

Ben Anderson Soil and Water Technician, **Bob Micheel**, Director, Monroe County Land Conservation Department; **John Sullivan**, West Salem School Forest Outdoor Education Center; **Kevin Luepke**, Natural Resource Specialist, Natural Resources Branch (NRB), Fort McCoy; **Jessup Weichelt**, Threatened and Endangered Species Biologist, NRB, Fort McCoy; **Rikki Ratsch**, Colorado State University, serving Fort McCoy Wildlife Dept; **Joey Esterline**, Adrian Township and Monroe Co. District 15. Supervisor; **Clint Gilman**, DNR Forester, **Matt Modjeski** Conservation Warden, Tomah Ranger Station; **Brandy Enders** and **Vern Klingbeil**, Goats on the Go, Trempealeau, and La Crosse. **Connie Weedman**, Sparta Township, **Cindy Liebl** Sparta Township. **Mary Hubbard**, West Salem and Sheldon Township. **Patsy and Norb Brown** Angelo Township; **Jenny Rodriguez Moran** Sparta, **Chris Hamerla**, Regional Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator with Golden Sands Resource Conservation and Development Council; **Eric Ressel**, Soil Conservationist, **Mic Armstrong** Soil Conservation Technician, Natural Resource Conservation Service and Scribe.

Note from Scribe, not everyone above attended both the Field Trip and the core meeting. Both were well attended.

New Faces: **Brandy Enders** and **Vern Klingbeil**, Goats on the Go, Trempealeau and La Crosse County <https://www.goatsonthego.com/>

Jenny Rodriguez Moran Nature enthusiast and reporter for Monroe County Herald. Jenny is also a member of the Sparta Garden club and vendor at Sparta Farmer's Market

Chris Hamerla, Regional Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator with Golden Sands Resource Conservation and Development Council. Chris is responsible for Aquatic Invasive Species outreach and much more in Taylor, Marathon, Wood, Portage, Waupaca, Outagamie, Juneau, Adams, Waushara, Marquette, Green Lake, Columbia Counties as well as Monroe. <https://www.goldensandsrccd.org/>

Cindy Weibel lives near Cataract, Black locust was spreading on to the property from the Right of Way a couple of years ago, and with encouragement from MCISWG, The Monroe County Highway Department came and took care of the problem. Cindy would like them to come back there as there are some new ones.

Letter from **Andy Ellingson** "This group is great. I'm glad I got connected w/your group & have been able to attend the Fort McCoy ~annual event numerous times. I wonder if there's any interest in Jackson Co to have a group like this? If you hear of any, let me know. There's a need. If Jackson Co had a group, I'd be willing to sit on the committee. What happens in neighboring counties could spread to other counties. Thanks for everything you do.

Andy Ellingson. Board Member & Invasive species coordinator for the Robinson Creek Preservation Association"

Ben Anderson has taken a job as the Jackson County Forester. He is not sure yet about having time to make all MCISWG meetings, but the thought was discussed that potentially the silver lining could be for some sort of future collaboration with Jackson County who do not have a CISMA. With that in mind we decided to attempt our next meeting when Ben can still join us somewhere in Southern Jackson Co.

Luepke commented that as a resident of Jackson County this would be a good thing as it appeared invasives not being managed there.

Hamerla said Golden Sands had reached out to Jackson County about collaboration but received no reaction

Armstrong asked if we should meet near or over the county line for our next meeting which would likely be our Annual Meeting, maybe at Three Bear Lodge? **Esterline** suggested the Evergreen Supper club which received favorable noises such as ooh, ahh and yay.

Field Trip **Armstrong** asked **Gilman** to summarize the Field trip, responded saying we were looking at a well-executed coppice, designed to get good oak regeneration. Oak seed trees were left scattered throughout most of the coppice areas in order to add a seed source in addition to stump-sprouting oaks. The new harvest was compared to a 10-year-old harvest as well as adjacent uncut mature oak.

The Field trip commenced with **John Sullivan** introducing himself and the Outdoor Education Center (OEC) to the assembly of MCISWGers readying themselves for a hike around the trails that snake through the woods to the east side of the buildings. The trails have different names and we soon found ourselves on Black Oak trail when **Gilman** explained the Ring Shake of Black Oak. Red oak has none and is more valuable because of it. **Jenny Rodriguez Moran** and her son **Adajio** were along on the hike, sometimes young Adajio would hike on his own legs but quite often Mum was carrying him on one arm and her notebook in the other as she was writing a story about the meeting for the Monroe Co. Herald** We admired the new interpretive signs by **Madison Odenbach**. The Forest in several areas had been clear-cut, (coppiced) by a local logging company (Lambert Forest Products) using a tree processor. Several healthy oaks were spared, and they will serve as seed trees to aid in oak regeneration. There are also benefits to wildlife in these new full sun openings. Clint made several stops to point out the different forest types. We located some Japanese Barberry then flagged it for ID by OEC staff. Management includes herbicide treatments of invasives such as buckthorn, (both types), occasional barberry. Garlic Mustard they have been pulling by hand with different visiting groups. Clint explained how oak sequesters more carbon than other forest products, partly because it will be turned into furniture, building materials or railroad ties which will last a long time. With pulp, the CO2 is used more quickly – paper. Check out Greenfire Monroe County web site for more.

<https://www.co.monroe.wi.us/government/county-board-of-supervisors/boards-committees/climate-change-task-force/greenfire-project>

A healthy forest biomass builds carbon in root system. All in sync, even leaves sequester carbon. Rotation: Red Oak 120 years in better soil.

On the other side of the property there is old growth White pine and even Yellow Birch. John would lead a group over there to (Magic Springs). Note from Scribe. I thought I would link back to the first meeting at the OEC. Here is the link to that meeting and the notes of July 2021. However, it can a finicky website, in my opinion, so I pasted un petis peau as a p.s.*

<https://www.co.monroe.wi.us/home/showpublisheddocument/23277/637684091286370000>

Luepke. Where there is buckthorn: anything less than 6' - treat foliar. Anything taller treat with basal herbicide application. Thickets-shred and treat the regeneration with foliar applications. **Klingbeil** wondered if there would be collateral damage to other native shrubs with this scenario. Yes, there would. Vern talked about how goats have been tried on a couple of sites and after a couple of years grazing there was a 70% reduction in stems. Goats eliminate seed bank too. Goats cost per acre varies. Time frame ½ ac 3-4 days 30-40 head, rotating through small paddocks. <6' girdle buckthorn and mulberry. Doesn't hurt oak much.

Clint pointed out a dead oak on the trail and blamed Oak wilt. Red and Black oak are more susceptible. White oaks are more resistant. The group made their way through some elaborate Halloween "obstacles" on the trail much to Adagio's delight, arriving to a fine lunch of hotdogs and chips.

Nomination Vice Chair. After discussion **Gilman** accepted the position and agreed to chair any meetings **Anderson** could not make.

Outreach media Point of Contact. **Weedman** willing to help. Land Conservation Department staff will still need to do updates Facebook and the website.

Farmers Market **Esterline** reported that she had missed quite a few while moving house, but **Armstrong** had presented Invasive of the Week 3 or 4 times. The opening next year will be 13th May and MCISWG is scheduled for the mainstage for what has become an annual demonstration of invasive species. Last year Golden Sands presented on Aquatic Invasive Species. **Hamerla** made a note in his calendar to bring an aquatics display in 2023. **Armstrong** asked if we could do a sampling in the creek behind the stage to document existing aquatic life too. Yes! **Ratsch** will help put together terrestrial samples/plant press vouchers as appropriate.

Big picture goals **Anderson** had been studying the contents of our MCISWG binder and was concerned we had not been looking at Big Picture goals. **Armstrong** pointed out that at our annual meetings that was basically the agenda. **Anderson** would set an agenda for the next meeting to include a discussion of these goals.

Anderson hopes Monroe County Land Conservation Department we can do some property management trials on Tri creek and was also excited to hear about Spring Bank wanting to do some plots with different treatments on buckthorn, which they have large swaths of more or less even infestation that we could tour on a future field trip. Spring Bank has a nice pavilion with an outdoor seating area too that would make a great place for a meeting after an outdoor tour in the morning. Buckthorn is the problem there, a lot of it glossy, but common is present too. The place has a range of different soil types and distinct types of forest. Hopefully **Gilman** can be there for that one to guide us through. If we go all the way to the east end, by the sand mine, which is a fun hike we will need a good hour, I think. So that one might be a 10 30 start to sync with a one o'clock meeting.

Luepke commented their experience was the larger the plant the tougher to kill. They have many areas where the best practice is to shred them with a tracked forestry head machine, then treat the re-sprouts the following summer with foliar applications.

Klingbeil asked if there was collateral damage to other plants with this method. **Luepke** admitted there could. Would goats be a viable option? They certainly could be.

Anderson added that Tri creek was open to public. Could track costs. Great intern project run by Monroe Co. LCD. Also, future Field trip there?

Golden Sands Resource Conservation and Development Council, AIS cooperative agreement

Hamerla summarized the agreement in place with Monroe County, now renewed for a second year. Golden Sands AIS is a fantastic resource that has already helped in our efforts to disseminate information, particularly on Aquatic Invasive species but also terrestrials. They have attended several meetings as well as the May Farmers Market and the June Field day at Fort McCoy. Golden Sands RC&D is celebrating 50 Years! Congratulations

Purple loosestrife (PLS) -have equipment if anyone wants to start a biocontrol project with a group. **Hamerla** also noted that PLS does not allow for creation of muskrat habitat. Muskrats rely on cattail vegetative material, and once the cattails are choked out by PLS, muskrats will not utilize PLS for huts. Ducks build nests on top of muskrat huts, muskrat and duck scat benefits butterflies.

Someone remembered **Esterline** had hoped to get a 4 H project rolling on PLS next year.

Monroe County Invasive Species Cost Share Program: Spring Bank Association the only application 2022.

Prairie garden Esterline explained that the garden she used to tend with wildflower orientated care was under new management and was glad that many of those native plants were being incorporated into the design. The good news is we have a new “prairie garden” by the covered bridge at the Farmers Market. A small group of native planters including **Armstrong, Esterline** and **Rodriguez Moran** would be planting in an area on the library side of Beaver Creek at the entrance to the Covered Bridge. Eventually, all of the areas above the little retaining walls under the bridge will be planted by the group. **Rodriguez Moran** has been documenting the new garden starting with a seed mix the Conservation Department had earmarked to overseed the fescue-based grasses that were used in the streambank protection project completed with the City of Sparta in 2017. The mix contains native pollinator attracting species. A patch of Japanese knotweed has been hammered over the last few years by the City of Sparta Maintenance Department so that corner might also be ready for a few native plants to keep the soil covered. There is also a plan to replace the ancient Honeysuckle (invasive species) on the opposite bank with a native shrub such as a Juneberry.

Hamerla has been looking into our Phragmites situation. It is a split Prohibited listed NR-40 regulated species so Rapid response \$ should be available, but someone needs to step up as a fiscal agent. **Hamerla** would research whether the landowner could take the funds?

Someone asked who is charged with dealing with new occurrences of Prohibited (NR-40) species? Conservation Warden? **Modjeski** said he has never had a call.

Spongy Moth Komiskey sent a note: “I hate them. My one tree was saved. We used a spring treatment of Acecap AC1210 which are tree implants. We drilled holes about 4-6" apart around the trunk of the tree and inserted the poison. It flows into the leaves and kills the buggers at feeding time. We also wrapped some tree trunks in cellophane with a sticky bug paste. We caught many flies, ants and bees, but no spongy moth caterpillars seemed willing to walk into the sticky trap. Then, I got out the 7 and destroyed caterpillars and enjoyed watching them fall to their death from our apple tree. HOWEVER, although no sign of feeding last year, the whole top of our bluff was decimated with feeding this summer. DATCP offers this guidance...hope next year is a lighter infestation. It comes and goes.”

Princess tree. Someone had reported a Princess tree growing in La Crosse County and **Poelma** was asked to look at it. No update.

Jap Knotweed Ratsch. McCoy Crews went 2 rounds (herbicide applications) on the infestations off Highway A and Highway 16. Leaf samples were sent to **Matt Walrath** of the Upper Sugar River Watershed Association for accurate identification. **Armstrong** reported that Monroe

County Highway Department conducted timely sprays on populations off County Highway Z by the Poe Creek bridges, Highway F near Norwalk, Highway M near Tomah and Highway SS in Little Falls. Someone said Outstanding!

Fort McCoy. **Rasch** reported treatments of Burning bush and fall foliar treatments of Crown Vetch, and Garlic Mustard on mowed breaks and spreadable sites. Honeysuckle foliar NOW Pre timber sale, Japanese Barberry, Buckthorn, Autumn Olive, Honeysuckle to reduce seed load next winter when timber sale starts.

Updates from the front line

Brandy Enders and **Vern Klingbeil**: Goats 20 some acres buckthorn super precision seeds 2% viable because of goat chemistry, superior land management tool, Aerate, fertilize soil as they go. The more invasives you take out the more natives can come back. **Luepke** Historically Buffalo roamed the area. Goats offer a similar mimic. Some plants need fire. Great in Residential Areas. Go to the website it has some great information and don't forget to look at the goat pictures. Locally in Trempealeau and La Crosse Counties.

<https://www.goatsonthego.com/>

Eric Ressel NRCS Conservation planner. Farm Bill EQIP Program can fund Brush Management projects, favoring green techniques One current project involves 200ac impacted by Multiflora Rose and Japanese Barberry. Landowner rotating their own goat herd in tandem with what we recommend. Standalone EQIP for green e.g. Goats. **Ressel** would look into that.

Someone mentioned Taylor Land Conservation Department used goats early spring grazing, for a few years. If you have land in Managed Forest Land with goats, you need receipts.

No-one else had "updates from the front line".

*The Education Center of the West Salem School Forest and its history. In 1958 Fort McCoy offered to donate 165 Acres to any local school that wanted it if they agreed to make one improvement a year every year for 20 years. West Salem said yes. Why not Sparta? We don't know, but John remembers the early days as he would "sneak" in during shows at the neighboring outdoor movie theater. The Ag teacher in West Salem at the time was Norm Rowe, he took the bull by the horns, even purchasing a sawmill and the lodge was built. The interstate was constructed so fire lanes were added to the south and west, they were already being maintained on the north and east boundaries with Fort McCoy. A phone line was brought in. In 1978 the property transfer was finalized for \$1.00. An April referendum is in the works to try to get funding for more improvements such as an outdoor pavilion. The Outdoor Education Center (OEC) has had its ups and downs. It is a venue for teachers of Science, Geography, Social Studies,

Native American Studies and more. The Center can bring a different learning experience to the students. Minds work differently in an outdoor setting, even kids with bad reputations become involved. 4K through 8th grade come at least 2 times per year. They host other events too. A bonus after the outdoor classes of the OEC is that John Gomez the neighbor allows groups to fish bass and bluegills out of his pond, there is a pile of cane poles at the center for the purpose as well as supplies to conduct pond studies. Kids love to have mud in their hands looking at crustaceans such as caddis larvae. John led our group from the MCISWG out around the "Magic Springs trail". A board walk gets us across the rare sedge meadow, then we follow a trail which is slowly being improved so that eventually it will be handicapped accessible. Some of our group were not fully prepared for the puddles and I am told that a participant left socks to dry on the car after the event, then in the car until one day the kids refused to drive with Mom anymore because of the killer odor. Those socks finally located in the trunk, ended up in a gas station trash can! We all did experience the grandeur of 150-year-old white pines and a rare grove of yellow birch with a stream popping in and out, constantly underneath the root systems. There are several stops where students are introduced to a very unique set of natural phenomena. The plan is to open the trails to the public by moving the entrance gate and providing a parking spot. It will not be groomed for cross-country skis but will be open for walking and snowshoeing.

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Local Group Offers education and Hope for Local Ecology

Volunteer opportunities available

By Jennifer Rodriguez Moran
Contributing Writer

On a recent morning, a collection of concerned citizens pulled on their boots and flannels and got ready for another session of hiking and learning with the Monroe County Invasive Species Working Group (MCSISWG). The group meets periodically to discuss and address ecological concerns, including and especially the state of invasive and native species in the area. The group has a number of working sites and volunteer opportunities for anyone who wants to get involved.

A wildlife biologist, an endangered species biologist, land owners, goat herders, conservationists, educators, local parents, retirees and even a toddling two year old naturalist in training, were among the attendees at the meeting, led by local Outdoor Education Coordinator, John Sullivan and DNR Forester, Clint Gilman.

"We have so many local experts," gushes Connie Weedman, a local retiree and volunteer with MCSISWG, who is using her retirement to learn more about local ecology. Connie continued on about why she joined the group, "I want to learn more about what's at my feet, and at eye level, too. The interconnectedness of things. Native bees depend on native plants. Some plants depend on one bug. There's a lot to learn about here and I think it's a lot more fun than crossword puzzles!"

Endangered Species Biologist, Jessup Weichelt, who works at Fort McCoy, is also involved in the group. Jessup explains that he helps monitor a number of state and federally endangered species, including the prickly pear, flame butterfly, rusty-patched humble bee, and the graywolf. The success of these species depends on the success of local habitats.

Vern Klingbell, of Goats on the Go, in Trempealeau and Grandly Ender, of Goats on the Go, in La Crosse, explain to the group that they offer a unique solution to help in eradicating invasive species of plants: goats. They can bring goats to sites in the region and fence them off. They then provide water and monitoring for the goats, while the goats munch away on the unwanted plants. The goats forage and dine on the invasive species, like buckthorn, reducing the need for tools or herbicides.

Land owners, Norb and Patsy Brown, explain that they have joined the group because, as land owners, they want to learn about the best practices for land management and local ecology. Monroe County Invasive Species Working Group seeks to educate the public and private interests in Monroe County on the impacts of invasive species, and to conduct and promote the management of invasive species, by interagency and private citizen action.

Their Vision Statement is, "Continuing to inform, promote and conduct the management of invasive species by interagency and private citizen action. Using public and private collaboration to reduce or eliminate the impacts of all invasive species that affect the resources of Monroe County."

Mic Armstrong and Eric Ressel, USDA Soil Conservation Technicians based in Sparta, educator John Sullivan, and naturalist, Joey Esterline, were all happy to point out invasive species, as well as native plants, along the hike. Mic pulled out some pink identification tape, to tie into some invasive barberry, for removal later. A new crop of garlic mustard, brought to the U.S. by Europeans because it was delicious and easy to grow, in fact grows



Goat herder, Vern Klingbell, of Goats on the Go, outlines the benefits of tackling invasive plant problems with the help of goats. Herald photo by Jennifer Rodriguez Moran.

too easily, and for years has been spreading and choking out local habitat. The same goes with buckthorn, Japanese knotweed, ornamental maple, purple loosestrife, poison hemlock, and multiflora rose, which spread easily, choking out our pristine native driftless habitat.

While invasive plants have taken over so much of our natural landscape, there is hope, thanks to the hard work of volunteers and the knowledge shared by groups like MCSISWG. On Saturdays, from May through October, the group teaches Sparta Farmers' Market attendees with an "Invasive of the Week" demonstration, in Mueller Square. MCSISWG also offers educational outreach to clubs, associations, and groups, such as garden clubs, youth groups such as 4-H, town associations and more.

There are volunteer opportunities coming up in November to help with a troublesome ornamental maple, and Mic Armstrong offers this call to action: "November is finally here and we can start working on our long term project to manage an 80 acre-plus infestation of Amur Maple. It's an unruly

ornamental plant you can still purchase under its cultivar name, Flame Maple. The straight species is already listed as restricted, so it is no longer legally available in Wisconsin."

We will be meeting to cut and treat the Amur Maple that we have spreading along the bike trail, east of Speed's Bikes and the area around the campground, on the other side of the interstate. We need people to help drag, and pile the brush out chainsaw operators (certified and approved) leave in their wake. If you are not a certified sawyer, we still can do stuff with hand tools and reciprocating saws, but piling and dragging is needed the most. We would also accept moral support. It would actually be great if someone wanted to greet passing hikers with our leaflets, explaining who we are and what Amur Maple does. We will have a clipboard for anyone interested in signing up for future events. We will be sending out an email, explaining the required paperwork to be a volunteer and hand out some reading on herbicides. It will also detail where and when we will meet. Please RSVP, so we know how many people we will need the



Patsy and Norb Brown enjoy learning more about local ecology.



Mic Armstrong flags some invasive barberry to be removed as soon as possible.



Outdoor Education Coordinator, John Sullivan, has found some invasive garlic mustard along the trail. At certain times of the year it is easy to pull garlic mustard out with little effort, just make sure seeds are not mature because they spread quickly when disturbed.

famous cookie bars for. If you, a group you are involved in, or someone you know who would like to learn more about invasive and native plants, best practices concerning local ecology, volunteer opportunities, or to book a presentation, you may reach out to Ben Andersen, of the Monroe County Invasive Species Working Group, at 608-269-8974. Check out the MCSISWG website at <https://www.co.monroe.wisconsin.gov/land-conservation/invasive-species-workgroup> and/or email Mic Armstrong, at john.armstrong@wis.usda.gov

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