

Monitoring Protocols for Landowners

Techniques, Protocols, Data Collection, and Training Opportunities

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Introduction

Figuring out how to begin monitoring activities on a property can seem like an intimidating task. While there are a myriad of references available explaining different options, this inundation can make it difficult for a landowner to navigate through and locate materials that are up-to-date, geared towards a non-professional, and tailored to their specific interests and needs. This Citizen Based Monitoring Grant endeavored to take on this task. The result is a publication filled with tools and references used to help Wisconsin landowners interpret or "read" the Wisconsin landscape. What does this gain us? With this knowledge, landowners are better equipped to understand the plant and animal communities around the state, identify how a parcel of land is connected to all the other surrounding lands, and interpret the history or past footsteps.



The goal of this handbook is to empower landowners to feel confident in interpreting the signs of the past, see the present, and make wise stewardship decisions for their property's future. By outlining the background and process from a landowner perspective, we hope to allow them to spend more time on the fun part; time to walk a prairie remnant or wetland, time to learn the plants and animals found on the land, and time to think. With this handbook, we will puzzle together the physical patterns in the local landscape. Discover the complex natural and human histories of the region. Identify and understand the surrounding vegetation and wildlife. Link the land's physical characteristics with the past histories and present appearance. Think about implications and possibilities for the future. Using the worksheets located throughout the handbook, readers will be introduced to various aspects of land's past, present, and future – all related to what we see today.

Approach

Review of the materials already available suggested an even greater need for monitoring context. Sure, we could provide instructions and data forms for a frog survey, but how would this fit into the user's goals or needs. Determining why and what to monitor is arguably more important than knowing the logistics of how, and that is a question each user must determine for themselves.

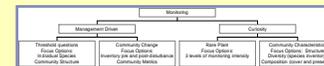
So rather than simply develop yet another book of forms and instructions, this handbook is set up to guide users to develop a sense of place; to draw connections between location and abundance of species and their habitats based on a myriad of factors including climate, geology, natural disturbance events, and human activities. Understanding these factors for a given area will prepare the user to better identify and interpret species and trends, and to begin to understand how their choices and actions impact what they see around them.

The handbook is broken down into three major sections. Consider the first section as an exercise in learning an ecological address followed by a workbook of activities to apply what is learned. The second section provides an in-depth introduction to nature study, inventory, and monitoring, and the role of monitoring in adaptive management. The appendix contains nuts & bolts methodology, additional resources, and a guide to ongoing CBM efforts.



Results

The Landowner Monitoring Handbook (PDF) provides landowners with the context, background, and basic tools to begin to implement a monitoring program. The goal of this product is to guide interested landowners through the myriad of monitoring activities and protocols that they have available, and to help them develop the skills, interest, and confidence in their abilities to monitor based on their landscape and habitat potential and management approach and goals. In addition, this handbook will facilitate collection of Landowner/non-professional observations in a standardized fashion, facilitate reporting, and ultimately use this data to inform decisions about species trends and landscape planning at a broader scale. The funds provided in 2010 were sufficient to develop a PDF version of these materials at a broader, statewide level. Further funding is needed to finalize the layout for printing, and for a first addition printing. A hard-copy edition of this information will help to reach a broader audience, increase distribution, and facilitate actual use of the worksheet and land-monitoring exercises beyond the capacity of a PDF. Ideally we want this to be a dog-eared companion that fits naturally along side field guide or notebook.



Successful implementation of the Conservation Actions outlined in the state Wildlife Action Plan depends on fostering partnerships for management, monitoring, and rare species protection. By providing a standardized, written approach to monitoring that can be tackled by multiple landowners, this handbook represents a cooperative, low cost partnership opportunity. This handbook opens the door to having landowners contribute additional, high-quality data towards conservation efforts, informing adaptive management strategies, and helping assess and document conservation success on the landscape.

Future Directions

Focus, Partnerships, and Publication

The next phase of the handbook will be to pilot and produce landscape-scale Companion Pieces focusing on the habitats and species found in each Ecological Landscape. These pieces will provide more focused application and training, including landscape-specific species checklists, habitat descriptions, management tools, and suggestions for styles of restoration, re-creation, etc. In some ways, this will be a landowner-tailored interpretation of the Wisconsin Wildlife Action Plan.

With this goal in mind, Blue Mounds Area Project, Southwest Badger RC&D, and the Landowner Incentive Program are piloting a landowner workshop in the Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area in Spring of 2011. This workshop will cover the basics outlined in the handbook, and offer a trial run for the workbook materials. We are currently seeking additional financial support for this effort.



The final phase of this project will be to transform the PDF handbook into a printed publication for distribution to landowners and partners. After the initial printing, the goal is a self-sustaining product via a nominal cost to purchase through DNR, similar to the state herpetile field guides.

