



The Valley Ridge Preserve is a 145-acre parcel located in the non-glaciated part of southwestern Wisconsin, near Richland Center. Now Leonardo Academy, a company that offers sustainability services, wants to restore the prairie and make a pictorial record of the restoration project at the Preserve. And it's hoping to raise funds for the initiative through a Kickstarter project, through which anyone can lend their financial support.

The restoration will take four years to be completed. The period will cover the planting, growth and flowering of the prairie. But the project needs the funding in order to sprout. "We only get the pledged funds if we reach or exceed our funding target, so we are counting on people to make pledges to support the project and receive project pledge rewards," said Michael Arny, the Academy's president.

Prairies are part and parcel of American history and iconography. The term comes from the French word for meadow, since the first settlers did not have a specific word for this type of grassland. Before European colonizers arrived in the 1880s, the ridges and valleys of this preserve were covered with a mix of prairie, oak savannah, sugar maple and elm woods. Now only 0.5 percent of the prairie is left. The Valley Ridge Preserve was permanently protected from development in 2003 by a conservation easement through the Driftless Area Land Conservancy.

"The Valley Ridge Preserve is a very special place. Additional support beyond our goal will enable us to plant more acres of prairie and plant a greater number of species," said Leonardo Academy's Sustainability and Emissions Services Manager, Barbara McCabe.

Besides their intrinsic value, conservationists in the Midwest are working to protect prairies to help save another icon that needs it in order to live: the Prairie Chicken. The majestic bird, which was ubiquitous across the American Midwest, is now threatened by loss of habitat to farmland. Efforts have been focused on the preservation of habitat for the bird, whose mating dance ritual is widely admired. There's an annual festival dedicated to the Prairie Chicken,

which takes place in April in Cassoday, Kansas.

Please follow the link to visit the project's [Kickstarter page](#) .

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