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PORTAGE SCOUTS PARTICIPATE IN SERVICE LEARNING

By Heidi Royal

A group of Portage area Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, and their families recently spent a brisk morning on the Sauk Prairie learning about the land inside the Badger Army Ammunition Plant fence as part of a community volunteer restoration program sponsored by The Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance.

Sporting several layers to ward off the November chill, Scouts quickly got to work removing brush from the Hillside Prairie just off of Highway 78 inside the Badger fence. The Hillside Prairie is a 15 acre remnant of the greater Sauk Prairie, a prairie which once spanned over 14,000 acres in southern Wisconsin.

Using loppers and other techniques involved in removing invasive species from restoration sites, Scouts tackled a variety of unwanted plants such as autumn olive, honeysuckle, and common buckthorn.

As both the morning and the work progressed, Scouts stopped to shed a layer or two, and to enjoy a brief snack while learning about the importance of preserving not only prairies, but the history of a place so formative to the southern Wisconsin landscape. Within their view were not only remnants of a native habitat, but foundations of the Badger munitions era, and the windbreaks planted by farming families nearly a hundred years earlier.

Scouts spent the remainder of the morning helping to reseed areas at the Hillside that were previously cleared of undesirable plants in an effort to encourage native prairie species, such as yellow coneflower, compass plant, and little bluestem, to grow!

This service learning experience at Badger is also providing Scouts with an opportunity to earn achievements toward their Conservation, Leave No Trace, and Outdoor Activity awards.

The Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance has been working with various community groups and volunteers over the last several years on cutting back invasive species from prairie remnants inside and around Badger, burning them to encourage the propagation of native species, and this year, with funding from the Greater Sauk County Community Foundation and the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin, planting native prairie seed. For more information, please visit www.saukprairievision.org.