

Annual Meeting 2008 Recap

Report by Theodore Cochrane

Twenty-one members and guests met at 9:00 a.m. at the Stanton W. Mead Education and Visitor Center in southern Marathon County, where outstanding weather and field trip leader Dr. Neil A. Harriman awaited us. The center, built on a high point on a hill, afforded a good general view of the terrain of the area, including the flowages created in the drained bottomlands of the Little Eau Pleine River and distant conifer swamps. Our first finds were made near the building, where a few native plants in the gardens and a number of weeds were brought to our attention.

Among the species in an abandoned field south of the building we found mostly truly ubiquitous weedy species, such as fleabane, quackgrasses, ragweed, common milkweed, lamb's-quarters, prickly lettuce, black-eyed Susan, and clovers. Below the field we entered expansive, moister terrain and proceeded to a dried-up waterhole, where species especially characteristic of exposed mud flats and drying shores were encountered, including soft-stem bulrush, blunt spike-rush, false-loosestrife, clammy hedge-hyssop, and water-plantain. Species commonly to be expected on moist sandy to muddy shores and fields were found on the edges of a nearby pond. Sedges and rushes were well represented, as were polygonums, including arrow-leaved



(2008 Annual Meeting photo by Tom Eddy)



Dr. Neil Harriman leads the Annual Meeting field trip. *(Photo by Tom Eddy)*

tear-thumb, and other interesting plants, such as marsh purslane. After returning to the building to get a drink of water, participants ambled through an area seeded by Audubon Society members with prairie grasses

and wildflowers. The area is progressing rapidly and soon will come to resemble a full-fledged, albeit obviously reconstructed prairie like one early settlers might have encountered in southeastern or southwestern Wisconsin. Wild quinine, which occurred naturally only in the southern two tiers of Wisconsin counties, is abundant in parts of the restoration, together with a number of other species customarily used in restoration seed mixes because they are strong growers, for example, yellow coneflower, black-eyed Susan, ox-eye sunflower, tall beard-tongue, and culver's-root. More special plants like white wild indigo, rattlesnake-master, pale Indian-plantain, and a compass-plant or two were present. These, however, like the wild quinine, were planted outside - in all cases but one far outside - their natural ranges, meaning that the restoration amounts to a traditional meadow garden, not an authentic prairie setting for the area. The site was surprisingly free of weeds and generally in good condition despite the dry season. Wide walking trails circle the perimeter of the area around the building and descend beyond the restoration, leading visitors toward other well maintained trails that cross through the upper portion of the bottomland below. However, time did not permit our continuing further.