



# Badger Report

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

November 2008

## Cassville Power Plant Rejection Won't Slow Council's Biomass Initiatives

The Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (PSC) has rejected a proposal by Wisconsin Power and Light Company (WPL), a subsidiary of Alliant Energy Corporation, to expand its existing Nelson Dewey Generating Station in Cassville, Wisconsin, to meet the future energy needs of its customers. In a 3-0 oral decision, the PSC denied WPL's Certificate of Public Convenience and Necessity (CPCN) application. The PSC stated that construction and operation of Nelson Dewey Unit 3 would not be the lowest cost option for customers. The PSC also expressed concern regarding Nelson Dewey 3's potential greenhouse gas emissions and its impact upon the environment. The proposed \$1.3 billion electrical generation project would have utilized 400,000 tons of biomass per year.

Alliant Energy has been an outstanding partner of the Southwest Badger RC&D Council providing \$30,000 for Switchgrass Establishment and Harvesting Demonstrations and \$12,000 for the True Costs of Harvesting Woody Biomass project. The following are some recent comments from Bill Johnson, Alliant Energy Biofuels Manager. "We are very happy with our relationship with the Southwest Badger RC&D; we've worked on important projects together and learned that the region has abundant natural resources and the productive capacity to provide a sustainable and

environmentally responsible supply of biofuel for projects the size of Nelson-Dewey 3. While disappointed with the PSC's decision we remain committed to learning how local resources can help meet our customers growing need for energy. Economic development is closely linked to the availability of energy; locally available renewable energy creates additional benefits that we were only beginning to better understand and quantify. Our understanding of how we can provide for cleaner sources of highly reliable energy is closely linked to the work being done by the Southwest Badger RC&D. I commend the RC&D Council for their support of this important work and am hopeful our relationship can continue into the future."

The rejection of the Cassville power plant is by no means the end to Southwest Badger's biomass initiatives, if anything our workload in biomass utilization should increase as the public awareness of biomass energy has soared. The silver lining to the PSC's decision is that it makes a strong statement that future energy production in Wisconsin will be focused on renewable fuels. Southwest Badger RC&D will continue to be a leader in biomass production and utilization and we look forward to working with existing and new partners to develop green energy initiatives for southwest Wisconsin.

**Southwest Badger RC&D Council, Inc.**  
**Annual Meeting**  
**December 5, 2008**  
**Meeting: 10:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.**  
**Ramada (White House)**  
**1450 Veterans Drive, Richland Center**

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# Staff Reports

## Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area

*Katie Abbott, Project Coordinator*

While the bulk of the field season is over, there are still some projects starting or finishing up this fall. The Nature Conservancy is conducting another large floodplain restoration project. They are removing excess sediment from a quarter-mile stretch of the East Branch Pecatonica River. The sediment is being removed in order to return the river segment to a more natural condition, one in which the river can reach its floodplain. This will help mitigate flooding events as well as provide important wetland habitat. An interesting part of this project is the involvement of University of Wisconsin researchers. Students played a key role in not only planning the latest restoration work but also in assessing its environmental benefits by researching soil conditions, stream flows, water levels and water temperature. Several other stream projects were completed on private lands along German Valley and Gordon Creeks. These projects included tree removal and bank shaping and were funded through a variety of grants.

The Prairie Enthusiasts and I are also spending money on new private lands from the Wildlife Conservation Society grant they received earlier this year. We looked at several sites and have chosen four on which to spend \$5,000 by cutting out trees and brush and controlling invasive species in prairie remnants and grasslands. The Fish and Wildlife Service's Private Lands Program may be able to help us do even more work on these properties.

I helped three landowners sign up for the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) program, and have two more sign-ups in progress. However, SAFE and Conservation Reserve Program sign-ups are temporarily on hold until the new Farm Bill rules are written. One rule that will change is the crop history dates, moving them from 1996-2001 to 2002-2007. This may help some landowners become eligible, while others may lose their eligibility. Once we have the new rules in place, we can continue the sign-ups. Melissa Keenan (Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologist) and I are planning a large postcard mailing to promote SAFE.

The DNR Southwest Wisconsin Grassland and Stream Conservation Area project proposal is moving along as well. In late August the DNR held four public meetings to update residents on their plans and receive comments. I was able to attend all four meetings to put up the MRPFA display and answer questions. I

## **Biomass: True Costs of Harvesting Woody Biomass**

*Aaron Wright, Biomass Forester*

also assisted with a tour of the southwest Wisconsin area for DNR employees, leading site visits in the MRPHA. Finally, the DNR and I teamed up to give presentations to two local Township Comprehensive Planning Committees to discuss the importance of prairie and grasslands, the MRPHA project, and the DNR project. Both townships were interested and open to including some of our information in their Comprehensive Plans.

I helped organize three events in the last few months. In mid-August the Wisconsin Bird Conservation Initiative, Department of Natural Resources, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), and Pheasants Forever sponsored a workshop focusing on grassland birds and their management needs. Nearly 60 local land managers attended, many from the Farm Services Agency and NRCS. The first half of the day consisted of presentations at Folklore Village near Dodgeville, while the second half consisted of a field trip through the MRPHA.

In September, Pheasants Forever Farm Bill Biologist Melissa Keenan and I organized a small workshop on pheasant habitat management. Though the group was small, they were interested, engaged, and seemed to enjoy the workshop.

Also in September, with the help of the Blue Mounds Area Project (BMAP) and other MRPHA partners, we held a landowner appreciation picnic. Despite the gloomy weather, over 40 landowners, partners, and BMAP members joined us to socialize, eat, and celebrate conservation. The purpose of the picnic was to thank all the partners and landowners for their dedication to and support of conservation and to celebrate recent accomplishments. Two awards were given out: Mary Rosenthal received BMAP's Bur Oak Award and Eddie and Cheryle Goplin received the MRPHA Landowner of the Year award. These landowners dedicate an enormous amount of time, energy, and resources not only to their own properties but also to volunteering on local nature preserves. It's because of landowners like these that the prairies and grasslands of the MRPHA persist, and it was a pleasure to give them the recognition they deserve.

The True Costs of Woody Biomass project marked its first anniversary this fall. Since September I have marked two more biomass harvests - a 40 acre site in Sauk County and a 23 acre site in Grant County. One of the two harvests that began during the summer was completed while the other is on hold until crops are harvested so that logs can be landed and processed in the crop field. Harvest operations have begun at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineer's Goose Island property. This is another black locust harvest and should be completed by this winter. In addition to working with biomass sites I have also marked 29 acres of other timber harvests.

In early October I gave a presentation about the woody biomass project at the Light on the Land Forestry Field Day. The landowners in attendance at the workshop were very engaged and showed a lot of interest in the project. A couple even showed interest in having a biomass harvest on their property.

In mid-October Patrick and I participated in a group that was checking on Best Management Practices (BMPs) after timber harvests. The group included private landowners, loggers, and DNR employees. BMPs are guidelines and practices used to protect water quality and prevent soil erosion during a timber harvest. Some of the items BMPs address are forest roads, skid trails, log landings, and no cut zones around water bodies. We visited a couple biomass harvests and they passed inspection.

In late October I attended the Woody Biomass Harvesting, Extraction, and Processing meeting sponsored by the Sustainable Resources Institute which was held in Keshena, Wisconsin. The first half of the day was filled with speakers talking about their different perspectives on biomass. We heard from people doing studies on biomass harvesting, from loggers harvesting biomass, loggers thinking about harvesting biomass, and biomass end users. Wisconsin State Forester Paul DeLong also spoke about the new Wisconsin biomass harvesting guidelines. The second half of the day consisted of watching biomass demonstrations in the field. It was interesting to watch the different machines made specifically for biomass extraction work in the woods.

# Driftless Area Initiative DAI Completes Major Projects

*David C. Wilson DAI Coordinator*

The Driftless Area Initiative (DAI) has recently completed a variety of major projects related to our mission to “unite organizations and individuals within the Driftless Area of the Upper Mississippi River Basin for collaborative action to enhance and restore this region’s ecology, economy, and cultural resources in a balanced, integrated fashion.”

These projects were funded through a \$260,000 agricultural appropriation sponsored by Senator Herb Kohl (D-WI). All projects completed through this funding relate to the planning, promotion, and implementation of natural resource conservation on private lands within the 4-state un-glaciated Driftless Area. Additional matching contributions of more than \$80,500 and 4,500 hours of in-kind efforts added significantly to the outcomes of these Driftless Area Initiative projects:

- Development of resource analyses and maps to help guide DAI and partner projects and priorities.
- Completed model identifying areas of highest erosion risk.
- Development and publication of “Managing from a Landscape Perspective: A guide for integrating forest interior bird habitat considerations and forest management planning in the Driftless Area of the Upper Mississippi River Basin”
- Worked with regional partners to organize and execute landowner and professional training workshops focused on integrating sustainable woodland management with regional bird habitat needs and forestry priorities.
- Completed a managed grazing assistance program focused on sub-watersheds in Minnesota draining directly to Lake Pepin on the Mississippi River.
- Facilitated a variety of watershed restoration and planning efforts.

- Provided information about water quality and land-use issues through many workshops and forums.
- Developed a website including internet mapping capabilities - [www.driftlessareainitiative.org](http://www.driftlessareainitiative.org).

Another major accomplishment was the development and production of a DAI Educational DVD and Resource Kit addressing natural resource issues of



the Driftless Area and the Upper Mississippi River Basin. The video includes guest interviews addressing selected issues and many scenic segments showing the natural beauty of the Driftless

landscape. The Resource Kit contains a selection of documents and information including: DAI history, history of Driftless Area resources, stock photos, sample press releases, maps depicting Driftless Area resources and custom analyses of priority resources and areas, DAI publications, and DAI contacts. The special 2-disc set is now available by contacting David Wilson at 608-723-6377 ext. 135 or by email at [David.Wilson@rcdnet.net](mailto:David.Wilson@rcdnet.net).

## Forest Stewardship Initiative

*Patrick Dayton, Forester*

The beautiful fall season has come back to Wisconsin; and it is a good time to be a forester and to be out in the woods. Speaking of this beautiful season, the weather for the Light on the Land Forestry Field Days held at Norskedalen Nature and Heritage Center was great this year. Attendees of the event were treated to nice weather and quality presentations and exhibits by presenters. The event did not draw as large of a crowd this year as it has in the past but the people that came were energetic and exceedingly interested in managing the forests on their property. Thanks to everyone - foresters, exhibitors, volunteers, attendees, and Norskedalen staff - for making the event a success.

As I stated before, this is a great time for me to be out in the field doing work; but I also try to schedule office time to assist landowners with understanding programs and cost-share opportunities that can benefit their forests. While the State of Wisconsin unfortunately had to cut back on cost-sharing forest practices due to budget constraints, the new forestry emphasis of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Environmental Qualities Incentive Program (EQIP) has been timely and a great boon to woodland activities. The 2008 Farm Bill emphasizes the importance of forestry and the effects are already being seen in local conservation offices. Foresters have the training and expertise to help NRCS with this new endeavor. In the past I have worked with the responsive and skilled NRCS staff in the Viroqua office with EQIP signups for tree planting, timber stand improvement, and forest trail rehabilitation. I look forward to deepening and developing our relationship with NRCS as we all work for sustainable natural resource management.

## **Forest Invasive Species Project**

*Dan Bohlin, Invasive Species Specialist*

In early October I participated in the two-day Light on the Land Forestry Field Day at Norskedalen Nature and Heritage Center near Coon Valley. The site is heavily infested with glossy buckthorn, bush honeysuckle and some garlic mustard. Each day I spoke to about 20 attendees who wanted to learn more about exotic invasive plants threatening our woodlands. I also had an exhibit set up with posters and handouts that were available to anyone interested in invasive plants information. Throughout each day attendees approached me to get more information on their particular woodland situation and engaged in some pretty detailed discussions.

Several members of the Coon Valley Conservation Club (CVCC) heard me speak at Norskedalen and asked me to tour their 120-acre property and speak to their members, which I did in late October. The CVCC property is quite diverse with some members engaged in several ongoing conservation projects, one of which focuses on eliminating black locust

infestations on the property. Bush honeysuckle has also infested the area. In addition, the early summer flooding deposited garlic mustard seeds along a streambank and garlic mustard is now germinating in the riparian area. About 40 CVCC members were present for my follow-up talk on the invasive plant problem on their property and in the Coon Valley area.

During this quarter I also visited landowner properties in Vernon, Iowa and Grant counties. A landowner in Iowa County with about 60 acres has been dealing with buckthorn and also has bush honeysuckle infestations. A landowner with 60 acres in Vernon County near Coon Valley has a woodland overrun with bush honeysuckle, black locust, along with some garlic mustard and a small infestation of buckthorn. A woodland owner with 120 acres in Grant County near Ellenboro has a riparian area that is heavily infested with mature honeysuckle, some autumn olive and quite a bit of eastern red cedar. The last landowner -- in Grant County, near Platteville -- has 580 acres that he has been aggressively clearing of brush and reestablishing grass cover. Some of his woodland areas are infested with bush honeysuckle with pockets of Japanese barberry also scattered throughout the wooded areas. The barberry infestation is the most extensive I've seen in any wooded area and is probably due to the property's close proximity to Platteville where the shrub is used extensively for landscaping.

## **Light on the Land Forestry Field Day**

The 5th Annual Light on the Land Forestry Field Day was held on October 3rd and 4th at the Norskedalen Nature Center near Coon Valley. Southwest Badger RC&D Council organized the event which attracted approximately 175 landowners. Eleven workshops and five logging demonstrations were offered each day. The Kickapoo Woods Cooperative and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provided staffing and financial sponsorship of the event. Other financial sponsors included the Driftless Area Initiative, Alliant Energy, USDA-NRCS, UW Extension, Norskedalen Nature Center and Three Rivers Forestry Equipment.

## Friends of the Platte River

*Tammy Enz, Project Coordinator*

Fishing and boating enthusiasts will find improved access to the Platte River this fall. Grant County's Banfield Park boat launch was improved and the boat launch area was dredged to provide better access for boats. Many thanks to the partners who helped with the planning and funding of this project to make it a success.

Other fall activities included a day of benchmarking and planning for the board of directors of the Friends of the Platte River. On September 20, Allison Werner from Wisconsin River Alliance facilitated this valuable workshop in the newly refurbished Potosi Brewery in Potosi, Wisconsin.

Ongoing projects continue to move forward including a sediment study of the Platte River with UW-Madison students. Students have been out to the river several times this fall as they work toward understanding sedimentation rates and deposition patterns in the lower Platte River.

## Tourism and Recreation Updates

*Angie Wright, Administrative Coordinator*

The Cycle Southwest Wisconsin project was awarded a \$40,000 Joint Effort Marketing (JEM) grant from the Wisconsin Department of Tourism. The grant will be used to develop an interactive website focused on bicycling and tourism in Grant, Iowa, and Lafayette counties, print additional Southwest Wisconsin Cycling maps, and to market the area in regional and national print media.

## Upcoming Events

**December 5, 2008 - 10:00 a.m. - noon**  
Southwest Badger RC&D Annual Meeting  
Ramada Inn, Richland Center, Wisconsin

**February 9-10, 2009**  
National Assoc. of RC&Ds Leadership Forum  
Washington, DC

**March 6, 2009 - 10:00 a.m. - noon.**  
Quarterly Southwest Badger Council Meeting  
Richland Center, Wisconsin

**June 5, 2009 - 10:00 a.m. - noon**  
Quarterly Southwest Badger Council Meeting  
Richland Center, Wisconsin

**June 14-17, 2009**  
2009 National RC&D Conference  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**September 4, 2009 - 10:00 a.m. - noon**  
Quarterly Southwest Badger Council Meeting  
Richland Center, Wisconsin

**December 4, 2009 - 10:00 a.m. - noon**  
Quarterly Southwest Badger Council Meeting  
Richland Center, 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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# Switchgrass Harvesting Results Provide

On November 5th and 10th Southwest Badger staff and UW Madison graduate students conducted harvest sampling on the 62 acres of warm season grass demonstrations planted this spring. A forage harvester from the UW Lancaster Research farm was utilized to harvest a 66 square foot area of each two acre plot. There are currently six farmers participating in the project. Five 2-acre demonstration plots were planted on each farm. Three of the five plots received difference herbicide treatments, one plot used oats as a companion crop, and the last plot was planted with a diverse prairie mix. Cave-In-Rock switchgrass was used on all demonstrations, except the diverse prairie plot.

Although we have not completed the analysis of the harvesting data, we can make the following initial conclusions:

- It does not appear economically viable to harvest switchgrass in the first year of production even when utilizing the best agronomic practices.
- A planting rate of eight pounds of switchgrass per acre appears to be a very sufficient planting rate for biomass production.



Southwest Badger Biomass Specialist, Mike Lieurance harvesting switchgrass with the forage harvester.

- No-tilled fields received less weed pressure than tilled fields resulting in higher grass yields.
- Plots receiving pre-emergence herbicide provided the best yields on all farms.
- The herbicide “Journey” applied at 11 ounces per acre provided excellent weed control.

## Biomass Buffers Can Increase Farm Income, Produce Biomass, and Cleaner Water While Reducing Flood Risks, Crop Losses

Better Environmental Solutions has released a Biomass Flood Reduction Buffer Plan to help farmers restore buffers in floodplains to reduce flooding, provide biomass for power plants, increase farm income, and protect water quality. Under the Biomass Buffer Plan farmers would plant biomass buffers of native grasses like switchgrass, fast-growing willows and/or poplars to replace crops that are flooded each year. These buffers would be managed to optimize for flood protection, water quality, and biomass production for power plants and cellulosic ethanol production. “We know buffers provide wildlife habitat, clean our water and reduce flooding,” said Tom Thrall, former state biologist of the Natural Resource Conservation Service. “The good news is that utilities and the state can contract with farmers to convert these floodplains to biomass.”

The Better Enviro analysis shows that farmers can make more from Biomass Buffers at \$50/ton than with \$4/bushel corn production. “We know that buffers and conservation must pay farmers, or they won’t stay,” said Better Enviro president, Brett Hulsey. “Wisconsin has lost a higher percentage of Conservation Reserve Program lands than any other Midwest states and biomass buffers may be our best chance to protect our streams and produce fuel.”

A 2007 Better Enviro report, Cellulose Prairie, showed that Wisconsin has enough biomass to displace half its coal use, while restoring critical prairie habitat and reducing flooding. Sixty percent of Wisconsin’s renewable energy comes from biomass and wood now, 10 times more than wind and solar combined.

Better Environmental Solutions is an energy and environmental consulting firm. For more on the Biomass Buffer proposal, go to [www.BetterEnviro.Com](http://www.BetterEnviro.Com).

# Deadline Approaching for Plan of Work Submissions

The Southwest Badger RC&D Council is currently developing its 2009 Annual Plan of Work. The Council welcomes projects from any organization, business, community or individual located in the Southwest Badger Area. Projects must address one of the Council's main goals which include:

- 1) Natural resources conservation, improvement, and protection;
- 2) Development and enhancement of the local economy through wise use of local resources; and
- 3) Enhancement of Southwest Wisconsin communities.

Projects may request financial assistance, technical assistance, partnership activities or a combination of all three. To submit a project for consideration, a project measure request form must be completed. The project measure request form can be obtained by contacting the Southwest Badger RC&D Council Office by phone at (608) 723-6377 ext. 4 or by email at [swbadger@mhtc.net](mailto:swbadger@mhtc.net). Project measure request forms are due at the Council office by December 4, 2008. The Council will evaluate all new projects measures and develop a draft 2009 Plan of Work at the Southwest Badger Annual Meeting to be held on December 5 in Richland Center.

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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