

Lalor Road: Living Roadsides

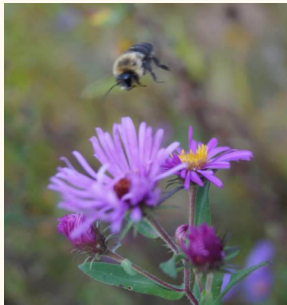
A living roadside supports native grasses and wildflowers, butterflies, bees and birds. It can also serve people who walk, run, bike and drive along roads, appreciating rustic views and remnants of historic vegetation and wildlife. Other benefits include cleansing pollutants and nutrients from storm water runoff, absorbing runoff to protect downstream waters, storing carbon to slow climate change, and even trapping blowing snow to reduce drifting.

Why we should care for our roadsides

We are inspired by Robin Wall Kimmerer (*Braiding Sweetgrass*, 2013) who motivates people around the world to care for nature, so nature can care for us. Some of her wisdom:

“Gifts from the earth or from each other establish a particular relationship, an obligation of sorts to give, to receive, to reciprocate.”

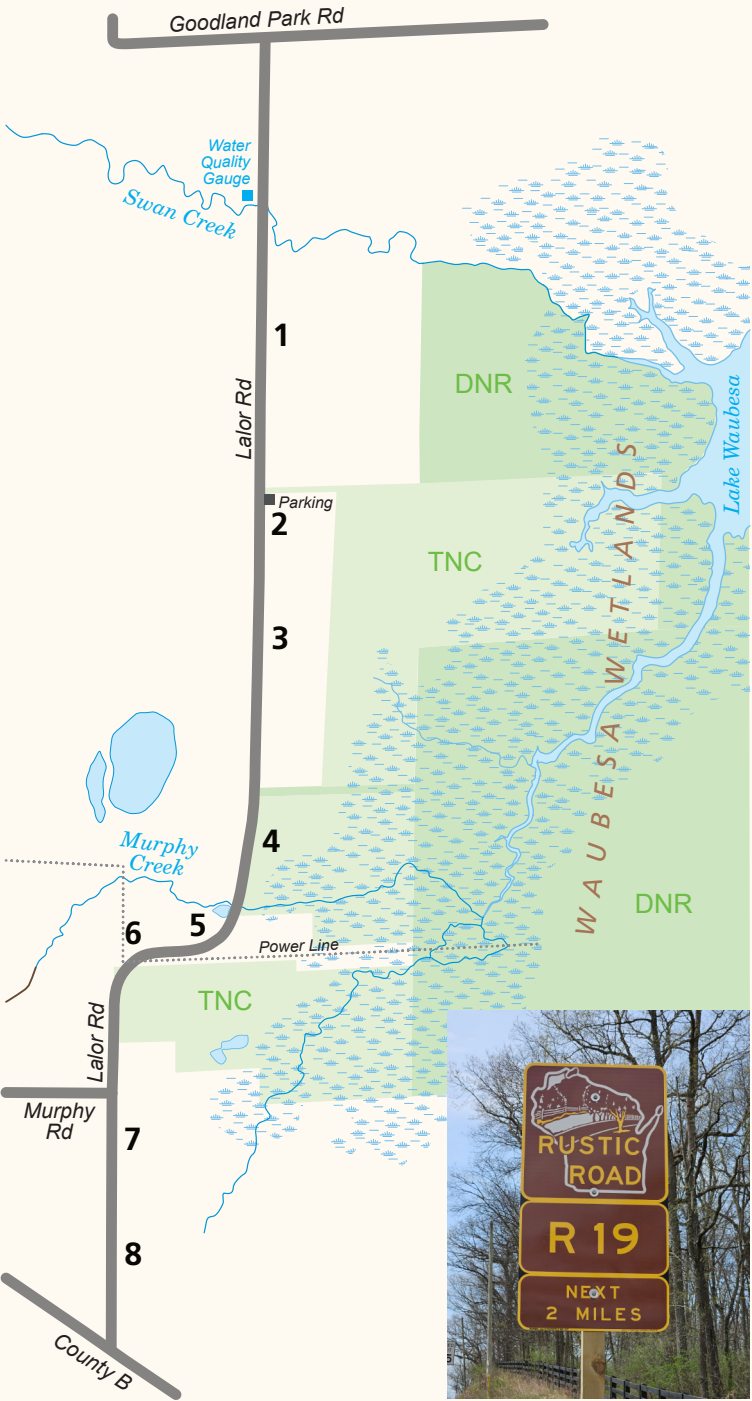
“If I receive a stream’s gift of pure water, then I am responsible for returning a gift in kind.”



Lalor Road in the Town of Dunn is Wisconsin Rustic Road 19. The road is on the western edge of Waubesa Wetlands, which are internationally-recognized for many rare and unusual plants and animals. Lalor Road forms an artificial boundary between these wetlands and the watersheds of Swan and Murphy Creeks which cross Lalor Road and wander through the wetlands enroute to Lake Waubesa. A diverse, sustainable ecosystem along Lalor Road would improve water quality in these streams and in the lake.



Patches of Native Plants along Lalor Road



• Since 1981 the Wisconsin Rustic Roads Program has helped to preserve scenic, lightly-traveled rural roads for pedestrians, bikers and motorists. The purpose of this brochure is to help achieve that goal and to improve ecosystem services that are now recognized: providing pollinator habitat, restoring clean water and reducing climate change.

• Roadside habitat improves when it is rarely mowed and weeds are managed by hand. Residents may choose to take responsibility for maintaining the roadsides adjacent to their property by registering their preference with the town. Contact the Town of Dunn at (608) 838-1081 or townofdunnwi.gov.

(See map at left)

Patch 1: A long row of Dogbane borders the roadside, separating ditch from a prairie planted and maintained by property owners.

Patch 2: Native vegetation surrounds a fenced parking area and extends south on private property. This patch might contain remnants of original prairie, as well as plants seeded by volunteers.



Prairie Dock

Patch 3: South of Patch 2, on the east side of the road and near a cattle pasture, a rise along the fence line supports a mix of sunflowers and prairie grasses. Maintained by property owners.

Patch 4: Where the road dips to Murphy Creek, a “Waubesa Wetlands” sign marks a prairie planted in the 1980s by Town of Dunn volunteers.



Patch 5: South of Murphy Creek, Lalor Road bends east-west. The north ditch has been seeded with native prairie plants by local residents and is maintained by property owners.

Patch 6: Plantings of Bee Balm, Common Milkweed and native sunflowers flourish in the power line right-of-way where Lalor Road resumes a north-south path. Maintained by the power company.

Patch 7: Just south of the junction of Murphy and Lalor roads is a remnant of Waubesa Wetlands sedge meadow on private property. The culvert in the lowest dip in the road carries agricultural runoff into the meadow.



Yellow Coneflowers, Bee Balm

Patch 8: The road borders a private three acre prairie to the east. This planting is almost 40 years old. Big Bluestem and Spiderwort are spreading into the roadside.



Sea of blue Spiderworts

How roadside services can be expanded

• Lalor Road offers an opportunity to fulfill its potential as a rustic road and for volunteers to expand the area and numbers of patches of attractive native grasses and wildflowers. Patch 1 is a role model. Owners hand-pull weeds and restrict mowing. Long-term intensive care reduces the weeds. Collecting and sowing native seed can augment wildflower populations.

• Neighboring states are also role models. Nebraska has a guidebook for roadside prairie plants; Iowa has statewide guidance for restoring and managing roadside prairies; Minnesota and Ohio provide advice and guidelines. In all these places, the main challenge is to control aggressive weeds.

• In our local roadsides, Parsnip, Burdock, Canada Thistle, Reed Canary Grass and Teasel are notorious invaders. Mowing is a short-term, inexact treatment that produces lawn-like ditches. In contrast, eradicating weeds requires careful timing and individualized attention. Even if mowing is timed to avoid the main flowering time of a weed such as Parsnip (a biennial), all it takes is for a single survivor to mature and repopulate the area.

• Tackling weeds with less mowing will require careful planning and coordination by the Town’s maintenance crew, property owners and volunteers. We will need to be adaptive – removing weeds where and when needed; collecting seeds where and when available; and sowing seeds where they are likely to establish and persist.



Lalor Road after mowing

Wildflowers Bloom Across Seasons

We feature wildflowers and grasses with conspicuous flowers and list them from early spring to late fall. We suggest places to see each plant. For further information, see the UW-Madison Arboretum book, *Prairie Plants* (Cochrane, Elliot and Lipke, 2006).

Spring (April - June)



Spiderwort

Tradescantia ohimensis

Bright blue flowers make a stunning display at the restored prairie that extends into Patch 8. Flowering lasts for days, and you can catch the peak by viewing from the south in late morning with full sun.



Meadowrue

Thalictrum dasycarpum

Pale green to white flowers contrast with shorter lacy foliage. Flowers develop above the dense canopy of re-sprouting grasses. See Patches 7,8.



Solomon's Seal

Polygonatum biflorum

Small white blossoms are suspended from tall arching stems. These mature into blue berries in late summer. Look for it in semi-shade in Patches 1,4,7.



Solomon's Plume

Maianthemum racemosum

Plumes of white flowers appear at stem tips. In fall, red berries hang below the canopy where ground-nesting birds such as ruffed grouse forage. This plant tolerates semi-shade. Look for it in Patches 1,4,7.



Wild Geranium

Geranium maculatum

Look for low-growing clusters of lavender-pink flowers in semi-shaded areas. Flowers appear above deeply lobed leaves. Patches 2,4,5,7.



Sedges

Carex species

Sedges are hard to distinguish from wiry grass leaves. Most flower and release seeds very early. Tussock Sedge (*Carex stricta*) once occurred widely. It persists in sedge meadows and likely grows in Lalor Road's wetter spots.

Summer (June - September)



Yellow Coneflower

Ratibida pinnata

The first bright yellow flowers are often this species. Its petals "dance" in breezes, suspended from brown, raised centers that form seed heads which are easy to collect in fall. Look in Patches 2,4.



Black-eyed Susan

Rudbeckia hirta

Crisp yellow petals around dark brown centers form suitable landing pads for butterflies. Stems branch and accumulate flowers, with weeks of showy displays, as in Patches 2,4.



Common Milkweed

Asclepias syriaca

Pale pink blossoms form balls on tall stalks with large flat leaves that are easy to identify. Their scent attracts Monarch butterflies whose caterpillars rely on it for food. In fall, dry pods split and release seeds that float with cotton-like fluff.



Dogbane

Apocynum sibericum

A row of Dogbane forms a short flowering hedge at Patch 1. The dense canopy benefits birds. It is also called Indian Hemp for its strong fibers.



Prairie Dock

Silphium terebinthinaceum

Large shovel-shaped leaves distinguish this *Silphium* from other showy "sunflowers" on tall stalks. It also has deep roots that hold soil in place. Plants in Patches 2,3 may be remnants of the area's historic prairie.



Pasture Rose

Rosa carolina

Look for two-inch flat pink flowers with yellow centers and stems with few thorns. In late summer, red hips are tasty food for wildlife.

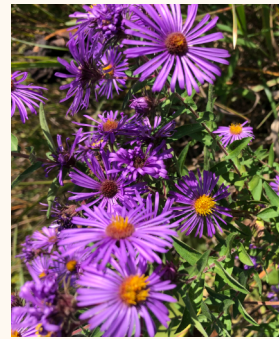


Bergamot

Monarda fistulosa

Pale lavender flowers in frilly clusters attract bees, hence its other name, Bee Balm. Sturdy stems produce lance-like leaves.

Fall and Winter (August-March)



New England Aster

Aster novae-angliae

Flowers vary from deep blue and purple to pink, with orange centers. The fall nectar supply is critical for butterflies, especially Monarchs. Enjoy in Patches 4,5.



Goldenrods

Solidago species

Roadsides turn yellow in fall thanks to abundant goldenrods. Rigid Goldenrod (*S. Rigida*) has flat clusters of flowers. It was planted in Patches 4,5. Canada Goldenrod (*S. canadensis*) is taller with flowers in sprays. More species of *Solidago* might occur.



Saw-tooth Sunflowers

Helianthus grosseserratus

Sunflowers often measure over 6 feet tall. The majestic row across from Patch 7 is intact where a power pole deters mowing. Look for more species in Patch 6.



Indian Grass



Prairie Cordgrass

Prairie Grass species

These grasses are diverse and productive both above and below ground. Deep roots and rhizomes store carbon, absorb water and curb erosion. Tall grasses send up sturdy flowering stems in fall.

Patches 2,4,5,8 have Big Bluestem (*Andropogon gerardii*) with blue/red stems, and Indian Grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) whose feathery seed heads are easy to collect when mature.

Prairie Cordgrass (*Spartina pectinata*) was once abundant throughout our region. Indigenous Americans wove the "cords" into baskets and mats. It is possible that Cordgrass persists. Clones in question have tough leaves (up to 3 feet long), but their identity is uncertain when mowing prevents flowering.

Robin wrote of the prairie plants: *"Alone, each is a botanical superlative. Together, the visual effect is stunning."*

Help Expand Living Roadsides



"We are dreaming of a time when the land might give thanks for the people."

- Robin Wall Kimmerer

A **"wake-up call"**: A 2025 study found that US populations of butterflies declined 22% from 2000 to 2020 across all butterfly families. Ten times as many species declined than increased, with 22 species plummeting more than 90% and 107 species declining more than 50%. The remedies include habitat restoration, reduced use of pesticides, and species-specific interventions.

Additional information sources:

FoWW Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/friendsofwaubesa>.



Wisconsin's Rustic Roads (online or print maps) [Wisconsin.gov/pages/travel/road/ rustic-roads](https://www.wisconsin.gov/pages/travel/road/rustic-roads).

Town of Dunn: Mowing guidelines and registration to manage one's own roadside [townofdunnwi.gov](https://www.townofdunnwi.gov) or call (608) 838-1081.

Waubesa Wetlands: New Look at an Old Gem (Joy Zedler, 2010). Online (FoWW website), and in print at the Dunn Town Hall (4156 County Hwy B).

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