



# Badger Report

The Newsletter of Southwest Badger Resource Conservation and Development Council, Inc.

May 2008

## Council Secures Funding for Switchgrass Research

The Southwest Badger RC&D Council recently secured \$110,000 in grants to fund a biomass project titled “Switchgrass Research to Determine Best Management Practices for Maximizing Yields in Southwest Wisconsin” The project is funded by an \$80,000 award from the Driftless Area Initiative (DAI) through an appropriation sponsored by Representative Ron Kind and a \$30,000 grant from Alliant Energy.

The project will look at the economic viability of growing switchgrass as a bioenergy crop in Southwest Wisconsin. Data will be collected from actual working farm land. Southwest Badger RC&D has contracted with six agricultural producers to establish, maintain, and harvest 60 acres of switchgrass on existing cropland. The involvement of agricultural producers is key to this project as the agricultural community will not pursue switchgrass production until they have proof that it is feasible to grow switchgrass in the region using proven agronomic practices.

Mike Lieurance is the Southwest Badger Biomass Technician for this project. Mike is working directly with producers and contractors on all aspects of planting, maintenance and harvesting the demonstration plots. University of Wisconsin Extension Weed Specialist, Mark Renz, will be the lead researcher on the project. Dr. Renz will supervise a graduate research technician

contracted by Southwest Badger to collect field data this summer. He and the research technician will collect and analyze data to determine the effectiveness of various herbicides and fertilization rates on yield.

Trials on each farm will compare various herbicides and fertilization rates to determine the Best Management Practices for maximum yield and economic return. To date five of the six demonstration sites have been planted and sprayed.



Field of switchgrass in Iowa County.

### **Southwest Badger RC&D Council, Inc.**

#### **Quarterly Meeting**

**June 6, 2008**

**10 a.m. - 12 p.m.**

**USDA Service Center Conference Room  
24136 Executive Lane, Richland Center**

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### Council Members

Crawford County—Virgil Butteris,  
Peter Flesch

Grant County—George Booth,  
John Schindler, Donald Splinter

Green County—**Robert Hoesly (Secretary)**

Iowa County—Phil Roberts, Roger Reynolds

La Crosse County—**Don Bina (President)**,  
Marc Schultz

Lafayette County—Dean Thoreson,  
**Lance McNaughton (Treasurer)**

Richland County—Marilyn Marshall,  
**Mark Shepard (Vice President)**, Virginia  
Wiedenfeld

Sauk County—Lester Wiese

Vernon County—Will Beitlich, George  
Nettum, Richard Hansen

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# Staff Reports

## Biomass

### True Costs of Harvesting Woody Biomass

*Aaron Wright, Biomass Forester*

The True Costs of Harvesting Woody Biomass Project is going strong. The first few months of 2008 have been very productive. We held two timber bid openings for six different sites. One site in Grant County and three in Vernon County were successfully sold. Two of the sites are on public land - U. S. Army Corps of Engineers property and Wisconsin DNR property. Two biomass sites - a private landowner in Trempealeau County and Esofea County Park in Vernon County - that were sold previously have now been harvested.

Ten biomass sites totaling 260 acres have either been sold or harvested. I am working on advertising and arranging harvests on eight additional sites. Three of the sites may be harvested this summer while the others will have to wait until fall or winter due to oak wilt restrictions. While all the sites to date are in Wisconsin, I have sites lined up in Minnesota and I am working on getting a site sold in Iowa.

I helped staff the biomass booth at the Tri-State Forestry Conference in Sinsinawa, Wisconsin and I assisted with locating demonstration sites for the Light on the Land Forestry Field Day to be held in October. In addition, I helped with the 75th Anniversary of the Coon Creek Watershed, I lifted trees at the state nursery, and I helped with prescribed burning.

## Driftless Area Initiative

### Biomass Energy for Rural Sustainability

*David C. Wilson DAI Coordinator*

As spring planting continues, Resource Conservation and Development Councils collaborating as the Driftless Area Initiative are surveying the effects of a wetter than usual spring. The need for additional grass waterways to control erosion on many fields is pretty clear.

Perennial grasses maintained in these waterways slow and disperse the force of runoff concentrating in low-lying areas during heavy rains. New or enlarged gullies are one indication that a waterway is needed. Another clue may be fresh top-soil deposited in vegetation at the bottom of a field. Typically, what appears to be minor erosion, or small rills, will be visible in the area above such deposition. If left

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untreated, these areas can lose many tons of soil over the course of several years.

An economic alternative to waterways is the conversion of fields on steeply sloping land to a perennial biomass crop. Switchgrass and other native perennial grasses provide superior erosion control, and are fast becoming viewed as a potential feedstock for energy and liquid fuel production. As biomass energy markets develop, practices that once were viewed simply as good stewardship are becoming financially rewarding to producers. What's more, biomass energy crops can benefit wildlife while keeping water clean and soil on the land.

DAI is working to promote perennial biomass crops as a sustainable economic and environmental alternative. These projects are funded by a federal appropriation sponsored by Congressman Ron Kind (D-WI), and included in the Energy and Water Resources Bill signed into law in December, 2007. The Driftless Area Initiative Biomass Energy for Rural Sustainability Project will:

- Research grassland productivity to assess potential business models focused on switchgrass and other warm-season grass and prairie mixes.
- Assess biomass availability from corn-stover, grasses, under-utilized woody plants, and other potential sources.
- Demonstrate in-field densification techniques (briquetting) for more efficient transport of biomass.
- Promote local biomass production as an economic alternative to cropping marginal acres in Driftless Area watersheds and fuelsheds.
- Promote biomass energy solutions to develop greater energy savings and security for individuals, municipalities, and industry.
- Sponsor regional conferences to share ideas, expertise, and opportunities related to biomass energy.

The six RC&Ds leading the DAI include Northeast Iowa, Postville; Limestone Bluffs, Maquoketa, IA; Hiawatha Valley, Rochester, MN; River Country, Altoona, WI; Southwest Badger, Lancaster, WI; and Blackhawk Hills, Rock Falls, IL. DAI collaborates with many organizations to achieve its conservation and economic development goals. A partial list of partners includes: Trout Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, Blufflands Alliance, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service, state departments of natural resources, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, soil and water conservation districts, forestry associations, woods cooperatives, local governments, and individual producers and entrepreneurs.

## Forest Stewardship Initiative

**Patrick Dayton, Forester**

Occasionally, in my work for Southwest Badger RC&D I am asked to justify timber harvesting or active forest management - it's the truth. Often there are misperceptions or misunderstandings about forestry, but sometimes there are just strong beliefs. Recently, in reading *The Forestry Source* I came upon the Society of American Foresters official stance on harvesting timber on public lands:

*"The Society of American Foresters supports commercial and noncommercial timber harvesting as an appropriate objective and primary means for maintaining resilient and sustainable forests on federal and other public lands. Experience around the world has shown that, to achieve sustainability, forested landscapes must provide a robust and mutually supportive complement of environmental, economic, and social values. Although the relative emphasis of these values will vary among different types of ownership and locations, it is essential that all be carefully considered as legitimate options in the management of public forestlands.*

*Most of these lands are governed by laws and other policies that allow or mandate a sustainable timber harvest with appropriate resource management planning. Where fish and wildlife habitat, water quality, or recreation is a priority, timber harvest can be compatible and, in fact, support these values when carefully planned and supervised by professional foresters and other resource specialists. The use of renewable, recyclable, and biodegradable forest products from many public lands is imperative given our nation's increasing resource needs and sustainability concerns."*

Some conservation organizations out West are now getting loans from banks and purchasing old timber land for conservation purposes. The loans are received and validated because proper timber harvesting will be used as a long-term profitable investment by the organizations. These groups realize that personal donations or governments tax monies can only stretch so far and only last so long. Besides wood and non-wood products that we humans use, forests provide us with clean air, clean water, and recreational opportunities. Personal investment or public benefit – forests can be used both ways.

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# Forest Invasive Species Project

*Dan Bohlin, Invasive Species Specialist*

During the first quarter of 2008 I made several presentations on the invasive plant problem to various groups. The first presentation was to a small group of DNR foresters outlining the impact of the Woodland Leadership Institute on my involvement with forest invasive plants. In February, I staffed a vendor booth at the Madison Area Woodland Owners Conference that publicized the Southwest Badger invasive plants program to landowners west of Madison. In March, I did a presentation on small woodland management at a landowner workshop for the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area near Dodgeville. I also did a talk on controlling invasive plants to a good-sized group of interested landowners attending the Tri-State Forestry Conference at the Sinsinawa Mound.

I have one site visit scheduled for early May and am hopeful that as the weather improves more landowners will be calling to schedule site visits.

## Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area

*Katie Abbott, Project Coordinator*

Spring often feels like a race against the weather, trying to find good days to conduct prescribed burning on local prairies and grasslands. There is a small window between when it's too cold and wet to have a good fire and when it's too hot, dry, and late in the growing season to be safe. This year's wet spring was a challenge, but the MRPHA partners were still able to conduct several successful burns. This will help set back weeds and non-native grasses and stimulate prairie species to grow.

In the beginning of March we held a land management workshop at Folklore Village near Dodgeville. Twenty-eight landowners from the area attended, and with partners, local contractors, and speakers we had about 50 people gathered to learn, network, and start thinking spring. We had a fantastic list of experts lined up to give presentations about beginning land management, prairie restoration, grassland birds, small woodlot management, stream management, and invasive species. The workshop was funded by generous contributions from the Alliant Energy Foundation, Isthmus Engineering and Manufacturing, and several local contractors. It was a



Controlled burn in the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area.

successful event and we've gotten very positive feedback from the participants.

Though the Farm Bill is still not finished, several programs continue to move forward. We had a frantic sign-up for the Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program, where there was only a few weeks to promote the program and get landowners signed up. Despite the limited timeframe, four projects in the MRPHA received funding. I assisted Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) participants with their mid-management practices, including writing burn plans and changing seed mixes. On May 1 landowners can start signing up for the new State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement program (SAFE), which is a CRP-offshoot targeted at creating grassland bird habitat. Getting acres enrolled in this program will be a high priority for me in the coming months.

The Prairie Enthusiasts were recently awarded a large grant for the MRPHA project from the Wildlife Action Opportunities Fund. The grant is funded by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation and administered by the Wildlife Conservation Society. It focuses on implementing and promoting state Wildlife Action Plans. State Wildlife Action Plans assess the condition of each state's wildlife and habitats, identify the problems they face, and outline the actions needed to conserve them over the long term. For more information on Wisconsin's Wildlife Action Plan visit <http://dnr.wi.gov/org/land/er/wwap>.

This grant provides important funding for the MRPHA project. Much of the funding will go toward on-the-ground management, such as tree and brush clearing, invasive species control, and prairie planting. An exciting part of this grant includes funding for outreach activities that had been lacking. Planning is underway for these activities, but may

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include more field trips and workshops, new brochures and other materials, and presentations to community groups and schools. Other funds will be used for staff and equipment. This will help us educate communities about the unique natural resources in this area, improve the quality of natural areas, and help willing landowners accomplish their land management goals.

## Friends of the Platte River

**Tammy Enz, Project Coordinator**

Even as the flood waters of the Platte River spilled over the banks of the river on the last weekend of April, our partners and volunteers busily handed out empty bottles for rural residents in the Platte River watershed to collect their well water and have it tested. This well-testing effort was made possible through a collaboration of the Friends of the Platte River, Southwest Badger RC&D, and UW-Extension. Funding was provided in part by a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources River Planning Grant and a donation from the Grant County Land and Water Conservation Committee. This funding provided participants with a ten dollar discount on the cost of the water testing. Seventy-six households participated in the well testing program. Results of the tests will be handed out to participants at an educational seminar presented by drinking water experts on May 29 at 7:00 p.m. at the Platteville Middle School.

A large crowd of Platte River enthusiasts gathered for our annual meeting in March and were treated to a presentation by Jeff Hastings about the exciting work Trout Unlimited is completing in the Driftless Area region. We were excited to gain several new members and to elect new people to the board of directors.

Plans are underway for a summer canoe trip on the Platte River for our members. In addition the group will participate in an organizational assessment with the River Alliance of Wisconsin. In the meantime, everyone is excited about getting back outside with a fishing pole, a paddle or a pair of binoculars to enjoy spring in the Platte River watershed.

## Tourism and Recreation Updates

**Angie Wright, Administrative Coordinator**

Southwest Badger RC&D secured an additional \$27,000 grant from the La Crosse Community Foundation for the La Crosse Human Powered Trails project. Human Powered Trails (HPT) is a non-profit organization that is building and maintaining socially and environmentally sustainable shared-use trails in La Crosse, Wisconsin. To date, Southwest Badger has secured \$42,000 in grants for the trail project.

The Tri-County Bicycle Map covering Grant, Iowa, and Lafayette counties is nearing completion. The map will be sent to the printer in early June. Southwest Badger RC&D is working with UW-Extension, tourism professionals, and local bicyclists on the map. Funding for the map will come from the County Board of Supervisors in all three counties, the Grant County Tourism Council, Mineral Point Tourism, City of Shullsburg, and Southwest Badger RC&D.

## Upcoming Events

**May 29, 2008 - 7:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.**

Well Water Education

Platteville Middle School, Platteville, Wisconsin

**June 6, 2008 - 10:00 a.m.**

Southwest Badger Council Meeting

Richland Center, Wisconsin

**June 21, 2008 - 8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.**

The Nature Conservancy Field Trip

Barneveld, Wisconsin

**September 11-12, 2008**

Wisconsin Association of RC&Ds

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

**September 16, 2008**

Switchgrass Field Tours

Platteville, Wisconsin

**October 3-4, 2008 - 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.**

Light on the Land Forestry Field Day

Norskadalen Nature and Heritage Center

Coon Valley, Wisconsin

For more information on the events above contact Southwest Badger

RC&D at (608) 723-6377 ext. 4 or email [swbadger@mhtc.net](mailto:swbadger@mhtc.net)

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# Southwest Badger Receives Regional Kudos

The Southwest Badger RC&D Council was awarded the 2008 Outstanding Performance by a Council award for the North Central Association of RC&D Councils. The North Central Region includes the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. The award was presented at the 2008 North Central Association of R&D Councils Annual Conference in Rochester, Minnesota in March. Congratulations to all Southwest Badger Council Members for receiving this much overdue award. This award is recognition for all the time and effort you put into the Council.



Steven Bertjens, Mark Shepard, Don Bina, and Marc Schultz with the "Outstanding Performance by a Council" award.

If you have comments, suggestions, contributions, or ideas for the newsletter, please contact Angie Wright at (608)723-6377 ext. 114 or email [angie.wright@rcdnet.net](mailto:angie.wright@rcdnet.net).



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# Making Things Happen!