

University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point, Student Society of Arboriculture connects with historic conservationist’s legacy

by Jeannette Bowden, Urban Forestry Major, University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point

Since its inception in 1981, the SSA at Stevens Point has been an active participant in both the Wisconsin Arborist Association and the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA). In recent years, this student group has placed much of its emphasis on tree climbing activities such as tree pruning and removals of campus trees as well as recreational climbing. Indeed it can be a lot of fun but, it tends to exclude those whose interests lie elsewhere in the broad field we call urban forestry. By pursuing a project that encompassed multiple facets of urban forestry management, students were able to catch a little glimpse of that broader palette through some practical application. Last October, through collaboration with the Sand County and Aldo Leopold Foundation, the Student Society of Arboriculture at UW–Stevens Point took advantage of a unique opportunity to connect with the historic roots of modern conservation.

Aldo Leopold, a world renowned conservationist, set in motion an ecological restoration project on an abandoned and impoverished farmstead in Baraboo, Wis., in the mid 1930s. This property is the heart of the Aldo Leopold Memorial Reserve, which now encompasses 1400 acres. It was here that he authored a number of ecological essays that would later be published as *A Sand County Almanac*. The content of this collection of essays helped define modern-day conservation land use ethics. Aldo Leopold strongly believed that every person must be a steward of the land. He said that “when we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect.” The philosophies behind this simple land ethic have in many ways shaped the way we think about natural resources management on a worldwide scale and are integrated throughout much of the course work of Urban Forestry majors at UWSP.

The group began the weekend relaxing around a fire next to the Wisconsin River in a location close to Leopold’s shack. This was a good time to build some camaraderie among the group members. The project got rolling the next morning as some of the students were able to utilize their tree climb-

ing and pruning skills to remove hazardous deadwood in trees located near some of the structures. Later in the afternoon, restoration efforts turned to some much-needed invasive species suppression. Buckthorn was the prime target of removal. After cutting away the intruders, the students used herbicide to treat the stumps to prevent them from resprouting. This process was repeated for the other invasive species that were encountered such as autumn olive, honeysuckle, and barberry.

The following day, students explored more of the historic property, including the location of Leopold’s untimely death in 1948. After the tour, students resumed invasive species work clearing a total of eight acres. In addition, time was spent surveying potential future projects with director of the Sand County Foundation, Kevin McAleese.

The success of the initial project stirred the interest of other Natural Resources student groups at UW–Stevens Point. Currently the SSA is working with the Society of American Foresters, the Student Ecological Restoration group, and the fire crew in developing a collaborative effort. By working with other student groups, SSA members get a taste of real-world urban forestry, where interagency cooperation is needed to achieve good management strategies in the wildland/urban interface.

Student Society of Arboriculture students are currently planning a follow-up trip this spring. The prospective projects include:

- ◆ Hazardous deadwood removal of declining oaks over the Leopold shack
- ◆ Maintenance pruning of trees Leopold himself planted
- ◆ Prairie restoration burns and invasive species treatment burns
- ◆ Invasive garlic mustard treatment involving GPS to create a mapping unit of treated and untreated areas
- ◆ Continued buckthorn and other invasive species eradication

An added bonus to this trip may include meeting Leopold’s daughter Nina Bradley.

As a proponent of arboriculture, Nina has expressed interest in giving students an opportunity to work at her residence which is located on the reserve.

This was the first time a student group from UW–Stevens Point participated in field work for the Aldo Leopold Memorial Reserve in an official capacity. This one-of-a-kind experience students received left them exhausted and sore but truly inspired. The pioneering efforts of the SSA, with developing cooperation from other student groups, will enable many future students to play a unique role in a continuing history of resource management.

The Student Society of Arboriculture is an active organization on campus at the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point (UWSP) College of Natural Resources. In fact, many current WAA members likely first became professionally involved through the SSA, honing skills through active service through committees, as a board member, assisting at WAA and ISA conferences, or learning from industry through presentations at SSA meetings. The SSA typically has 30 members that participate in various functions with current SSA board members Dane Connolly-Nelson, President; Matt Pecard, Vice President; Mary Neal, Secretary; Keria Miller, Treasurer; Glen Wills, Promotions; and Charles Kastern, Pruning Coordinator, leading the way for the organization.

The SSA is part of the urban forestry program at UWSP that annually graduates approximately 30 students. Graduating students have interest in many facets of arboriculture and urban forestry. With an active job market, the prospects for employment are great for graduating students. One of the best ways to market job openings from the industry is on-campus meeting with students and sending job announcements to either

Mike Pagel (mpagel@uwsp.edu),
Les Werner (lwerner@uwsp.edu), or
Rich Hauer (rhauer@uwsp.edu).

The SSA is active and some recent functions the SSA has participated in include the WAA, ISA and TCIA conferences, pruning and tree removals on campus, student organization fair, and Arbor Day. One recent activity includes invasive species control as documented in this recent article that appeared in *Arborist News*.