

MCISWG MEETING MINUTES 07/25/2024

FireFly Farms and Mercantile is located on Market Road south of Cashton. Owner Andre Paquette used to come to the Monroe County Invasive Species Working Group (MCISWG) meetings until business and homeschooling duties became more time consuming. Andre had suggested we could have a meeting at the farm, and we thought it was time to reconnect and see what he and his family have been up to. A major flood shortly after the Paquettes moved on to the property in 2018 almost took out the historic barn and must have looked devastating to the newcomers. Monroe County Land Conservation Department crafted a stream stabilization plan and used riprap to stabilize the streambanks. Bank shaping with a grass seed mix designed to retard the erosive attacks of flooding became step one in the process of transforming a little corner of Monroe County into an iconic farm enterprise.

Andre walked a group of MCISWG regulars and several newcomers along the creek side pointing out some native plants and a few invasives which are noteworthy, not least because they are still there after a long fight- Crown Vetch gets that award. There were plenty of good plants nearby including coneflowers and wild quinine. Soon we got to the bane of the area-Poison Hemlock. Because it kills goats Andre and intern **Hunter Kabat** are quite vigilant about keeping it under control. Hunter pointed out a poison hemlock that had its head (seeds) cut off, as well as a water hemlock. Also, poisonous if ingested, Water Hemlock *Cicuta virosa* is distinguished from Poison Hemlock by the compound leaflets. Water Hemlock, usually found in wetlands or streamside is native and benefits several beneficial insects. Poison Hemlock *Conium maculatum* another umbel*has lacy foliage similar to carrot but with a bad smell. They are native in Europe where the ancient Greeks famously used them to kill prisoners including Socrates. Most references say Poison hemlock was introduced and is naturalizing in America, but **Salesman** read it is a circumpolar, agreeing with Andre's assertion that it is a native species. The stems of both plants are hollow and purple, Poison hemlock is usually more of a mottled purple with green.

- Umbel: an inflorescence that consists of a number of short flower stalks (called pedicels) that spread from a common point, somewhat like umbrella ribs.

We walked along Market Road with Andre who has a small herd of goats the Paquettes move around using electric fencing and they are great at munching vegetation where it would otherwise be difficult to mow. We could also see other animals including sheep and chickens which are rotated through fenced paddocks to maintain healthy livestock and healthy pasture.

Wild Parsnip *Pastinaca sativa*, another umbel, this one bright yellow, fading to brown, seen in the road ditch, has more worrying traits. Once it flowers, if you cut wild parsnip or tread on it so that sap is released, if it should touch human skin (or animals' lips) it can cause severe blistering when activated by UV (sun) light. One piece of knowledge we learned is that if your skin has come in contact with sap from a wild parsnip, immediately cover the affected area. Your goal is to shield your skin from sunlight to prevent a reaction. Once inside and out of the sun, wash the contact area with mild soap and warm water. Even after washing, the area might be sensitive for about 8 hours and must be kept out of the sun and away from UV light for that period. If blisters are bad, a fever, swelling seek medical help. Unfortunately, many people don't know how they got a rash and medical practioners may not know where the person got the rash from. As we say in MCISWG "Know it before you grow it or mow it"!

Poison Hemlock (and Water Hemlock) on the other hand are toxic when eaten, all parts of the plants in sufficient dosage can be deadly. The sap isn't as devastating as parsnip on skin, unless you have a cut or open wound then it is bad too. Long sleeves, pants, gloves, eye protection are all encouraged when working with bad umbels.

Another invasive plant of concern on the farm is Creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens* which is toxic to most livestock, however Andre has learned to use chickens to clean it up in pasture before rotating other stock to that area.

Firefly Farms and Mercantile is a business with over 140 native species available as seeds as well as numerous plants, some native, some not, that double as inventory and a beautiful home garden. Andre studied Permaculture, which means the garden is designed in zones depending on closeness to the house, shade and other factors. He pointed to an area where apples, pears, plus nitrogen fixing trees coexist on a terraced swale, which is part of a system to keep water on the farm. The Apple cultivar Zestar is his favorite. Andre does not accept donated plants, worried that Jumping Worms [Jumping worms | Amyntas spp. | Wisconsin DNR](#) will come in on soil that has not gone through protocols his nursery vendors adhere to.

Firefly farm use black tarps (solarization) to kill the brome grass 25% vinegar to kill other weeds and start the vegetation recovery with a cover crop of crimson clover which dies overwinter. The Paquette children are homeschooled and have observed 3 species of bumblebee, and other cool things like milk snakes. They try not to kill wasps as they eat caterpillar pests. They discovered that the topsoil that washed off the farm during flood events took firefly larvae too and slowly, by improving their habitat, several firefly species have returned. They plan on marketing a kit for firefly habitat improvement. [Firefly Farm and Mercantile, Shop for Garden Bulbs and Seeds](#) Note: Not everything offered for sale, including seed mixes are 100% native. Homework advised.

Stopping the edge of the pond, Andre pointed to all of the metallic green Japanese Beetles on a particular pink flowering plant. It turns out the native Pennsylvania smart weed *Polygonum pennsylvanicum* attracts the pesky beetles and, lo and behold, firefly larvae eat their larvae.

Back by the barn Bonnie Paquette and the kids were making the final preparations for a wonderful lunch, with delicious bread and brownies for dessert.

At 12.30, as advertised, we convoyed up Neola Road where **Armstrong** stopped by a wide spot, and **Tyson Langrehr** from Monroe County Highway Department brought up the rear with flashing lights for safety. We observed how poison Hemlock and wild parsnip were dominant in the creek bottoms all the way up this valley which are the headwaters of the same creek sides that Firefly farms manages. We looked at the main characteristics of each "umbel" – parsnip and poison hemlock and, as the convoy headed up the valley, some areas of the ditch banks were seen to be just thick with poison hemlock. At Jefferson Town Hall, MCISWG had hoped that landowners who had been mailed a post card invitation to learn about the poison hemlock adjacent to their properties would show up at the appointed one o'clock hour. One landowner did, as well as another interested in managing multiflora rose. **Armstrong** had set up the "invasive of the week" display with Poison Hemlock, Wild Parsnip and also Teasel for good measure, as this trifecta of nasties are often found together.

After a question-and-answer session with attendees everyone that needed took fliers on management of those species. You can slow down the spread and possibly eliminate them by just keeping them mowed (or scythed) off to keep them from flowering, and eventually smothered by grasses. It was hoped the town of Jefferson, which has far and away the worst poison Hemlock problem in the area, for some reason, would perhaps work with the Highway Department's spray program which uses a combination of growth regulators and a broadleaf specific herbicide showing success in suppressing weeds, including wild parsnip. This program also allows the Highway Department to delay mowing for additional cost savings. If there was interest, they had even talked about having herbicide available in a backpack for landowners to manage Poison Hemlock in the fall and spring, (the best times).

Core meeting.

Clint Gilman, Forester, Tomah Ranger Fort McCoy; **Jack Herricks**, Jefferson Township Chair; **Tyson Langrehr**, Operations Coordinator, Monroe County Highway Department; **Jessup Weichelt**, Threatened and Endangered Species Biologist, **Jessica Salesman**, Vice Chair of MCISWG; Natural Resources Specialist\Invasive Species Coordinator Natural Resources Branch NRB, Fort McCoy; **Rikki Ratsch**, Colorado State University, serving Fort McCoy Wildlife Dept; **Connie Weedman**, Sparta Township; **Karen Williamson** Sparta Township, **Ella and Pam Melbe**, Wells Township; **Joey Esterline**, Adrian Township and Monroe Co. District 15. Supervisor; **Mic Armstrong**, Soil Conservation Technician and MCISWG Scribe, Natural Resource Conservation Service, under a cooperative agreement with New Solutions.

Outreach Media. **Connie Weedman** was researching a new invasive species topic to send to the Monroe County Herald. Cheat Grass was one she had heard was a problem, however after a brief discussion we decided it may not be the time to address that one (in the paper) as so far it seems to be less of a problem in our Midwest conditions than some other species. More on cheatgrass later in the meeting. Spotted Knapweed was bounced around the room and Connie was off and running. **Armstrong** had a "framed" copy of Connie's Herald article on poison hemlock and passed it around. **Gilman** added that Connie was doing a great job.

Armstrong summarized the notes from the May 30 meeting at The West Salem Outdoor Education Center, in which **Gilman** surprised **John Sullivan** with the Outstanding Educational Tree Farm award. The meeting and woodland tours were well attended and the notes are now posted to [Invasive Species Working Group | Monroe County, WI](#)

Gilman led a discussion about the recent Field Day at Pine View Campground, Fort McCoy. The program went well but there were mostly agency type folks, and the only citizens were frequent attendees of MCISWG events. **Salesman** after consultation with the staff thought we should have a date set early enough to do more publicity, and just like that we flagged **June 26th** for the event in **2025**. Comments included posting fliers at South Family Housing. Invite Mississippi Valley, Sparta Garden Club and watershed groups. Fliers in Tomah (Chamber Commerce etc.). Contact the Towns Association. **Esterline** thought the WIWiC [Wisconsin Women in Conservation \(wiwic.org\)](#) could also be contacted.

We discussed moving to a pavilion by the dam to facilitate a walk to Trout Falls. Bathrooms are a bit further of a hike for that one. Electricity?

Someone could go on the radio ahead of the event and that notion degenerated into a back and forth about Cow Radio. Wisconsin Public Radio and Radio DIRT. All good. Revisit at the Annual meeting.

Action Updates:

Monroe County Cost-share Applications for Private Land Invasive Species Management. **Gilman** summarized that as far as he knew there was still just one holdover from last year in the applications for 2024. Someone asked if (Japanese) Knotweed could be targeted with the fund. Yep. Have the landowner write a description and map for Bob Micheel.

Community Garden: **Armstrong** reported the Garden Club made more raised beds for other donated veggies and added some great hand painted signs. Many native plants including the elusive prickly pear, (*Opuntia* species), seem to be holding their own. A water barrel is topped up by the fire department for gardeners to help themselves with a small pile of buckets and watering cans. The Garden Club also facilitated the painting of several murals including a must-see trout mural between Ben Biking Park and Evans Bosshard Park, under the Hwy 16 overpass. There is still Crown Vetch to pull in the community garden if anyone is bored.

Mapping the Bike trail. **Armstrong** is now slowly mapping species visible in summer via bicycle. Met Wildcat Park manager **Andy Haffle** in Elroy and had an unplanned meeting about invasive species management on the trail, as he took water samples from the hand pump there. He still meets with the Friends of the Trail every month and they talk about inviting MCISWG to talk about invasives. **Haffle** mentioned how many miles/ acres of trail and park he and his small crew manage, and it is a lot. There are many priorities some, including the woodwork on the tunnel gates, more consequential to the bike trail than the common buckthorn, honeysuckle and wild parsnip, spread, but we had a good visit and swapped ideas on how to get more invasive species management going.

August 6th Field Day Cranberry Research Center. Diversity Landworks will be there again with goats eating glossy buckthorn <https://www.diversitylandworks.com/>. **Kyle Johnson** hoped he could talk to the group inside too. **Gilman** has been talking to **Wade Brockman** and we are set to go again. **Armstrong** is working on an agenda; a flier is already out there and posted to MCISWG website. Rick **Schulte** cannot make it this time, but **Mark Renz** will be there talking about both non and chemical management of invasive plants and to take herbicide questions. **Mara Lince** from Golden Sands RC&D will have a talk on aquatics (Purple Loosestrife); **Jessica Salesman** will take Rikki's usual spot and talk Invasive plant ID using the voucher collection; **Eric Ressel** will put together a presentation on native plant choices to use after gaining control of invasives. There will be discussions (a panel) on managing invasive plants with prescribed grazing, so Kyle can talk goats and landowners and agency folks can chime in on their experiences and funding opportunities with munchers. Lastly **Wade Brockman** can take the floor, then lead us to the goats with a stop on the way to talk Cranberry Research.

Aquatic Invasive Species: No purple loose strife bug propagation this year in Monroe County.

Terrestrial Invasive Species: No projects discussed.

Fort McCoy Updates. **Ratsch**: treatments of Cow and Crown vetch, Spotted knapweed, Leafy spurge, Wild parsnip, Canada thistle, Nodding thistle, Butter and eggs, Dalmatian toadflax, Cut leaf teasel, Chinese lespedeza, Japanese hedge parsley, Creeping bellflower, Cypress spurge, Burning bush, Common tansy, False spirea, Japanese Barberry, Purple Loosestrife, Multiflora Rose, White Mulberry and Black locust. Mapping Lupine. Spotted knapweed pulling, along with goat grazing on buckthorns and honeysuckle.

Someone said we are lucky in Monroe County to have the research provided by the Natural Resources Branch and the team from the Center for Environmental Management of Colorado State University serving Fort McCoy. **Salesman** added that there are over 20 years of records on management of Garlic Mustard on McCoy and that there are still areas that even with the use of multiple UTV spray rigs and backpacking crews, are just impossible to make any headway. Everyone who has worked for the wildlife crew in the spring knows the area known as the Pig! She added that prescribed fire does make a difference to GM control.

Lastly, we looked at was some voucher specimens of Cheatgrass, *Bromus tectorum*, **Salesman** brought along, as well as some lookalikes, also in the brome family: *Bromus squarrosus* and *B. japonicus*.

Armstrong said Foxtail Barley has a different seed head but is another small, light-colored grass, also found on roadsides.

Next Meeting **Esterline/ Geraud** farm October 16th.