



Friends of Governor Dodge State Park

4175 State Highway 23 • Dodgeville, Wisconsin 53533

• www.friendsofgovdodge.org

Supporting Recreation, Education and Environmental Stewardship

SPRING 2014 NEWSLETTER

2013 Heart of the Park Photo Contest Winners!

Our 2013 Heart of the Park Photo Contest was a resounding success! Prizes were awarded for the winning photos submitted for each of the four seasons. Photos shown below.



Spring – photo by Bob Thuli



Summer – photo by Kristen Klein



Fall – photo by Alyssa Thuli



Winter – photo by Jenna Thuli

Letter from the President

The Friends of Governor Dodge are always looking for opportunities to enhance our park for visitors. Each year, we use some of our funds to complete a project from our lists of long- and short-term goals to improve the park. This year's project is upgrading the park amphitheater.

The Friends group has funded the summer naturalist program at Governor Dodge for several years and many of the naturalist programs are held at the amphitheater. The years have taken their toll, and the lighting, electrical wiring, benches and stage are all in need of upgrading and repair. The Friends are funding the following improvements:

- ❖ An upgrade of the lighting, wiring and outlets with LED-efficient materials
- ❖ The purchase of a portable sound system and projector
- ❖ Repair and staining of the benches, stage and presenter's podium

Our park visitors help fund these projects, with the majority of money coming from the sale of firewood supplied by the Friends group. Purchasing your firewood at the park not only helps fund park improvements, it also is critical for slowing the spread of the Emerald Ash Borer. We welcome ideas and volunteers for this year's and future projects and invite you to join us for our monthly work days. We also encourage you to attend the summer naturalist programs. Visit our website at www.friendsofgovdodge.org or call the park office at 608-935-2315 for more information on dates and times. **We look forward to you joining us this summer!**

Enjoy Our Park!

2014 Summer Naturalist Programs

Again this summer our naturalist programs will be offered every Saturday from Memorial Day through Labor Day. **Returning naturalist, Gayl Stewart**, is planning a wide array of programs. By popular demand, programs returning this summer include:

- ❖ Bat Night and White-Nose Syndrome
- ❖ Black Bears of Wisconsin
- ❖ Universe in the Park
- ❖ Soaring Eagle Wildlife Rehabilitation Center - *with live raptors*

Restoring the Park's Prairies

Located in the non-glaciated Driftless Area of southwest Wisconsin, Governor Dodge State Park is best known for its steep hills, towering rock outcroppings and expansive woodlands. But there are also many acres of prairie as well. Did you know that in the early 1800s there were millions of acres of prairie across parts of Wisconsin, Iowa and Minnesota? It is estimated that of the 2.1 million acres of Wisconsin that were native prairie when Europeans arrived more than 200 years ago, less than 1% of that native prairie remains today.

So what IS a "prairie"? Prairie is a native ecosystem dominated by grasses and flowering plants. Other than occasional bur oaks and scattered shrubby thickets, few woody plants are found there. If an area has prairie flora mixed in with scattered trees, the landscape is referred to as a savanna and the trees are usually oaks. In addition to a varied plant community, prairies have diverse and specialized fauna, especially invertebrates, grassland birds, and prairie and grassland reptiles and amphibians.

As you drive along the road toward the Twin Valley campground, you will see a wide expanse of restored prairie on the south side of the road. On the north side, you will see extensive work being done to clear out the invasive brush species (mostly autumn olive and honeysuckle). This is the first step in restoring a prairie ecosystem.

Why is it important to remove some trees and brush from the ecosystem? There are several reasons:

- ❖ Many bird species require grasslands to live and reproduce. Of the 233 confirmed breeding bird species in Wisconsin, 105 species regularly or occasionally use Wisconsin grasslands for breeding activities. Grassland birds have declined more than any other suite of birds in North America.
- ❖ Most prairie plants need full sunlight to survive. The shade that occurs under a developing tree canopy can eliminate prairie plant species.
- ❖ Trees and brush provide refuges for common predators of grassland birds. Also, many grassland birds will bypass grasslands that are chopped into small "compartments" by tree lines and plantations as they seek a place to nest.
- ❖ Rare butterflies, such as the state-endangered regal fritillary, won't cross woody barriers and are thus restricted to rapidly shrinking remnant prairie habitat patches.

Historically, native grasslands were maintained primarily by frequent fires, either started by lightning strikes or by Native Americans who burned large areas to produce food for game or to aid hunting/gathering activities. After European settlement, the massive fires that could burn thousands of acres were reduced, controlled or eliminated. When the fires stopped, the forests started to move in.

In addition to clearing brush and trees, Governor Dodge is also doing prescribed burns of our prairies to replicate nature's way of maintaining those grasslands. We hope you take time to explore our prairie areas and experience the prairie ecosystem of pre-settlement Wisconsin.

Thank You to Katie Abbot of the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area
for providing much of the material for this article!



Friends Membership Renewal Form

Please mail this completed form along with your check to:

Friends of Governor Dodge State Park, 4175 Hwy. 23 North, Dodgeville, WI 53533

Name _____

Address _____

street

city/state/zip

Phone () _____
area code

E-Mail _____

Membership Options

- Individual \$10.00
- Family \$20.00
- Corporate/business \$50.00
- Additional donation \$ _____
- I am unable to join the Friends today, but I would like to make a donation \$ _____
- Please send me information about the Friends of Governor Dodge Endowment Fund.



All donations are tax deductible!

I would like to get involved with Friends projects. Please contact me about:

- Invasive species removal efforts
- Firewood preparation & sales
- Visitor education & interpretive programs
- Volunteer recruitment
- Nature Center planning and fundraising
- Other _____