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UW-MADISON STUDENTS BAGGED THE LIMIT

by Donna Stehling

UW graduate and doctoral candidates didn't know what they were in for, but they proved they were up to the challenge inside the former Badger Army Ammunition Plant fence.

Under direction of Professors Nancy Langston and Steve Ventura, students were on an ecology tour and camping adventure, sharing experiences as well as cooking chores. After a morning at the Aldo Leopold Center, they drove through the Narrows to Baraboo and along USH 12 past the Point of Rocks. Descending the Baraboo Range hill, they saw the expanse of the Great Sauk Prairie. They turned down CTH Z past the cemetery to STH 78 and the Dairy Forage entrance. Compacting themselves into a few vehicles, they soon found themselves inside the fence.

On the way to the Hillside Prairie, they observed a portion of the bluebird trail, numerous cement slabs and flocks of meadowlarks, bluebirds, numerous woodpeckers and lots of native prairie plants surrounded by woody invasives.

After a brief history of the land with its glaciated and driftless heritage, various occupations by various communities, highlights from the munitions production era into the transition to excess declaration, the Klug Commission and the grassroots demand for a facilitated process that forged the Badger Reuse Plan, they selected their weapons and went hunting for one easily recognized invasive species. They stalked, took aim and cut down one seed stalk after another until, in less than two hours, they ran out of bags.

It was a successful hunt. They bagged sacks of burdock seed stalks! Imagine the number of new plants that would have sprouted from even half that load!

As all emerged from the tall growth of the Hillside Prairie and gathered on the road, they began removing stick-tights from each others hair, shoulders, backs, and generally everywhere. One of the students noted this was the most successful group bonding experience she'd ever experienced. All that remained was stuffing all the bags into one vehicle, which they somehow, unbelievably, accomplished.

One of the students noted that in her country, Butterfly Weed and Milkweed are invasives they battle while Burdock is native. There they eat the root.

Prof. Ventura said he was involved with the Badger Plant long ago when Olin needed to have all the mapping data converted into something they could use for their documentation. He lopped off six different invasive woody plants, laid them out on the road and conducted a quick class in identification.

Prof. Langston emailed her appreciation, stating, "All the students were thrilled to see a bit of Badger and to participate in the larger effort to restore the landscape."

After being inside the fence, they spent some time at a local restaurant with Laura Olah, director for Citizens for Safe Water Around Badger, talking about water quality issues. They camped at Mirror Lake State Park, absorbing information about the terrain, habitat, land uses and history along the way.

If your group or organization is interested in scheduling a workday at Badger, please contact The Sauk Prairie Conservation Alliance today at info@saukprairievision.org, or visit their website at www.saukprairievision.org.