

# RESTORATION NEWS MIDWEST

*The newsletter of the Midwest-Great Lakes Chapter of the Society for Ecological Restoration International*  
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## **New Beginnings**

In March 2008 the Society for Ecological Restoration International (SER) welcomed the Midwest-Great Lakes Chapter as the newest regional SER Chapter. The chapter will serve the six state region of Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota. We will provide an introduction and give an overview of our future goals in this article.

Historically, SER was represented in the midwestern United States by the Ohio Chapter SER, which had members from Ohio and several adjacent states and Canada. Unfortunately, Ohio SER has not been active in recent years and SER lacked representation within the very region where the field of ecological restoration began. Additionally, the interest in ecological restoration is evident by the numerous organizations and individuals within the region that are interested in ecological restoration. Thus, the Midwest-Great Lakes Chapter of SER began with the vision of establishing an organization that brings together all within the midwestern United States who are interested in ecological restoration.

We, like SER, will not implement restoration projects, but instead will strive to be the organization that brings people and organizations with different interests together to help them meet their common ecological restoration goals. The mission of this regional SER Chapter is:

*We will promote the science and practice of ecological restoration to assist with the recovery and management of degraded ecosystems within the Midwestern and Great Lakes regions. We will connect local resources and partners by facilitating dialogue among all groups and individuals interested in ecological restoration. We will provide educational opportunities to foster an interdisciplinary understanding of and interest in concepts and methods of ecological restoration for specialists and laypersons.*

There is a tremendous diversity of organizations and individuals within the midwestern United States with an interest in ecological restoration, but who have a focus on specific ecosystems, taxonomic groups, subregion, or professional discipline. We want to foster dialogue among those working in different aspects of ecological restoration. One way that we will accomplish this goal is to hold annual meetings. Locations of the annual meeting will rotate among states each year. Additionally, we hope to hold joint meetings with different organizations each year. Plans are currently underway for the first annual meeting to be held most likely sometime this fall. Our initial goals for the meeting include passing the Chapter by-laws, officer elections, and celebrating the first Chapter gathering.

We have established a chapter listserve and developed a Chapter newsletter to foster communication among Chapter members throughout the year. We would like to encourage everyone to sign up for the listserve, especially since short communications from the Chapter leadership will be distributed via this list serve. To subscribe to this listserv, go to this webpage: [http://sernews.org/mailman/listinfo/ser-mwgl\\_sernews.org](http://sernews.org/mailman/listinfo/ser-mwgl_sernews.org). The newsletter will be distributed at least two times a year and will contain articles on a wide range of restoration topics. The newsletter will consist of invited and contributed articles from the membership. Contact if you have something that you would like to share.

We also have a Chapter webpage ([www.ser.org/content/SERMWGL.asp](http://www.ser.org/content/SERMWGL.asp)) to let others know something about us. Long term plans involve developing the webpage so it will serve as a resource of information on restoration within the midwestern United States.

Our membership drive has begun and we want to encourage each of you to join. For details on joining see the article below.

In summary, the future is exciting and we look forward to serving you.

*Rocky Smiley and Jennifer Lyndall,  
Co-Chairs, Organizing Committee*

**Ancient texts with contemporary sustainability lessons: lessons learned from the visit of Dr. Narayan Desai, Executive Director of SER India Chapter**



Dr. Desai and colleague

The destinations on the May visit of Dr. Narayan Desai to the United States reflected the eclectic nature of his interests. These destinations included the Belin Blank Center for Gifted Education at the University of Iowa where Desai attended the Wallace Symposium on gifted education; DePaul University, Chicago, where he was a guest of the Institute for Nature and Culture; and a visit to the University of Arizona in Tucson. At each place he presented on aspects of his work in and around Pune, India. Not only does Desai serve as the Executive Director of SER India Chapter, he also works at the Jnana Prabodhini Research Institute and investigates the ecological application of the Vedas, the sacred books of the Hindu faith. Additionally, Desai leads a Mensa project in conjunction with his work with a local village school two hours that focuses on the identification and nurturing of the ecological consciousness of gifted students.



Dr. Desai with children from school near Pune, India

Several of the projects that Desai discussed during his visit are of especial interest to those interested in developing a sustainability and restoration ethic. His philosophy contrasts western restoration principles, which are science based, driven by technology, emphasize design and planning, and are often conceived within a legislative framework [mitigation and the like], with the restoration principles enunciated by Indian restorationists, which are more exploratory in nature, emphasizing cultural perspectives, evaluated on short term goals, and motivated by strong emotional or indeed loving connections with the land. Clearly, this taxonomy is presented as a general one, with many projects both in the US and India having shades of both restoration philosophies. Nevertheless it is apparent from the restoration projects that his group is pursuing, that they embed distinctive qualities that are instructive and thought-provoking. For instance, a sacred grove in view of the tribal school that Desai is associated with is being preserved, and another parcel of degraded land on the school property is being restored and will be “sacrilized.” The project exemplifies some important principles: restoration should cultivate the potential human resource [in this case for instance through the tribal residential school, where one aim is

to educate children to become “ecological priests”), and thus can facilitate the development of effective techniques [some of these based upon principles from the Vedas]. The combination of a well developed human resource and a philosophically appropriate technique can be applied to an especially important landscape: the sacred landscape of ancient groves.



Sacred ficus grove

The restoration approach can also be applied to more traditional seeming restoration projects. For instance, working with Manisha Shete, Desai’s PhD student, the team are involved with the conservation and restoration of turtle habitat in Maharashtra State. In cultivating an awareness and conservation ethic for these animals the team is assisted by the sacred importance of turtles in the Vedas. An examination of the ecological significance of Vedic writings forms another related plank in the research life of Desai and his groups. Desai is working on a second PhD on ecological principles in Vedic literature and supervising other students in the enormous task of systematically examining the books of the Vedas and elaborately coding them for their ecological relevance. His painstaking work is undertaken in a modest reading room of the library of his high school, where hundreds of Vedic texts are being pored through alongside more recent commentaries and translations. Desai has been able to demonstrate convincingly that this ancient tradition contains many lessons that authentically apply to the present day. His library space also serves as an office where his conservation projects are planned and where the materials to promote them are designed. The highlight here is a collection of beguiling weather-proof posters that combine Hindu and English translations of Vedic ecological pronouncements with colorful depictions of deities, who are juxtaposed with images of contemporary landscapes and local citizens.



Dr. Desai’s library space

The work of Dr. Narayan Desai is significant in that he gives an ample reminder that restoration is not just about habitat and species, but is also about human beings, their history, their values, and their perennial desire to find a reverential and loving way to be in this world.

*Liam Heneghan and Randall Honold, Executive Committee for the Institute for Nature and Culture at DePaul University.*