

THE POWESHIEK POST

OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE POWESHIEK SKIPPERLING INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP



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Photo: Vince Cavalieri



In response to the imminent imperiled state of the endangered Poweshiek Skipperling, a coalition of conservation partners formed an international partnership to foster coordination and collaboration.

The two fundamental objectives of the partnership are to:

- 1) *Minimize likelihood of near-term extinction of Poweshiek Skipperling*
- 2) *Maximize likelihood of long-term viability of the species*

Please visit us at <https://savingskippers.org/>

The Poweshiek Post is a platform for partners to share news about Poweshiek Skipperling conservation efforts in order to mobilise knowledge amongst interested public citizens.



STEERING COMMITTEE

2026 Annual Meeting of the Poweshiek Skipperling International Partnership

The Poweshiek Skipperling International Partnership (PSIP) will meet during February 2026 in Michigan, United States of America! At this meeting, partners will discuss developments in Poweshiek Skipperling conservation before strategizing a collective approach to facilitate recovery of this endangered skipperling. Following this meeting, partners will implement our plan through the 2026-27 season.

STEERING COMMITTEE CO-CHAIRS

Erik Runquist Tam Smith



Photo: Kirstyn Eckhardt

COMMUNICATIONS

In addition to a [website](#), the Poweshiek Skipperling International Partnership has a [Facebook](#) page, [Story Map](#) and this [newsletter](#)! Be sure to visit, like and follow the pages for updates!

COMMUNICATIONS CO-CHAIRS

Dave Pavlik Tam Smith

COMMUNICATIONS

Festival Highlights: NCC at the Monarch Festival

Robert Mensies, NCC

This summer, the **Nature Conservancy of Canada (NCC)** proudly joined the **Living Prairie Museum's Monarch Festival** in Winnipeg, welcoming over **1,200 attendees!**



Engaging conversations: NCC staffers **Robert (left in green PSIP shirt)** and **Jacalyn (right)** connected with nature enthusiasts, sparking meaningful discussions about conservation.

Festival fun: Activities and giveaways drew crowds to the NCC tent, where visitors discovered the **Poweshiek Skipperling**, one of the world's rarest butterflies.



Tall Grass Prairie: Guests learned about NCC's **Tall Grass Prairie property**—the only known site in Canada where the skipperling still survives.



The day was filled with inspiration, learning, and a shared passion for protecting Canada's unique prairie ecosystems.

POPULATION MANAGEMENT

John Ball Zoo/ Haddad Lab and Minnesota Zoo Update

Cale Nordmeyer (MNZ) and David Pavlik (JBZ/Haddad Lab)



Photo: Cale Nordmeyer

We are excited to share that we were able to confirm the persistence of 2024-2025 generation at the **2024 Michigan reintroduction site – a first for the US population!** We are planning to continue augmenting this population for several more years as more seasons of survey efforts will be needed to verify the population is stable. We are a long way off from meeting our recovery goals but seeing generation over generation survivorship at a reintroduction site is a critical first step in saving the species.

A recently released Zoo-reared (marked) and a wild Poweshiek Skipperling at the Michigan Nature Association site.

The Minnesota Zoo (MNZ), John Ball Zoo (JBZ) and Haddad Lab teams released a total of **1283 Poweshiek Skipperlings** to all four Michigan populations.

While releases and surveys were taking place in the eastern side of the lower peninsula, JBZ/Haddad Lab teams were hard at work caring for the breeding members of the insurance population. A **program record 60 pairs bred, and 5,338 eggs were collected** which were then split between the JBZ and MNZ. At the time of this post, there are **currently 1217 larvae in diapause at the JBZ and 716 at MNZ.**

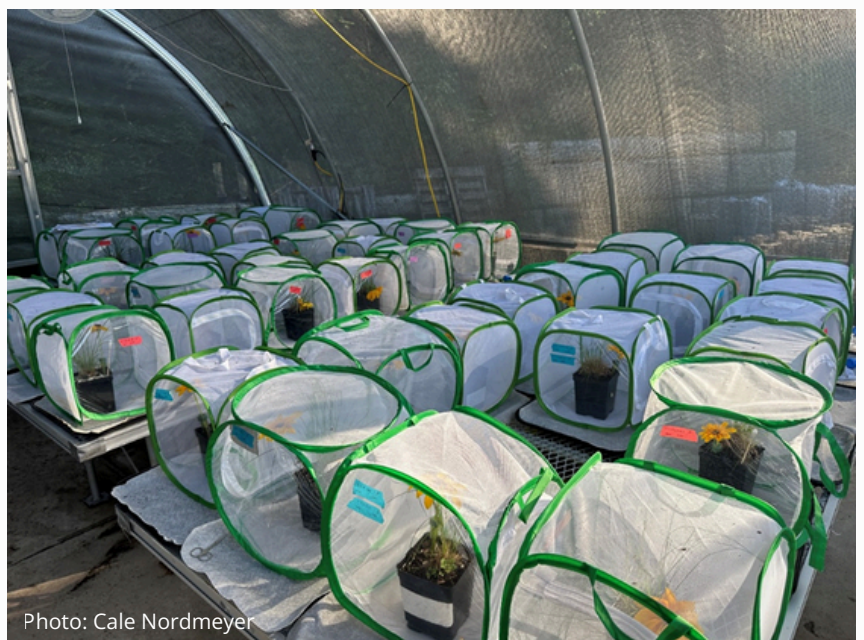


Photo: Cale Nordmeyer

Poweshiek Skipperling breeding operation at JBZ.

POPULATION MANAGEMENT

Breeding Butterflies: Assiniboine Park Zoo's Grassland Butterfly Conservation Program Update

Kirstyn Eckhardt, Assiniboine Park Zoo

This year, **16 pairs of Poweshiek Skipperling successfully bred** at Assiniboine Park Zoo (APZ) – a **record-breaking number for our program!** To encourage butterflies to breed this year, we paired three-day old male butterflies with females that had recently emerged from their chrysalids; a strategy that has proven effective for breeding Poweshiek at MNZ and JBZ.



Photo: Kirstyn Eckhardt

A breeding pair of Poweshiek Skipperling at APZ in 2025.

We collected over 1600 eggs this year, which is the most since our program began in 2017. From those eggs, 677 larvae are now in winter hibernation at the Zoo and we expect to release over 400 butterflies next summer.

POPULATION MANAGEMENT CO-CHAIRS

Cale Nordmeyer

David Pavlik

SCIENCE SUPPORT

New Scientific Publications

Climate envelope models for three endangered skipper butterflies at their northern range margins in Manitoba, Canada.

Amy Thorkelson, <https://doi.org/10.36939/ir.202509031615> (OPEN ACCESS)

Oviposition substrate preferences of two endangered prairie butterflies in an ex situ conservation environment.

Amaya Thomas et al., <https://doi.org/10.3354/esr01437> (OPEN ACCESS)

Using population viability analysis to inform and adapt ex situ conservation activities benefitting a critically endangered butterfly.

Erik Runquist et al., <https://resjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/icad.70009> (OPEN ACCESS)

If you know of a scientific publication relevant to Poweshiek Skipperling conservation, please contact the Co-Editors (info on last page)!

SCIENCE SUPPORT

Manitoba Population Monitoring Update

Melissa Grantham, NCC

In Manitoba's Tall Grass Prairie Preserve, population surveys were carried out between July 2nd and 17th, 2025 to determine Poweshiek Skipperling presence or absence in eight key sites. Across the entire survey period, approximately **95 observations** were made among five of the survey sites, including those with ongoing population reinforcement, which is higher than last year's observation count of 59. **Poweshiek individuals were also spotted** in a few significant locations, including for a **second year in our reintroduction site**, suggesting that reintroduction efforts are going well, and that Poweshieks are spreading out and using more habitat.

Michigan Poweshiek Skipperling Population Surveys

Logan Rowe, MNFI

Poweshiek Skipperling population numbers have continued to improve over the past few years and in 2025 we observed a total of **714 Poweshiek Skipperling butterflies in Michigan prairie fens**. This is a considerable increase compared to recent years. As populations continue to grow, we are now seeing Poweshiek Skipperling move into and occupy new areas of the prairie fens. Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI) also confirmed a new resident population at the **first Poweshiek Skipperling reintroduction site in the US**. Additional surveys are planned over the next few years to continue documenting population trends and measure success of population augmentation and reintroduction efforts.



Photo: Logan Rowe

MNFI Poweshiek Skipperling survey team showing their excitement for 2025 population numbers.



Photo: Logan Rowe

Local Legend Dave Cuthrell surveying for Poweshiek Skipperling at the first US reintroduction site.

SCIENCE SUPPORT CO-CHAIRS

Justis Henault Logan Rowe

HABITAT MANAGEMENT

Habitat Management Activities in Michigan Prairie Fens

Logan Rowe, Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI)

In 2025, partners across the region worked together on an active season of habitat management to restore and enhance prairie fen ecosystems that support Poweshiek Skipperling. Efforts focused on **prescribed fire, careful chemical treatment of invasive plants, and targeted shrub removal**. These actions helped reduce aggressive species such as glossy buckthorn, phragmites, purple loosestrife, and narrow-leaved cattails, which threaten native prairie fen vegetation. **By improving conditions for native grasses and wildflowers, these management activities are increasing the availability of food and shelter for both larval and adult Poweshiek Skipperlings.**



Photo: Logan Rowe

Poweshiek Skipperling habitat after prescribed fire. Prescribed fire improves habitat quality, including regeneration of native vegetation such as essential larval and adult nectar resources, while limiting invasive plant species.



Photo: Logan Rowe

Healthy Poweshiek Skipperling habitat is characterized by a diverse set of native grasses and forbs in an open prairie fen landscape. Poweshiek habitats in Michigan remain suitable for Poweshiek Skipperling because of ongoing habitat management.

The work reflects the strength of partnerships between researchers and land managers, who are combining science and stewardship to protect one of North America's rarest butterflies. Support from the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative has been vital in making these efforts possible.

HABITAT MANAGEMENT

Michigan Prairie Fen - Poweshiek Habitat Sampling

Rachel Hackett, Michigan Natural Features Inventory (MNFI)

Preliminary **analyses** comparing **ovipositing vegetation composition** and structure to that of the overall area has us looking most closely at mean litter depth and percent cover of tussock sedge (*Carex stricta*), mat muhly (*Muhlenbergia richardsonis*), marsh muhly (*Muhlenbergia glomerata*), and woody vegetation. The mean litter depth of the ovipositing locations is between those

of burned and unburned samples. Over the next years, we'll **develop protocols to evaluate potential Poweshiek sites and identifying those with the most similar vegetative composition and structure that are utilized by the Poweshiek.**

Rachel Hackett (MNFI) examines the vegetation in Poweshiek prairie fen habitat at a formerly occupied site, in 2025.



Photo: Rachel Hackett

HABITAT MANAGEMENT CO-CHAIRS

Melissa Grantham
Tameka Dandridge

To submit inquiries regarding The Poweshiek Post or the Poweshiek Skipperling International Partnership, please use the contact form on our [website](#).

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and Melissa Grantham**