

# Iowa County Success from the Field

## Living Classroom Enhanced with Prescribed Burn

### Background

Roger and Janice Boettcher live on approximately 80 acres in rural Iowa County. The majority of the property is forested and includes a maple sugar bush. In 2011, the Boettchers started converting an open ridge near their house to native prairie, which now provides excellent habitat for the honey bees they keep. The Boettchers generate both wind and solar electricity on the property for their home and operation.

Roger has combined his interests in botany and education by turning the property into a living classroom. He regularly hosts field days for local schools, involving students in the restoration of the land.

### Program Successes

The Boettchers started working with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in 2018, through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). Though they knew the value of prescribed fire in managing prairie ecosystems, they hadn't yet completed a prescribed burn on their land. Their prairie presented several challenges to burning, including a wind turbine with guy wires located in the middle of the prairie and the prairie's proximity to the Boettcher's house and buildings. With guidance from the Dodgeville NRCS Field Office, the Boettchers prepared a prescribed burn plan designed for their property. Soil Conservationist Kaitlin Schott commented, "It's satisfying for everyone involved when taking the time to plan a complex prescribed burn results in such a clear success."

In 2019 they completed their first prescribed burn on 1.7 acres of their prairie. In addition to 8 members of the Cobb Fire Department, 7 community members joined in to carry out the burn. The prescribed burn was successful in controlling woody plants and reducing plant litter. In August, Roger stood overlooking a prairie ablaze in rosinweed, prairie blazing star, and Indian plantain. He explains, "It was a lot of fun to do the burn."

Additional 2019 work through the CSP program included forest stand improvement work on an acre of forest land.

### Future Plans

The Boettchers are committed to continuing natural restoration work on their property. They will maintain the high



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Prescribed burn project area in May two days after burn completion.



Prescribed burn project area with wind turbine in early August.

baseline levels of conservation on the property through 2022 as part of their CSP contract.

Their next big projects will focus on a new area of the property where they will be removing red cedar from an abandoned pasture before restoring the land to prairie and oak savanna.

Janice and Roger plan to continue using prescribed fire as a management tool. After learning about the importance of appropriate weather for safe and effective prescribed burning, they installed a weather system on their wind turbine to provide real-time weather data for future prescribed burns and to better understand the place they call home.

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