

Lower Wisconsin River

Riverway Board hears about delay in Lone Rock Bridge construction project

By GILLIAN POMPLUN

The Lower Wisconsin State Riverway Board (LWSRB) learned of a delay in Wisconsin Department of Transportation's (WDOT) project to replace the bridge over the Wisconsin River at Lone Rock at their May 11 meeting in Muscoda. The delay is caused by the extended period of high water on the river this spring.

"I've been telling folks that the flows on the Wisconsin River this spring have been high water, but not big water," LWSRB Executive Director Mark Cupp told the board. "Nevertheless, it was the extended duration of the high water that eroded the causeway Kramer Construction was building at the site and is causing delay in the project timeline."

Cupp said that he has been attending progress meetings for the project, and learned that the closure of Highway 133 has been pushed back from Memorial Day to at least the Fourth of July, and possibly later. The closure of the south channel of the river will remain in effect as Kramer works to rebuild the causeway that will allow construction of the south bridge abutment before work can begin.

"The high water caused scouring on the south bank, so Kramer is focusing their efforts on the north channel part of the construction right now," Cupp explained. "They will need to rebuild the causeway on the south end of the project."

Cupp said that after the high flows through late April and early May, with flow rates at times in excess of 46,000 cubic-feet-per-second (cfs), rates had slowed down to about 17,000 cfs by May 2. But since then, the flows have jumped back up due to precipitation events in the northern part of the river basin. As of May 10, flows over the dam at Prairie du Sac had jumped back up to about 30,000 cfs.

Field trip

Earlier in the afternoon,

some members of the board had attended a field trip to a Nature Conservancy property - the Spring Green Nature Preserve. LWSRB attendees included President Gigi LaBudde, Randy Poelma, Ritchie Brown, and Dan Hillberry. In total, about 20 people attended the event.

The Spring Green Nature Preserve is a property just to the east of Spring Green, and to the north of the Wisconsin River. The 1,400-acre parcel was acquired in a series of 14 purchases. Half of the funding for the acquisitions came from Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund dollars, and the other half from private donations to the Nature Conservancy.

Spaul explained that when the Nature Conservancy puts together a funding package for a property acquisition, they take 20 percent of funds raised and invest them in a long-term endowment to assure there will be resources available for management of the property. In addition, their work has also been funded by state and federal grants, Turkey Stamp funds, NRCS EQIP grants and U.S. Forest Service grants.

"This area is a dedicated State Natural Area on a Wisconsin desert that was formed through glacial deposits," Nature Conservancy Director of Land Management Hannah Spaul told the group. "The Preserve harbors some of Wisconsin's rarest plant communities, including sand prairie, dry bluff prairie, and black oak barrens. Due to changes in land use, all these communities, which once covered thousands of acres across the state, have almost completely disappeared."

Known as the Wisconsin Desert, the preserve is a place where forest meets bluff, and bluff levels off into plains and dunes.

Spaul told the group that fire is a key management tool her team of nine land managers employs on the property. She said that typically, her group burns the lower portions of the property, when

there is still snow on the bluffs in late March or early April. The use of fire is a regenerative tool that enables the species to survive and thrive, and helps to control invasive species at the site. She said that public and private groups in Wisconsin combined are currently using fire to manage about 50,000 acres in the state, and said that it should be 250,000 acres.

"Everything we do here is about partnerships," Spaul emphasized. "When we burn, the staff is about half Nature Conservancy staff, and the other half is drawn from DNR, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and the Ho-Chunk Nation."

Spaul said that the Nature Conservancy has had a long-term partnership with the LWSRB, who has renewed the permit for the Conservancy's work multiple times throughout the years since the board was formed in 1989.

"For many, it was somewhat shocking when the Conservancy cleared the bluffs of the red cedars growing there, because they were used to it and thought it had always been that way," Cupp said. "Actually, the bluffs were historically home to prairie plant communities, and clearing the cedars allowed those communities once again to emerge and thrive."

As the group walked through the bottomlands at the property, an experimental station came into view. Spaul explained that the station represents a study about the impacts of climate change on desert habitats like the one at the Preserve.

"The species that we are fostering on this property prefer dry conditions," Spaul pointed out. "Initial results of our study indicate that dry sites like this one are very resilient to the impacts of climate change."

Spaul walked with the group to the upper areas where her team is managing for invasive species at a landscape scale. The work

on the upper portions of the Preserve has been funded through a U.S. Forest Service (USFS) 'Landscape Scale Restoration' grant.

The USFS program promotes collaborative, science-based restoration of priority forest landscapes and furthers priorities identified in State Forest Action plans or equivalent restoration strategy. Landscape Scale Restoration

projects cross multiple jurisdictions, including Tribal, state and local government, and private forest land, to address large-scale issues such as wildfire risk reduction, watershed protection and restoration, and the spread of invasive species, insect infestation and disease.

"The goal of our work in this upper portion of the Preserve is to allow mobility of

species from below into this upper portion if it is a suitable habitat for them," Spaul explained. "If we can demonstrate good results on this property, we hope to be able to secure additional grant funding for more projects across the state."

In other business

In other business, the board:

- heard that the June meeting of the board will be on a Voyageur Canoe trip on the river
- heard that Cupp will release the schedule for the 2023 Voyageur Canoe trips open to the public in the next few weeks
- heard that Hillary Hundt, a UW-Madison graduate student in Geography, has completed a Masters Degree project comparing land use in the southern tier of townships in Richland County from the 1930s to the present
- heard from former LWSRB president Gerry Dorscheid about plans to celebrate the 100th Anniversary of the Village of Arena, on Saturday, May 13
- approved placement of a sign marking the location of the first of three sites the Village of Arena had occupied
- heard a presentation about carbon credits offered by C6 Scientific to landowners in Southwest Wisconsin from Arena resident Kathy Stoltz
- approved a permit for Crawford County Town of Marietta resident Teddy Beinborn to build a shed on his property.



HANNAH SPAUL, Nature Conservancy Director of Land Management, talks with field trip attendees at the Spring Green Nature Preserve. Spaul told the group about what makes the State Natural Area so special, and the work her team does to maintain and improve habitat for desert loving species at the site.



KRAMER CONSTRUCTION has resumed work on the north end of the Lone Rock Bridge replacement work site. High water can once again be observed as the Wisconsin River responds to precipitation events in the upper parts of its basin, but nowhere near levels seen a few weeks earlier.

Crawford County

Emergency Management pursues recovery funding

By GILLIAN POMPLUN

Crawford County Emergency Management Director Jim Hackett told the Independent-Scout on Monday, May 15, that the process of computing flooding damage assessments in the county has been completed. He said that the kinds and levels of funding available to those who experienced damages due to recent historic flooding on the Mississippi River will also depend on damages experienced in other counties and their municipalities up and down the river.

"To qualify for a presidential disaster declaration and FEMA funding, the damages in all jurisdictions impacted would have to meet the \$7 million threshold," Hackett explained. "Crawford County's flooding damages have been computed at \$1.1 million, but we're still waiting on county's to our north to compute their damages."

Hackett explained that for each county and municipality, the formula to qualify for FEMA disaster recovery funds is to multiply the 2020 census numbers by \$1.77. He said that the county, as well as the city of Prairie du Chien, the villages of DeSoto, Ferryville and Lynxville, and the towns of Freeman and Prairie du Chien have met the threshold. Only the Town of Bridgeport did not meet the threshold.

"State Senator Brad Pfaff and State Representative Loren Oldenburg have been plugged into the flood response and now the recovery effort every step of the way," Hackett said. "Their assistance has proved instrumental in helping us to secure the resources we needed to respond to, and now to recover from this flooding emergency."

Other funding

Hackett explained that in addition to FEMA disaster recovery funding, there are also two other potential sources of flood recovery funding for which impacted county residents could potentially qualify. Those are FEMA individual assistance funds, and Wisconsin Disaster Fund funding.

"Basically, the individual assistance funding would be only for affected homeowners," Hackett said. "It is usually something requested at the Governor's discretion when other FEMA assistance is not available."

Hackett explained that Wisconsin Disaster Funds can be made available to jurisdictions that meet the damage thresholds if federal funding is not available. To meet the threshold for state funding, the jurisdiction would have to meet an damages threshold computed by multiplying their 2020 cen-

sus number by \$4.44.

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