



# Friends of the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area Spring Newsletter 2025

## Spring greetings, Friends of the Namekagon Barrens!

It must be spring, as the Sharp-tailed Grouse are dancing on the leks! There may still be open slots to reserve a viewing blind on our website. Check it frequently, as cancellations come up, particularly on Tuesday through Thursday each week if DNR Wildlife surveys are rescheduled.

The Friends’ Board is happy to invite you to our field days and our annual “Blueberries on the Barrens” summer picnic (July 19 this year!). Our 2025 Schedule is on the back page of the newsletter. *Mark your calendars!*



*In this issue:*

FNBWA 2024 Accomplishments.....	Page 2
2024 Bluebird Report.....	Page 2
Property Update from Nancy Christel.....	Page 3
Barrens Flora Featured in Great Lakes Botanist Journal.....	Page 3
Karner Blue and Ellie.....	Page 4
Thanks to our Members and Supporters.....	Page 5
Thanks to Past Board Member Susan Armstrong.....	Page 5
It’s Turtle Time!.....	Page 5
2025 FNBWA Program Schedule.....	Page 7

## 2024 Accomplishments: What did FNBWA do last year?

By Gary Dunsmoor



The FNBWA were busy as usual throughout 2024, accomplishing many projects, and enjoying many events with many others that recognize the importance of barrens conservation.

The Friends added one more picnic table to the picnic shelter for more seating as our small, but important, organization grows. Two new portable toilets were also added to the cabin/picnic shelter area for the increase in users, one by the gate, and one closer to the shelter.

The annual spring cabin clean-up and road litter pickup were completed in May.

Thanks to a generous donation by Allen and Carol Nelson, two new solar panels were installed on the cabin by Allen, greatly enhancing the electrical supply available at our picnics, meetings and other events.

A few members again assisted the DNR with Sharp-tailed Grouse lek surveys, all the Bluebird houses were again monitored throughout the nesting season, and the WI Snapshot camera the Friends sponsor was checked four times for the fifth year.

On the educational front, the Friends again sponsored two very popular Natural Resources Foundation field trips: Rare Birds of the Barrens, and Butterflies and Wildflowers. We also offered field trips on Blueberries, and Bird Dogs and Sharp-tails. Our annual Blueberries on the Barrens picnic was again a big hit with over 70 barrens enthusiasts attending for food, presentations, displays, silent auction, door prizes, and great conversation.

Susan Armstrong again produced our very popular 2025 FNBWA calendar mailed out last fall, and Bruce Pankratz and Dave Peters continued to make great improvement on the Friends website, including adding YouTube videos on Barrens topics.

A big *Thank You* to all our wonderful Friends that have made generous donations of support that make all these accomplishments, events, and globally-significant barrens conservation possible.



*Thanks to Larry Dau for this bluebird photo, taken spring at the Evergreen Cemetery on the south edge of the Barren's North Unit.*

### 2024 Bluebird Report

*Many thanks to Dave and Sue Clausen for maintaining the bluebird nesting boxes on the Barrens and monitoring the nests throughout the summer. Here's their report on the hatchling success from last summer:*

2024 was a good bluebird year compared to the past few. A total of 60 chicks were fledged. We found the first eggs on our May 1st visit. On May 22, a total of thirteen nests were being used by bluebirds. There were 42 chicks in nests on June 1st! It seems that there weren't a lot of second nesting attempts. Only 9 chicks were fledged after July 3rd and the last 2 chicks were gone by August 9th. Normally we have good reproduction well into August. We suspect that may have been weather-related as swallows weren't very active later on also. Thanks also to Jim Adams for help with the bluebird monitoring.



# Namekagon Barrens Property Management Update

From Nancy Christel, DNR Wildlife Biologist and  
NBWA Property Manager

Hello Neighbors,

Happy spring! I thought you may appreciate a little update on the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area (NBWA) and Sharp-tailed Grouse.

You probably noticed all the work that has been done to improve the open landscape. With these pine/oak barrens habitat improvements on the NBWA, we are happy to share that many wildlife species populations that require this open-landscape habitat are growing and expanding. There are more Sharp-tailed Grouse leks in more areas throughout the property! This is great news, except that many are dancing on or very near our firebreaks.

In addition, street-legal motorized vehicle use has been increasing on our firebreaks over the more recent years, and this is causing more possibilities that birds are being disturbed as they attempt to mate and raise their young.

With all of this in mind and following the existing NBWA Master Plan, you will see more seasonal firebreak closures posted on the property this year, most notably Gomulak from St. Croix Trail to North County Line, Clemens from Dry Landing to County Line Road, and Delong-Lien. Sharp-tailed Grouse blind users have been instructed to use the town roads to access the blinds for viewing. Most DNR wildlife management areas limit street-legal vehicle use to authorized DNR business only year-round, so NBWA's firebreaks being open to the public, is more of an exception than the norm.

Besides DNR staff, Friends of NBWA volunteers are authorized to use these roads while conducting business, such as cleaning up garbage, managing the bluebird boxes and the Wisconsin Snapshot camera, and guiding many FNBWA tours and events. See <https://www.namekagonbarrens.org/> to find out more, get involved and enjoy the fun!

**From April 15 – July 31**, dogs on wildlife areas must be on a leash no longer than 8 feet long to protect breeding wildlife species.

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation. Enjoy the property and all the wonderful wildlife. If you have any questions, please let me know.

Sincerely,

Nancy M. Christel (Cervantes)



## Barrens Flora Featured in *Great Lakes Botanist Journal*

Congratulations to authors and researchers Derek Anderson, Paul Hlina and Richard Haug on publication of their paper “*The Barrens Flora of Wisconsin’s Northwest Sands Ecological Landscape*.” This scholarly article was published in *The Great Lakes Botanist*, a Journal of North American Botany last summer. The authors conducted many surveys in the NBWA and other Northwest Sands barrens. FNBWA members assisted with plant surveys over the past several years to provide data for this research study.

Here’s an excerpt from the paper’s abstract:

“*The barrens of Wisconsin’s Northwest Sands Ecological Landscape are a dynamic mosaic shifting between dry forests and woodlands to open, prairie-like communities depending on the frequency of disturbance. In the course of this study, we collected 2,213 voucher specimens representing 71 plant families, 217 genera, and 404 taxa. The barrens flora becomes less diverse as you move from the southwest to the northeast. Prairie species are more common and dominant in the southwestern sites, and northern dry forest species are more common and dominant in the northeastern sites.*”

The full paper can be viewed at this link:

<https://journals.publishing.umich.edu/glb/article/id/5009/>

## Karner Blue and Ellie

By Jerry McAllister

The *Karner Blue* is a shimmering blue-violet butterfly which lives in a few scattered pockets in the Great Lakes and New England states. It is named after a tiny town in upstate New York where it was first identified. It is on the federal Endangered Species List. *Ellie* is my adult daughter who is a butterfly expert—self-taught from childhood. She identifies butterflies as they pass by on the wing. Most parents teach their children about nature and the out-of-doors. Ellie began teaching me about butterflies in the third grade. I am still learning. I am fortunate.

The Karner Blue is endangered because the larval stage is completely dependent on wild lupine. The latter grows in high sand content soils in the open in forested areas (think barrens or oak savannah habitats). Though once abundant, European agricultural practices have rendered them globally rare. Overwintered eggs hatch the first ten days of June, adult butterflies lay eggs on spring lupine, and a second hatch occurs 60 days later leading to another hatch about ten months later.



Ellie and family were up from Marion Iowa at my spring-summer-fall lake home near Stone Lake WI for a week's vacation last June 9-14. The timing was right so we decided to duplicate (relive) our first sighting and identification of the Karner from fifteen years ago. One of those few scattered pockets of Karner Blues is in Fish Lake Wildlife Area located a few miles south of Grantsburg, Wisconsin on Stolte Road, and an hour's drive from my lake home. The "butterfly pocket" is strung out along Stolte Road for about ½ mile on both sides. Total area is 3-4 acres.



Butterflies are late risers; they wait for sunlight to dry their wings so we arrived about 10:30 a.m. on June 13th. It was sunny, high sixties, with a light breeze. Karner blues flit low in the foliage; so, this was about perfect viewing conditions. The date was a bit late in the egg-laying window. The lupine flowers were a bit shabby. Many had gone to seed pods. We banded around in a low spot with lots of lupine first. We saw only a few butterflies, one of which Ellie thought was a male Karner. It was tattered looking, a late first-hatch adult.

There are six possible Blue species butterfly at Fish Lake. The other five are fairly common across Wisconsin. On our first foray from long ago we saw all six. Karner Blues are distinguished by bands of orange spots on the underside of the wing (top and bottom). The female Karner is brownish-blue on the wing upper side; the male is violet-blue on the wing upper side.

We shifted topography going from a damp thick growth spot to a higher (10-15 feet), thin growth spot. Both topographies had plenty of lupine with mostly late growth blossoms or seed pods. At the second we saw 7 males and 1 female Karner Blue. The female seemed intent on laying eggs and gave us great photo opportunities (*see accompanying photos*).

There were plenty of other butterfly species in the sandy lupine habitat. Ellie identified 5 Monarchs, 8 swallowtails both Black and Canada Tiger, about 50 Silvery Checkerspots, 5 White Admirals, an American Copper, and a huge Mourning Cloak. The only Blue species found was the 9 Karner individuals, surprising relative to our visit 15 years before.



Although wild lupine was the predominant flower species, we also saw pink Wild Rose, white Daisy, deep blue Hyacinth, white and yellow Yarrow, red Indian Paint Brush, Orange Hawkweed, red and yellow Columbine and Prairie Phlox. The latter was a deeply colored pink. The Hawkweed's orange paired well with Prairie Coreopsis as they seem to share the same patch of soil often. Forgive me if there was some mis-identification. Ellie and I are weak on wildflower identification.

The photos were taken by Ellie McAllister. The lupine photo is typical for the Fish Lake Karner pockets. The photo of an individual with grayish underside and bands of orange is distinctive for the Karner. The photo of the blue upper side without orange bands is distinctive for the Karner male.



## Membership update

The Board extends sincere thanks and appreciation for everyone supporting FNBWA through membership renewals, special donations, lifetime memberships, photography, and help on field days and projects. We are very grateful for your generous contributions of time, talents, and funds.

We do have some members on our list who have not renewed in the last 5 years, and some emails that don't reach the original mailbox owner anymore (either the mailbox is discontinued or full). We will be updating our roster and taking off these contacts.

Thanks again to everyone for staying in touch, donating, attending programs, and supporting barrens conservation!

**Many thanks to Susan Armstrong** for her years of devoted service to FNBWA. Susan did a wonderful job compiling and formatting our newsletter, developing and publishing our beautiful calendar each year, keeping members informed by email, and helping with our events.

*Thanks Susan! You deserve a medal!*

## It's Turtle Time! June 9-13th, 2025 is "Wild Turtle Week"

*From past Wisconsin DNR Bulletins*



Turtles have emerged from the wetlands and lake bottoms and will soon be crossing the roads, making "nests" and laying eggs. They especially need our help and protection when they are vulnerable on our roadways (see more advice below). While they prefer wetlands, lakes, and streams, there should be some in the Barrens at the spring ponds, and possibly laying eggs along the sand and gravel roads. The drive *to and from* the Barrens in early spring is usually a good time to see (and watch out for) these awesome reptiles.

Several resource conservation groups nationwide have declared **June 9-13th, 2025 as "Wild Turtle Week"** "to shell-e-brate all things related to turtles." They've provided a website with fun activities for kids, which can be found by searching on-line for "Wild Turtle Week" and selecting the [Partners in Amphibian and Reptile Conservation](#) site.

We're also happy to share this advice from Wisconsin DNR's Conservation Biologist Andrew Badje on ways to protect and appreciate our native turtle species:

*"It's that time of year where we're seeing hatchling turtles of a few species (painted and map turtles) digging themselves out of their nests, and wandering like lost souls to the nearest body of water.*

*Here are a few tips that will help get these turtles back to their rivers, lakes, and wetlands safely, so they do not perish from mammalian/bird predators, vehicles, or desiccation from heat on grass and pavement. If you do see a turtle and want to help:*

- *Pick up the turtle and place it in a container that is shaded/cool (potentially add some leaves/vegetation for it to tuck itself into), until you have time to relocate it to a safer place.*
- *When time allows, sooner than later, make your way down to the nearest appropriate waterbody and place the hatchling at or near the shoreline, so the turtle can make a decision on whether it wants to stay in a vegetated area on land for a bit or enter the water.*
- *Good places to put the turtle are always on a well vegetated shoreline with cover they can hide in, if they choose to. I prefer to give them a fighting chance and place them near a backwater area/wetland with minimal to no flow.*
- *Bad places to place turtles are in areas with open water (little to no vegetation) and high flow, areas near riprap, or keeping them where you found them if it's far from a water source and near roads.*



*Two important things to note:*

*1) Since young turtles do have higher levels of salmonella, touching them does carry some risk. If you do handle them without gloves, please remember to not rub your eyes, eat with your hands, etc. until washing hands thoroughly, so as to minimize salmonella infection.*

*2) This is not an invitation to bring baby turtles into your home as pets or to sell them to well meaning owners. Wisconsin DNR and all other federal and state agencies stress to 'Keep Wild Turtles Wild' in addition to most other wildlife found in Wisconsin and elsewhere. The WDNR and turtle advocates worldwide want turtles to continue to reside in the wetlands, lakes, and rivers that they always have, and keeping them in their habitat is the best way to do that.*

*Any little help goes a long way, and following a few simple steps here and in your neighborhoods, will help keep turtle diversity and abundance healthy throughout Wisconsin in years to come, and it will further help lessen the blow that turtles are facing along our roadways."*

There is also a conservation document on protecting wood turtles during forestry and other land management activities. The guidance provided is also applicable to our other turtle species as well. It can be found by searching for ["Wood Turtles: Conservation Considerations for Forest Landowners."](#)

To learn even more about turtle conservation, search for ["Wisconsin Turtle Conservation Program"](#) on-line. This site has instructional videos and a link to a form for reporting turtle observations.

Thanks to our members who shared photos with us for this issue: Dave Peters (Sharp-tailed Grouse on page 1 and South Unit scenery page 3), Larry Dau (bluebird photo on page 2), Ellie McAllister (lupine and Karner Blue photos pages 4 and 5), Gary Dunsmoor (turtle on page 6) and Kathy Bartilson (turtle on page 5).

# Friends of the Namekagon Barrens Wildlife Area 2025 Summer Program Schedule

## **Opening Day! Cabin Clean-up & Road Litter Picking Day**

**Saturday, May 10 at 9 a.m.**

Join us at the Namekagon Barrens Cabin at 33174 Gomulak Fire Lane, Danbury, WI; no sign-up is needed for this field day. Bring a pair of gloves to help clean litter from the roads and spring-clean the cabin.

## **Rare Birds of the Barrens**

**Saturday, May 17 from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m.:**

Car pool with our Board member leaders to specific viewing points in the Barrens to see and hear spring birds! The trip starts at the Cabin. Registration and information are available through the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin at [wisconservation.org](http://wisconservation.org)

## **Hunt Hill Nature Center Field Trip to the South Unit**

**Tuesday, June 3 from 10 a.m to 2 p.m.**

Learn about the history of the Namekagon Barrens and what makes this globally rare habitat so special! The trip starts at Hunt Hill. Registration and information are available through Hunt Hill Nature Center at [hunthill.org](http://hunthill.org)

## **Butterflies & Wildflowers**

**Saturday, June 7 from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m**

Hike into the South Unit to see spring wildflowers and check the lupine stand for signs of the elusive Karner Blue butterflies. The trip starts at the Cabin. Registration and information are available through the Natural Resources Foundation of Wisconsin at [wisconservation.org](http://wisconservation.org)

## **Scouting for Blueberries**

**Saturday, July 12 at 9 a.m.**

Help find the hot spots for blueberry picking so we can share maps at the Blueberry picnic the next week. We gather at the cabin and then check out likely spots in the Barrens for lots of juicy berries. No sign-up is needed for this field day.

## **Blueberries on the Barrens Annual Picnic!**

**Saturday, July 19;** Board members will be at the Cabin to share blueberry picking maps at 8:30 a.m. Come anytime to view displays and visit with friends. Presentations by resource conservation speakers will begin in late morning, followed by a picnic lunch at noon. No sign-up is needed for this field day.

## **Bird Dogs & Sharp-tails**

**Saturday, August 16, 8:30 a.m. at the Cabin**

Come see hunting dog trainers and their dogs work together to find game birds.

No sign-up needed- just come! Bring your binoculars. Rubber knee boots are recommended to keep dry feet.

Events & field trips are at/begin at the NBWA cabin at 33174 Gomulak Firelane.

Watch for FNBWA member email updates and more information or updates on the FNBWA website ([www.namekagonbarrens.org](http://www.namekagonbarrens.org)) & Facebook page.

**Hope to see you on the Barrens!**