patiently working with us so that this high-priority natural area could be conserved,” Huston said.

The Conservancy’s Spring Green Preserve protects a complex of sand prairies, black oak barrens, woodlands and high quality dolomite dry bluff prairie and dry cliff communities. Its dry sandy plain and steep rocky slopes are home to plants common to western deserts like prickly pear cactus as well as prairie plants including compass plant, leadplant and little bluestem. Animal species include the eastern pocket gopher, grassland birds, lizards and several types of insects that are found few other places in the state.

Land management activities at Spring Green include use of prescribed fire to suppress competing trees and shrubs and stimulate the growth of native grasses and wildflowers, and removal of red cedars that shade out native plant species.

Spring Green Preserve is open to visitors for various types of outdoor recreation including hiking, photography and birdwatching.

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The Nature Conservancy is the leading conservation organization working to protect the most ecologically important lands and waters around the world for nature and people. To date, the Conservancy and its more than one million members have been responsible for the protection of more than 15 million acres in the United States and have helped preserve more than 102 million acres in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific. In Wisconsin, the Conservancy has helped conserve more than 140,000 acres since 1960. The Conservancy has more than 21,000 members in Wisconsin and offices in Madison, Baraboo, East Troy, Minocqua and Sturgeon Bay. [Visit The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin on the Web at www.nature.org/wisconsin.](http://www.nature.org/wisconsin)

The Prairie Enthusiasts is a private organization committed to the protection and management of native prairie and savanna of the Upper Midwest. We have an incorporated, nonprofit status and are a grass roots organization run by volunteers. The Prairie Enthusiasts differ from other conservation groups in its sole dedication to the preservation of the last remaining pieces of the once vast, now endangered, prairies and savannas of the Upper Midwest through land protection and management. The Prairie Enthusiasts evolved from small prairie preservation organizations that began in the mid-1970s. We now have chapters in Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. On the Web at theprairieenthusiasts.org.