

State of Wisconsin
Department of Natural Resources
Geographic Names Council
PO Box 7921, Madison WI 53707-7921
dnr.wi.gov

Geographic Name Proposal
Form 2200-124 (R 7/16) Page 1 of 2

Notice: Pursuant to s. 23.25, Wis. Stats., complete and submit this form to the address in the upper left hand corner with requested geographic name proposal. See page 2 for naming guidelines. Personal information collected will be used for administrative purposes and may be made available to requesters to the extent required by Wisconsin's Open Records law (ss. 19.31 - 19.39, Wis. Stats.).

Geographic Feature Information

Description of Feature - Include size (acres), length (miles) or population etc.	Recommended Name of Feature
Ridge that is about 350 acres.	Big Hill Savanna
Other Names or Spellings in Use:	By Whom: (Name and Address)
None	

Reason for this Proposal - Identify Problem and Need (Attach supplementary sheet if necessary)

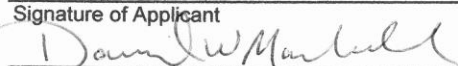
The ridge is the site of a locally important historic site and significant for ecological restoration and conservation efforts located within the Southwest Grassland and Stream Conservation Area.

Origin and Significance of Recommended Name - Attach Supporting Documents (resolution, historical data, etc.)

See description, maps and references attached.

Feature Location	DNR Use Only	
County	Lat ____ ° ____ ' ____ " , Long ____ ° ____ ' ____ "	
Iowa	Lat ____ ° ____ ' ____ " , Long ____ ° ____ ' ____ "	
Stream	Lat ____ ° ____ ' ____ " , Long ____ ° ____ ' ____ "	
Heads: Sec. ____ , T ____ N, R ____ <input type="radio"/> E <input type="radio"/> W		
Ends: Sec. ____ , T ____ N, R ____ <input type="radio"/> E <input type="radio"/> W		
Lake, Village, etc.	Lat ____ ° ____ ' ____ " , Long ____ ° ____ ' ____ "	
Secs. ____ 12 ____ , T ____ 05 ____ N, R ____ 5 ____ <input checked="" type="radio"/> E <input type="radio"/> W	USGS Quad. Name	
Secs. ____ , T ____ N, R ____ <input type="radio"/> E <input type="radio"/> W	Index Number	
(or locate by landmarks and attach map)		

Applicant Information

Name	Agency	Telephone Number (include area code)	
David W. Marshall		(608) 438-1450	
Address	City	State	ZIP Code
8951 Clay Hill Road	Barneveld	WI	53507
Signature of Applicant	Applicant Email	Date Signed	
	underh2ohab@mhtc.net	02/5/2021	

DNR Use Only - Map Search and Field Investigation		
Name of Map or Other Reference	Date of Ref.	Name Given Feature
Person Contacted	Address	Occupation
Special Concerns		
Findings and Recommendations		
Signature of Investigator		Date Signed

Background on Big Hill Savanna Geographic Name Proposal

Prepared by David W. Marshall

November 21, 2020

Big Hill Savanna is the current name for a conservation easement that The Prairie Enthusiasts (TPE) hold on 72 acres at the ridge. The land is located within the Southwest Wisconsin Grassland and Stream Conservation Area (<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/Lands/Grasslands/SWGrassland.html>) and Southwest Savanna Ecological Landscape ([Southwest Savanna Ecological Landscape - Wisconsin DNR](#)). The ridgetop that we currently call Big Hill Savanna is a large grassland tract that has been in existence since the 1985 Farm Bill and provides habitat for numerous imperiled migratory grassland bird species.

According to the Perry Historical Center, the ridge was called Big Hill since at least the early part of the 20th Century. “The Clay Hill Road used to run up a very steep hill called Big Hill. Model T Fords would have to turn around and back up the hill so gas could flow to the engine. There were wild lupines (*Lupinus perennis*) johnny-jump-ups (prairie violets, *Viola pedatifida*) growing on the side of the road.”

The site has rich native American and European settlement cultural histories that are located within an important ecological Driftless Area setting. Research conducted on the site and research initiatives originating at the site include a major study documenting migratory grassland bird nesting (Byers et al. 2017) and a study of improved trout stream habitat associated with grassland management (Marshall et al. 2008). Big Hill Savanna is also the site of Wisconsin’s first conservation aquaculture project (ongoing) that was initiated to raise State Endangered starhead topminnows (*Fundulus dispar*) and stock them in the Wisconsin River above the Prairie du Sac dam to expand their range.

Seventy-six Federal Migratory bird species have been identified on the conservation easement property within a diverse savanna and prairie plant ecosystem. The property will be maintained as a permanent conservatory under the terms of the conservation easement.

References

Byers, C.M., C.A. Ribic, D.W. Sample, J.D. Dadisman and M.R. Guttery. 2017. Grassland Bird Productivity in Warm Season Grass Fields in Southwest Wisconsin. *Am.Midl.Nat.* 178:47-63.

Marshall, D.W., A.H. Fayram, J.C. Panuska, J. Baumann and J. Hennessy. 2008. Positive Effects of Agricultural Land Use Changes on Coldwater Fish Communities in Southwest Wisconsin Streams. *North American Journal of Fisheries Management* 28:944-953.

Marshall, D., J. Lyons, S. Marcquenski and T. Larson. 2019. Re-establishment of the State-Endangered Starhead Topminnow in the Wisconsin River Above Prairie du Sac Dam. 2018-19 Final Report to the FERC committee.

The Perry Historical Center. 1994. The Historic Perry Norwegian Settlement. Winner of the American Association for State and Local History’s National Certificate of Commendation.

Big Hill Savanna Management Plan

(Located within Military Ridge Prairie Heritage Area
& Southwest Grassland and Stream Conservation Area)



Updated April 22, 2020

Prepared by David W. Marshall



Big Hill Savanna - Big Hill Road and surrounding land July 5, 1937



Big Hill Savanna – permanent TPE conservation easement, Old Clay Hill Road and surrounding land September 11, 1937



Current view of Big Hill Savanna and extensive grassland bird habitat (WDNR Surface Water Dataviewer)

The historic Perry Norwegian settlement

Perry Historical Center (Wis.). Rathbun, Mary Yeater, Editor
The historic Perry Norwegian settlement
Daleyville, Wisconsin: The Perry Historical Center, 1994

Chapter 10: Clay Hill-Spring Creek School District

25. The Big Hill

The Clay Hill Road used to run southeast from the bridge. It went up a very steep hill called the Big Hill. Model T Fords would have to turn around and back up the hill so gas could flow down hill from the gas tank to the engine. Other cars would not have enough power to carry a whole family up, so everyone jumped out and walked up. There were wild lupines and Johnny-Jump-Ups growing on the side of the road.





LOCAL SUPPORT

From: Merel Black <mblack@wisc.edu>
Sent: Thursday, December 17, 2020 9:29 AM
To: underh2ohab@mhtc.net
Subject: Big Hill Savanna

We support officially naming the ridge Big Hill Savanna for historical purposes. I also remember that they used to have to drive the Model T's up it backwards since the cars had no fuel pumps. The "savanna" part of the name recognizes the important ecological features and history of this area.

Merel and Joel

11066 Spring Creek Road

Blue Mounds, WI

Re: Proposed Geographic Name Adoption - Big Hill Savanna

Hello Dave,

I am writing to support the proposed renaming of "The Big Hill" where Clay Hill Road used to run southeast from the bridge and went up the steep hill called Big Hill to "Big Hill Savanna." I am told that there were Lupine and Johnny-Jump-Ups (prairie flowers) growing on the side of the road there and that old history books refer to the site as an "oak woods" prior to European settlement, indicating the characteristics of oak savanna habitat.

I think it would be an appropriate renaming because the area is part of the Southwest Grassland and Stream Conservation Area, located within the Southwest Savanna Landscape, where our Town of Perry's Hauge Historic District Park is also located, so I am familiar with the area and appropriateness of the designation.

Good luck with the proposed geographic name adoption.

Doug King

Dr. Douglas King

The Madison Group Consultants LLC

A Private Practice In The Public Interest

<http://www.madisongroup.us>

Home: dougmargin@tds.net

Office: douglasking@madisongroup.us

991 Perry Center Road

Mt. Horeb, Wisconsin 53572 USA

608-832-6455



January 21, 2021

RE: "Big Hill Savanna" Naming Proposal

To Whom It May Concern:

The Mount Horeb Area Historical Society writes in support of the naming of the ridgetop southeast of the intersection of Gordon Creek and Clay Hill Road (from Iowa County into Dane County) as "Big Hill Savanna."

The proposed name calls attention to the historical roadway that extended over this landform and provided the Clay Hill community residents access to Daleyville prior to the re-routing of Clay Hill Road. According to available records, local residents referred to the landform and its road as "Big Hill"; a review of material in our files provided no evidence of any other name for this landform or the road that crossed it.

It is the Society's stance that the use of well-researched, historic place names not only preserves the cultural history of an area, but provides an opportunity to facilitate deeper, more meaningful connections between community members and the land around them.

Please do not hesitate to call or email for clarification on any of the above.
We thank you for your consideration of our perspective.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Destinee Udelhoven".

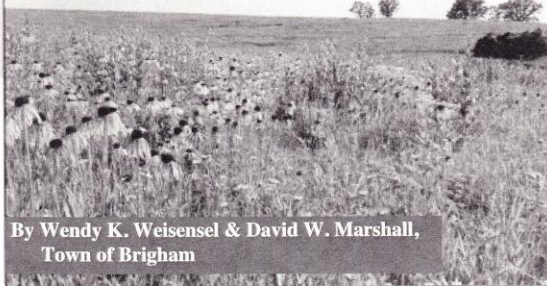
Destinee Udelhoven
Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Johnna Buysse".

Johnna Buysse
Curator

Telephone (608) 437-6486
Email mthorebhistory@mhtc.net

BIG HILL SAVANNA TODAY BRINGS BACK THE LOOK OF THE PAST



By Wendy K. Weisensel & David W. Marshall,
Town of Brigham

A grassy ridgetop running about a mile west from Daleyville in Dane County's Town of Perry into Iowa County once was known to local families as Big Hill.

The ridgetop provides stellar views to the north of the iconic local landmark, Blue Mounds. Big Hill reaches Gordon Creek and parallels today's Clay Hill Road, which was re-routed in the mid 1950s.

Before then, Old Clay Hill Road actually crossed Big Hill on the former Grimstvedt farm, which was established in 1850 and includes a famous round barn. The old road connected nearby farms and cheese factories with Daleyville. According to the informative local publication, *The Historic Perry Norwegian Settlement* (1994), in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries:

"The Clay Hill Road used to run up a very steep hill called Big Hill. Model T Fords would have to turn around and back up the hill so gas could flow to the engine. There were wild lupines and johnny-jump-ups growing on the side of the road."

Gordon Creek historically flowed along the north side of a rocky cliff that abuts Big Hill about a mile and a half from Daleyville. The creek and cliff created a rare cool and moist habitat favoring a pine relict that escaped periodic prairie fires and still stands today. Pine relicts are globally rare and listed as imperiled habitats.

Following the 1985 Federal Farm Bill, much of Big Hill ridge was converted from cropland to grassland. Today the ridge more closely resembles the oak savanna habitat and ecological features that predated European settlement. Oak savannas are an endangered ecosystem that depend on periodic fire to maintain their character and native flora and fauna. Many degraded oak savannas like Big Hill remain in this area and are being brought back to life.

Twenty-five years of conservation work on our portion of Big Hill, part of the old Grimstvedt farm on the uphill, south side of Clay Hill Road, has turned the former

cropland and shrub-choked oak savanna back into a haven for native grassland birds, including bobolinks, grasshopper and Henslow's sparrows, dickcissels, red-headed woodpeckers and, in the winter, short-eared owls. Butterflies, bees and other insects critical to pollination and nature's food chain are responding well. Many native plants that have clung to life here over the decades or been re-introduced are thriving.

Big Hill now is located within a regionally Important Bird Area known as Military Ridge – York Prairie. This parcel is one of three focus areas targeted for grassland bird conservation in the Southwest Grassland and Stream Conservation Area, a major Wisconsin conservation project aimed at protecting functioning grasslands, savannas and streams within the working farmlands of the Driftless region.



While vehicles no longer have to be backed up Big Hill to reach its top, a fast hike can definitely cause huffing and puffing. To recognize and capture Big Hill's cultural history and ecological importance, we have proposed officially naming the site "Big Hill Savanna" to the Wisconsin Geographic Names Council.

In the meantime, many of the flowers, grasses, insects and animals that live here now are the same species local settlers and Native Americans before them might recognize. These days, a patch of one of the native oak savanna plants, the colorfully-named bastard toadflax (*Comandra umbellata*), has quadrupled in size right where Old Clay Hill Road once traversed the property. This restored landscape is ushering Big Hill into a new chapter of history while still celebrating its past.



Top: Prairie on Big Hill
Above: 1937 aerial map showing the current and
historic routes of Clay Hill Road
Left: The Knudt O. & Mari Grimstvedt family at
their farm, ca. 1880.

Hi Dave,

The Blue Mounds Area Project (BMAP) supports your efforts to officially name the ridgetop along the old roadway of Clay Hill Road "Big Hill Savanna." This name preserves the cultural history of the Clay Hill and Daleyville communities and recognizes the valued savanna and prairie habitats that defined (and continues to define) the landscape of south central WI.

As part of our work to encourage private lands habitat conservation, the Blue Mounds Area Project enthusiastically supports initiatives or ideas that look to connect communities with our landscape and that draw attention to the imperiled native plant communities we hope to preserve.

Best,

Micah Kloppenburg

Outreach Ecologist, Blue Mounds Area Project

P.O. Box 332

Mt. Horeb, WI 53572