Prairie Pod Podcast Transcript

Episode 6: Putting Prairie Back is Hard

Podcast audio can be found online at mndnr.gov/prairiepod

Transcript:

((sounds of birds chirping and wind blowing))

Megan: Hey! Welcome back to the prairie pod. I'm Megan Benage, regional ecologist with the DNR and I'm sitting here with my buddy.

Jess: Jessica Peterson, prairie habitat research scientist. We're here in the Slayton office.

Megan: I know, we've never been in the Slayton office before. How do you feel about this Jess?

Jess: I absolutely love it here!

Megan: I kind of like it, I have to say if you've never been to the Slayton office, it's one of those DNR offices that's really special and unique because you come down main street/Broadway of the downtown and we're tucked in right there on Broadway. You can't miss us because there's a super friendly taxidermy squirrel that looks like he's going to jump on you in the window display. He has his arms raised in the air, I call him Chucky the squirrel. ((laughter)) He is ready to greet you right here at the Slayton office. There's a weasel?! There's all kinds of things they got, there's pheasants… Why is it your favorite?

Jess: I just like that it's in the middle of town and really accessible. I think that's great.

Megan: I know, I like it. We are here with two very special guests today. Like all good things that we do for the DNR and conservation in general it happens because of partnerships. We're going to highlight a huge project that wouldn't have happened without area wildlife manager Bill Schuna ((Bill says name)) and assistant area wildlife manager, Kent Schaap ((Kent says name)). See they're here, but we're making them a little bit nervous with our level of enthusiasm. ((laughs)) We're going to talk about the Swessinger wildlife management area. This is a huge reconstruction or restoration, depending on who you are, project that was undertaken last year?

Bill: Started in 2015.

Megan: 2015, gosh were have I been? It's gone on so long that it seems like it was last year. ((laughs)) We're sad to say John Lindstrom with Ducks Unlimited was supposed to be here today and he had a work conflict so he couldn't be, but he also was part of this group as well as Kassy Hendricks who both work for Ducks Unlimited. They were a huge part of this partnership effort getting this site into a wildlife management area. It should come as no surprise that we're going to talk about this unit [Swessinger] in Nobles County. We had the challenge of restoring an entire section of land to prairie and wetland. Talk about a big deal, a big big deal. Bill and Kent are the muscle behind all this, they really put a ton of hours into this. Bill how many sleepless nights do you think you had?

Bill: More than one. ((laughs))

Megan: For those of you that don't know Bill, he's fondly referred to as bayonet Bill here in the DNR now because of his recent turkey hunt that we'll get into in a little bit. He really cares about what he's doing at the site as most of our wildlife managers and conservation folks do, he cares so much that he takes this home and stresses about it--making sure that he's making the right decision. I have never received so many phone calls from a wildlife manager in my life ((laughs)) when we were restoring this, but it was good it was all good. Jess should we jump right in?

Jess: Yeah, let's start at the beginning. Tell us a little bit about the work that you do in general. What kind of work do you do on a regular basis?

Bill: We manage wildlife management areas for the most part.

Jess: What does that mean? How does one manage… that's a really a big thing that you do. So what are some of the things that that entails?

Bill: We have grasslands, wetlands, facilities, all that rolled in. It takes people, a lot of people, time, and money.

Jess: So Kent, give us some background on what you do on a regular basis to manage these areas.

Megan: Besides keep Bill in line, but don't tell people that. Tell them the real thing.

Kent: A lot of field work. I do a lot of the field work. A lot of the seedings, we do a lot of burning, a lot of the on the ground work I guess you'd say. Megan isn't going to like this, I run the spray crew. ((laughs))

Megan: I just cringed. There is such a thing as noxious weed control, we have to take care of these things.

Megan: I know. We've talked about this in many many podcasts, you guys know, Kent knew due to our partnership that I was going to cringe at that. Because when you spray new plantings, we have talked about this in the establishment podcast. When you spray new plantings, it makes it really difficult for your forbs to establish because essentially whatever you're using even if it's a targeted spray is hitting them as well. We're trying to work with Bill and Kent quite a bit to limit the amount that we spray when we do these really diverse restorations so that we can keep them diverse and nice. Like anything

that we do there are lots of challenges and pressures and so sometimes we do need to spot spray areas Kent, SPOT spray. ((laughs)) He just laughs.

Kent: I'm doing better.

Megan: Yes he is, he's in a program. ((laughs)) He's doing a lot better.

Kent: So Megan is it spot spray as opposed to boom spray?

Megan: Correct, correct. We like to see a little bit of TARGETED spraying so that we're… I never like to see where we just go out there and we got maybe a handful of Canada thistle and we spray the whole site. That's a bad deal right there because then you're targeting everything, all of your forbs and not just the Canada thistle areas. So Bill walk us through on what it takes to restore land on this scale. I mean Swessinger is really large, it's an entire section, that's 640 acres of land. Tell us some of the things that had to happen in order for this to become a reality.

Bill: First of all you have to look at what is restorable. First of all that was cropland so I used ArcMap for the most part, polygons, to see how many acres you got. Then look at the soils and the topography. We use a lot of clipping, those that use GIS know what that's all about. Cutting out the soils into a shapefile that is going to be seeded down. Come up with a seed mix, consult a lot of books, and consult a regional ecologist many, many times. Come up with seed mixes, we didn't do one mix fits all, we did four mixes for dry sites, mesic, wet and then wetland. The restored wetland got seeded down too. It was quite the process, but we came up with new products. We got some bags of seed and Kent went out there and in between wetland restorations while work was going on--Kent can talk about that. We went out multiple times over the winter and seeded down most of it. One field, the 52 acre one, was seeded down the fall of 2015.

Megan: Did you broadcast plant THAT Kent? What were you doing, were you drilling it, broadcasting it, you planted it in the winter?

Kent: I'd say most of it was broadcasted. We drilled in the hills, the dry mesic we drilled it because we were worried about wind erosion so we wanted to get that into the ground instead of just laying on top. Most of it was broadcast and a small portion was drilled.

Megan Good. So even the drilled parts, did that happen in the winter time?

Kent: Nope, that was all in the fall. I did all of the broadcasting, that all took place in the winter time. The ground was obviously frozen, you can't use a drill in the winter time.

Bill: We had perfect conditions that winter too as there wasn't a lot of snow.

Megan: I like it, so everything kind of lined up, you had these really good conditions to make it happen. So how do we get an entire section of land? How does the DNR acquire a section? I don't mean like "oh we met with a realtor and the realtor met with the landowner". I mean just how… what was motivating the landowner here?

Bill: We were approached by a farm management company who knew that David Lee Jones himself and his heirs wanted some of his property to go into wildlife conservation. This was the perfect parcel and the farm management company knew that many, many drained wetlands, restorable wetlands were on this section. Also it wasn't the best crop

ground in the world. In fact a local farmer told me it was a wet farm that needed much, much more tile to be a profitable farm. The hilltops were eroded too. We were excited when we were approached by the farm management company. Then we looked at the restorable wetland inventory, saw that there were over 40 restorable wetlands in this site.

Megan: Whoa! That's a lot! That's a lot of work.

Bill: Most of them are restored. There are a few that Ducks Unlimited will be restoring.

Megan: Part of that partnership again, which is really nice.

Jess: So tell us… this was obviously a huge challenge, a large acreage with lots of work that needed to be done. Tell us what excited you from the onset about this project and what got you going? I'm sure you knew that there were lots of challenges ahead, but what's the most exciting part for you?

Bill: How often does an area manager get to restore an entire section of land?

Megan and Jess: Once, maybe once.

Bill: Yeah, that's what excited us about it.

Jess: For sure.

Megan: Is Bill speaking for you Kent? Is that what excited you as well?

Kent: Yeah I would agree. It's always fun to do a whole section at a time. I've been lucky to do three of them in my career.

Megan: Whoa! Getting Bill beat here! Kent has three and Bill has one! ((laughs)) Okay so because this podcast… We're really trying to help people figure out the science of restoration because it is such a new science. We talk about this every time, we talk about how in the 70's it's this emerging science about how do we build land back. We know it's incredibly challenging because we don't even understand all of the connections that happen in an ecosystem, we don't. It would be foolish to think that we do. So you said earlier that you were trying to match in ArcMap the soils on site with your seed mix. So you didn't just do one blanket mix because obviously in this section of land you're going to have different soil types so it wouldn't make sense to put only one seed mix out there and be like, "that's a hail Mary, hope that works out". You were trying to do it based on moisture and gradient. Tell me a little bit about after you did your mapping. As we all know, the soil survey is a fantastic resource but because of how many acres they map at a time, it doesn't always match up when you're looking at an exact site. After you did your office part, take me through the steps that it took to restore this site. Including taking those maps you made out to the field and how did you match it up when you were actually on site?

Bill: Well after we mapped out all the sites, we decided to flag the dry sites as those would be planted first. So we're out there in the field flagging and we're standing in wet soil. We were supposedly in a dry site, but it was like, "hum… something is wrong here". While we're in the field we change the gps points on the fly, adjusted our acres and

went to work. Once it was all flagged then he [Kent] used, and he can talk about this, used a GPS device in the tractor.

Megan: How'd that work Kent?

Kent: Good. So basically the Trimble 250 and on the screen you can go and set your field, your farm and your event. For each seed mix I set a new event and then it would fill in yellow on the screen. I could see exactly where I've been so I don't have any gaps, skips, misses or anything like that. Then once I got my field filled in I just continued on to the next one. Then I had to come around back with a different mix when I did the dry, came back to fill in and around those sites with the mesic [seed] mix. Then I could go back and pull up that event on the Trimble and I could see exactly where I left off. It worked really good over a period of almost a year of seeding with different mixes and stuff. I had all that information in the Trimble and I could go back and pick up where I left off. Even if I hadn't been there for a week, I could go back right to where I left off. It was ideal for four different mixes.

Bill: Now when we're having the seed mix boundaries on the map we upload the GPS points because you cannot upload a shapefile into the Trimble. So we're using GPS points then instead of flagging the points. Kent is using a handheld GPS to go from point to point to point to get his field boundaries then fill them in.

Megan: Kent are you walking these sites? You're telling me you walked 640 acres? You must be in real good shape.

Kent: No, in the tractor. ((laughs)) I'm just trying to figure this out here.

Megan: So you have 640 acres, Kent is eating a donut right now, we're just trying to figure out if this is his exercise plan. ((laughs))

Kent: The Trimble is mounted right in the tractor. Then when I do my boundaries with the handheld GPS I'm actually in the tractor driving it, not walking.

Megan: Oh okay, that's an important point so people know and understand because I was thinking he's the most in shape assistant area wildlife manager that ever lived. Now we know that he's cheating.

Kent: Close maybe…

Megan: ((laughs)) That's a podcast for another day. Back when we have Dave Trauba on again.

Kent: Not all the shapefiles came from soil inventory either for the seed mixes. Some shapefiles came from Ducks Unlimited using their GPS survey equipment to show us where the hydro-fringe would be for all of the wetlands.

Megan: Who primarily did the wetland restoration parts? Did we do that, the Department of Natural Resources? Or was that mostly Ducks Unlimited or still a partnership?

Kent: Ducks Unlimited did all of the survey and hired the contractors and did contract oversight for the Swessinger WMA.

Jess: Talk a little bit more about that partnership and how that works, challenges and opportunities again. What worked well, what was hard?

Bill: I don't think any of it was really hard except the fact that Kent couldn't go out and seed sometimes because we had to wait for soil to be removed and stuff like that, but that's typical when you're doing the grassland restoration and the wetland restoration at the same time in concert.

Jess: It's a lot of communication.

Bill: Exactly. We have an excellent partnership with Ducks Unlimited--they're the greatest people to work with.

Jess: That's awesome.

Megan: That is awesome.

Jess: What made this project was that partnership.

Megan: It did and I think everybody is bringing their own set of skills to the table. What I love about Swessinger WMA is that even though Kent yelled at me a lot for the number of seed mixes that we had, because it's more work to do a restoration this way. I would venture and say to do a restoration right it's a lot of work and it's a lot of coordination. The seed mixes are very complicated in detail. A lot more species than you would have typically planted before. There's a lot of pushing from a certain regional ecologist to get a lot of diversity in there. Bill what did you say last fall when you went out to the site? You sent everybody an email and it was about a particular flower. What was your response just seeing the restoration kind of growing?

Bill: It was dotted blazing star or rough blazing star I believe, right? I have never seen that in the first year of seeding. It was blooming, I thought it required that the bulb had to grow first underground before it would send up a shoot and flower.

Megan: So then you weren't as mad at a certain regional ecologist because this is the key the key part of the story that we want to make sure people understand?

Bill: Right, right ((laughs)) You weren't out there the first day that Kent was out there bouncing [in the tractor]. That was kind of rough ground, it may have been bean stubble, [but it was rough]. It was harvested when it was pretty wet so it really had a lot of ruts. Kent is used to driving along, not against the grain/bean stubble, but with it. With these seed mixes he was going around in circles and stuff like that. He lost his back teeth, he hasn't seen the dentist still yet. ((laughs))

Kent: It was rough between going across the rows and working around the wetland restoration work, you know all the dirt work, and they did it in the winter time so it was hard and frozen. It was very rough so you bounced around a lot.

Megan: Well and I want to point out something too, not just how rough the ground is but you did not take it easy on yourselves. After you did all the seed mixes and you did all these [assessments] kinda spec'ing out how the land was going to fit it based on moisture, you went back AGAIN to plant a really special grass, porcupine grass, because that would have normally been on the dry hill slopes. Tell us a little about how

you plant porcupine grass because we didn't plant it with a drill or a Vicon broadcast seeder. Talk to us a little bit about how challenging it is to plant porcupine grass.

Kent: Well my first experience with porcupine grass, I put it in the Vicon and it just kind of balls up and it didn't work. So we did a little check and I think we asked a couple of other managers and we ended up discovering that we had to soak it in water in buckets so that the awns become loose and pull apart and we throw it out by hand.

Bill: You have to wear raingear or you get soaked.

Kent: Also, wear leather gloves because they're [the awns are] pretty sharp.

Megan: In order to plant that it takes some ingenuity and patience and goggles because it was very dusty. I remember that we were all out there and it was Kent, Bill and Nate Mullendore and myself and we were out there and we had little goggles on and gloves and ((laughs)) we were trying to see who could do it the best. Has any porcupine grass come up at Swessinger?

Bill: Yes, we've seen it.

Jess: That's great!

Megan: That's really good, so it worked. It was not just an exercise in futility.

Jess: Can we back up and talk about awns? Because this is such a cool word. I get really nerdy about porcupine grass and I really don't even know if the myth of how it would've self-seeded or does self-seed [is true]. We're planting it where it used to be then it wasn't now we're putting it back. Talk a little bit about what a porcupine awn looks like. They're so cool.

Megan: They are so cool. While the grass is maturing and making its seed, and still has the seed on it. Awn it… see what I did there? ((laughs)) Nerd joke. While it still has the seed on it, I still can't stop saying it. It has a long awn that's A-W-N, it's like a quill or a needle. It's about 4 to 8 inches long and basically it responds to moisture. As it gets dry it coils up and as it gets wet it kind of relaxes and uncoils. That motion, that gradient back in forth between coiling and uncoiling essentially drills the seed into the ground. It has this super cool adaptation that as it drops from the grass on to the ground it drills itself right in. We're trying to replicate that by adding moisture first and we had to do that for like 30 minutes at least to soak it to help it relax because it takes a long time for those seeds. They're just in a bunch otherwise, like a crazy scary witch's nest kind of bunch. It takes about 30 minutes for them to relax, so as you're going on and some of the seeds submerge and some of it does not, some of it is easier to spread than others. Hopefully the idea is that as it dries that it will drive itself into the ground. It's a pretty cool thing.

Jess: Thanks for that, I appreciated it.

Megan: You're welcome.

Jess: I just love it. When it coils it kinda kinks the tip of the awn and it just looks so cute. You're right, when they're all together it's like this huge mess of awfulness and I can only imagine how hard that is.

Megan: They're incredibly important for dry hill prairies though. Mad props to Kent and Bill for taking it on and going the extra mile and making sure that they can get those little awns into the ground and they can have porcupine grass. Ecologically they are incredibly important to the function of a dry hill prairie. I'm like moving my arms around because I'm so excited about porcupine grass.

Bill: Wow.

Megan: Bill is getting scared that I'm going to hit him in the face.

Bill: Remember you came out to help plant it. We knew what we were facing.

Megan: They thought this was a punishment, but it was actually one of the most fun days I had last year. ((laughs)) With my goggles, helping them plant porcupine grass.

Bill: Soaked to the bone.

Megan: We were soaked. You were wetter than I was. I think it had something to do with technique. ((laughs))

Bill: Maybe it was raingear that the gore tex failed on, I don't know. The awns busted holes in the gore tex.

Megan: That was not your smartest outfit choice.

Jess: They're very sharp, very very sharp. Tell us about some of the things that you're finding. What're some of the coolest things that are happening out there already? This is the second growing season for the most part?

Bill: Yes, second.

Jess: What's going on out there at Swessinger?

Bill: It's always fun to see the different species coming up. This is a much more diverse mix then what we used to seed so seeing all these different species come up other than what we're typically used to in our simpler mixes that we used to do. That was kind of exciting. I always like to see what is coming up and how long it takes.

Kent: So far we've seen penstemon, golden alexanders, some other grasses.

Megan: Have you seen any pheasants?

Bill: Oodles, but we don't want to tell anybody that, and deer.

Megan: How do you measure oodles of pheasants? Is it like by weight? ((laughs)) Per pound of pheasants?

Bill: You build it, they will come. They are there, that's all we need to know.

Megan: And turkeys you said?

Bill: No. Deer.

Megan: Oh deer… what am I thinking? I'm looking at a turkey so I said turkey. ((laughs))

Bill: We had a fairly open winter last winter so the deer stayed. Normally they wouldn't stay there, [as it's] not really a good wintering area.

Megan: Have you seen a good pollinator response? Like when you've been out there do you see bees and other insects a lot?

Bill: Lots and lots of insects.

Megan: Didn't you send me a picture of a Monarch last year on the Liatris that you were so excited about?

Bill: I did.

Megan: That was the whole connection piece.

Bill: Other wildlife that we've seen out there, we had a pair of trumpeter swans with a brood of babies last year and other non-game species like bobolinks, meadowlarks. None of this would have been possible without the funding from the outdoor heritage council and the clean water, land and legacy amendment.

Megan: Just to wrap it up, the outdoor heritage fund, that money that came for this project is part of that sales tax that the people of Minnesota voted for to voluntarily tax themselves for the arts and conservation, right?

Bill: Yes.

Megan: Working for the people of Minnesota, putting it right back into your public lands that you can visit anytime. Jess?

Jess: Yeah?

Jess and Megan: Lets science!!! To the Literature!!!!

Jess: This is the part of the podcast where we bring in a little bit of the literature from books, blogs, peer reviewed scientific publications, to broaden our minds and scopes about prairies and how we restore prairies. Today I want to bring to the table three different things people can go out and find and read. We'll put these on the website as usual. The first is a publication that came out this year by a group that is working, that I've been really thankful to be a part of, The Prairie Reconstruction Initiative Advisory Team, that's putting together some crowdsourcing data opportunities to make sure we're planting prairies great every single time. Sometimes we have flops right? Sometimes things happen out there on the prairie, we don't even know why. Because this is such a new science we have to all work together to try to answer some of these questions about when we have success and why and when we have not so much success and why. This recent paper came out, Diane Larson was the lead author on it, it came out this year in 2018 in [the Journal of] Ecological Restoration. It talked about the need for folks that are planting prairies, to make sure that they document what they're doing and what kind of seed mix went into the ground, where the seed mixes went into the ground, how it was planted, what time of year it was planted. All these different things that might factor into whether or not the prairie was successful. They did kind of a retrospective study, trying to gather this data themselves to see where the holes were in terms of data collection. They had a couple of insights from their

analyses. They found that through times species richness or the number of species that were planted were declining. That's one of the main concerns that a lot of different publications are coming out with. We plant these diverse mixes, but then it declines through time. We may find that that is changing through time as we continue to increase the diversity, but we won't know unless we monitor these sites. It is certainly something that I wanna get out there at Swessinger and start using these PRI (Prairie Reconstruction Initiative) monitoring protocols to document the diversity. Especially the second growing year we might be able to do that, less of these annual weeds and things popping up, we'll get more of what's actually planted showing up. Variables such as fire they found in this paper were also really hard to document and remember unless they were written down. This paper really drives home what we need to be documenting from a prairie restoration standpoint in order to learn to crowdsource and to learn from what we're doing. The second, I'm showing you here as if you can see. The second piece that I want to bring to the table is this prairie reconstruction guidebook from the NDSU (North Dakota State University) Extension Service, but also some U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service folks put this together, you can find it on the web. We'll put it on our website too, a link to it. It's really helpful, it goes through all these different steps of how you restore a prairie. It's a pretty big document, I think it was published in 2017. It's really helpful if you're just brand new to this prairie reconstruction thing and you don't know what you're doing, this is really helpful. It doesn't go into this, what I call precision planting, it doesn't really talk about that. Maybe that's volume two or something and we can write that. ((laughs))

Megan: Yeah, let's break some new ground with that.

Jess: It's pretty cool, pretty cool stuff. This is a really helpful resource. The third thing I want to talk about is one of Chris Helzer's blog [posts]. Megan and I always really enjoy reading and talk about it, kind of banter a little bit about what he's finding and what we see here in Minnesota. One of his blog [posts] is talking about poison hemlock and just some quick and dirty stats that he was doing looking at whether or not poison hemlock was repelled by diversity, whether or not increased diversity could repel these invasive species. One of the prevailing theories is that if we increase the diversity, it decreases the invasibility. You have more species there filling more niches, then invasive species are less likely to come in.

Megan: I love that because this is my whole (as Jess knows) soapbox I'm on all the time. You heard Kent kind of use his whiny voice earlier when he was talking about this mean regional ecologist who made him do this more diverse mix, but they're seeing things that they haven't seen before. I hope what you're getting from Bill and Kent is that we're evolving too, we're learning too. Each time they do a restoration or reconstruction, they're doing it a little bit different than the last one because they are learning from the last one. We're getting better and better and that's because of diversity, I could talk about that all day long. That's why Jess and I chat about it so much when Chris Helzer brings it up on his blog because I just feel like in nature, nature always tries to insert diversity into any scenario. I feel like if you want to use nature as your guide to do a prairie reconstruction or any kind of reconstruction, you have to have that diversity as a foundation.

Jess: Yes, it's very important and the science clearly shows that. The more diversity we have, the less management for the future.

Megan: See I'm trying to help you Kent. I want you to get off the sprayer for so many reasons. ((Kent laughs)) I want you to not even have to get on it. That's what we're trying to do.

Kent: Okay.

Megan: Which makes Bill happy because then Kent is happy and the Slayton office is happy.

Jess: Hey Megan?

Megan: Yeah Jess?

Jess: Take a hike!

Megan: I think I will. So this is the part of the podcast where we highlight your fabulous public lands where you can in fact take a hike to experience prairie in all its gloriousness. It would just not be right if we didn't highlight as our number one property that you all own, the Swessinger Wildlife Management Area. We didn't say this earlier, we just kept saying it's a section of land, but it's actually about 713 acres in Nobles County. You heard Bill say earlier, over 40 reconstructed wetlands. Definitely have lots of different types of prairie that they're trying to create out there, dry, mesic, wet and I love how Bill says it, "wetter". There's wet and then wetter! ((laughs)) Otherwise known as wetland to everybody else, but I like how Bill talks about it. Because of that, as he mentioned earlier you can observe deer, small game, pheasants and as Minnesotans say, water-fall (waterfowl)

Bill: Lots of waterfowl.

Megan Water-fall, got to say it the Minnesotan way! In that general complex though, there is also the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Bloom Waterfowl Production Area. It is literally right across the street from Swessinger. You can just walk south, or if you're Kent, get into your tractor and just drive across the road south. This waterfowl production area (WPA), it does provide habitat not surprisingly, for a vast variety of waterfowl, shorebirds, grassland birds, plants, insects and other wildlife. Then north of Swessinger, if you wanted to go the other way and go into Murray County a little bit there's a 516 acre unit called the Fenmont Wildlife Management area. That has permanent and semi-permanent wetlands, meaning that they are ephemeral so they may dry up as the season progresses. They also have uplands, some woody cover plantings, which you don't typically see out in this area. Then you can also, it has good road access through it, so you can have good wildlife viewing. This is one of those sites that if you are not able to walk or if you need a little bit more assistance it has a nice little long road through it so you can do your wildlife viewing from the car or the tractor as Kent prefers. ((laughs)) Bill and Kent, because you all are here, I want to know, tell me some of your favorites. We'll start with you Bill, I want to know your favorite wildlife management area, or one of your favorites because we don't want the other ones to get jealous.

Bill: Swessinger of course. ((laughs)) I mean I have to say that right now. It was such a fun project to work on. You build it and they will come, and they have come. You can see it out there. If you want to take a walk, you will find wildlife, you'll find lots of diversity out there. Everything from frogs to turtles to geese, ducks. Of course we don't want to talk about those pesky Canada geese eating our new prairie seeding that was coming up last year, but you know, we gave 'em a break.

Megan: Opportunities for some fall hunting.

Bill: Exactly

Megan: There's a nice vista. Where can people overlook almost the whole property? When we were talking on the phone last week you were telling me there's this one spot where you park and come up the hill and kind of see the lay of the land.

Bill: You go to the south side of the unit, county road 18. The parking lot hasn't been developed yet, but it will be. There's a sign there, you just walk north and keep walking until you're on the top of the hill, you'll see the entire section from there.

Megan: Nice, I love vistas. Kent what about you? What's your favorite?

Kent: Well I have a lot of favorites but my current favorite probably is Plum Creek WMA (Wildlife Management Area). It's got some nice native prairie, it's got some hardwoods, creek running through it and we're currently developing that one right now so that one is kind of fun. There's lots of deer, turkeys, pheasants, so that's my current favorite. Subject to change within a week. ((laughs))

Megan: The partnership continues because Bill and Kent, I was graciously invited out on that site and we got to do a little bit of a walk and kind of see what their plans were for the restoration, look at the different areas and what the future seed mixes are going to be. It has some really unique areas because it overlooks, it has this really steep hillside that overlooks a wetland that extends onto the private land there. Would you call that a wetland or a full-blown marsh?

Bill: Oh I don't know, probably just a wetland.

Megan A wetland ((laughs)) we'll just call it a wetland. It's really neat because you can be on the top of that hillside and you can look all the way down. There are quite a few pheasants out there when we were out there scouting. Everybody knows that a wildlife manager does a lot of scouting in the fall, it's important for obvious reasons. These are just a sample of some of your public lands. As always you can check out all of these on the DNR's recreation compass. It is an online tool, its mobile accessible so you can access it on your cellphone. It is not an app currently, but you just go through it on your web browser like you normally would. You can search by unit name, you can search by county or you can just scroll on the map just like you would on google maps. Then it will give you a lat/long (latitude and longitude). And you can navigate right to these areas to find your public lands. I love it, it's a handy tool we mention it every single time. Use the DNR Recreation Compass. I use it at work. Do you use it at work Jess? Like at your desk?

Jess: All the time.

Megan: When I'm trying to find, when a wildlife manager calls me and they're like what about this unit? Because you guys are amazing and you know exactly where they all are just in your head. I don't have that yet, I don't have that ability to just know where they are. So I have to cheat and open up Rec. Compass.

Bill: We had to use maps at first though to get to them.

Megan: Right. Now they're in the Rec. Compass so we can cheat and use our skills. Well I'm really glad that you guys were here today. You've got work to do so we don't want to hold you up. Jess it was nice wasn't it?

Jess: It was wonderful. As always I got goosebumps, it was just great.

Megan: Anytime we talk about partnerships, Jess and I nerd out. Well, we're going to catch you next week on the Prairie Pod. We're going to talk through establishment phase management for restorations. We teased it a little bit on this episode when I yelled at Kent for spraying. We'll talk through a little bit of that: to spray or not to spray, benefits, and pitfalls, how to get Megan not to yell at you, what you do now matters later. Gosh, sounds like something my mother would say to me. 'Til next time. Bye Jess, Bill, Kent.

Jess, Bill, and Kent: Bye.

((sounds of birds chirping and wind blowing))