

# **Dane Co. Exec. Parisi: Partners donate \$70,000 to Dane County for 160 Acre Restoration Project at Pheasant Branch Conservancy**

Posted on Tuesday, Feb 9, 2021

**>> WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

Community partners are coming together to help Dane County complete a 160-acre addition and restoration to the very popular Pheasant Branch Conservancy, County Executive Joe Parisi announced today. Organizations have already collected \$70,000 in donations for the project that will add onto the popular hiking and walking destination. The County acquired the land next to Pheasant Branch Conservancy in 2019 and thanks to funds from The Nature Conservancy of Wisconsin, The Meringoff Family Foundation, The Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy, and The Clean Lakes Alliance, restoration work on the expanded Conservancy is moving forward. This work will help the property maintain its rural character, reduce the flow of floodwaters into Lake Mendota during heavy rain events, and help capture sediment and phosphorus, improving water quality within the Pheasant Branch Watershed and the Yahara Lakes.

The parcel provides a variety of ecosystem services and expanded recreational access to an incredibly popular but sensitive natural resource area. By saving this property from being developed and restoring it to prairie, Dane County will be able to prevent the runoff of nearly five million gallons of water from entering the Yahara Chain of Lakes each year, and reduce more than 550 pounds of phosphorus annually. Roughly one pound of phosphorus can produce up to 500 pounds of algae in area lakes.

“Our restoration project to expand the Pheasant Branch Conservancy furthers our efforts to mitigate flooding, improve water quality, and preserve this treasured

outdoor space for years to come,” said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. “This effort wouldn’t be possible without the support of the Dane County community—both through financial contributions and the many volunteers who donate their time year after year. We thank everyone for their support and look forward to partnering with these organizations as we work to preserve the Pheasant Branch Conservancy.”

Key aspects of the restoration project include 1) demolishing all structures and using the concrete from building foundations for a future access/parking site, 2) converting all of the cropland to native prairie over a 4-year period, 3) implementing a major wetland restoration and stormwater management project, 4) establishing perimeter hiking trails that would also serve as firebreaks and connect to the existing trail system at the Pheasant Branch Conservancy.

The following partners will support the restoration with financial contributions:

- The Nature Conservancy of Wisconsin, in partnership with the Meringoff Family Foundation, will grant \$20,000 to support restoration of historic wetlands.
- The Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy will grant \$25,000 to support the prairie and has pledged to continue fundraising for the project with a goal of contributing \$100,000 to the project.
- The Clean Lakes Alliance will grant \$25,000 to support the prairie and has committed an additional \$25,000 per year for three years for a total contribution of \$100,000.

“Clean Lakes Alliance volunteers have been removing invasive plants to help control runoff and improve wildlife habitat in Pheasant Branch Conservancy for the last 10 years,” said Clean Lakes Alliance Founder and Executive Director James Tye. “Recently, our donors and business partners, like Alliant Energy, were excited to contribute to our Protect, Restore, Preserve Fund that we will use to support land improvement on the newly purchased land next to the Conservancy.”

In June of 2019, Dane County purchased 160 acres of land from the Acker family who operated a dairy farm at the site. Costing nearly \$10 million, it was the largest conservation investment for a land acquisition in the county’s history. The parcel is within the Pheasant Branch and Yahara River Watersheds and contains the headwaters of an intermittent stream that flows into Pheasant Branch Creek. The site is also located within the recharge area of Frederick Springs, found south of the parcel, making it important for groundwater protection.

“Protecting and restoring nature provides benefits to all of us, like flood reduction and water purification, and helps solve water challenges that come with climate change,” said Nick Miller, Director of Science and Strategy at The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin. “Thanks to Dane County and the Meringoff Family Foundation, these restored habitats will benefit people and nature at Pheasant Branch Conservancy and throughout the Yahara River Watershed.”

Last year, Dane County awarded a \$429,800 contract to Middleton-based Speedway Sand & Gravel, Inc. for concrete removal and grading at the site. The Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy also donated \$16,500 to support the funding of a limited term employee (LTE) dedicated to working with volunteer groups in the Pheasant Branch Conservancy.

“The Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy are pleased to be contributing funds to seed the first 40-acre quadrant of prairie on the former Acker property,” said Pam Shannon, Co-President of the Friends of Pheasant Branch Conservancy Board. “We are grateful to our partners in this effort—Dane County Parks, the Clean Lakes Alliance, and the Nature Conservancy— and to all of the generous donors to our Seed the Need campaign who recognize the environmental and aesthetic value of planting a “Platinum Prairie” in the newest portion of Pheasant Branch Conservancy.”

As the restoration work progresses, recreational access to the property will also increase. Dane County Parks has seen an increase in visitors at all property during the pandemic, including the incredibly popular Pheasant Branch Conservancy. In addition to ecosystem services, the property offers a great opportunity for residents to hike and to enjoy the many physical and mental health benefits of time spent outside.

A county resolution to approve the organization’s donations will be approved in the coming weeks.