

Regents approve land purchase

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Western's students, faculty and staff have an opportunity for more R and R - research and restoration.

The Board of Regents approved the purchase of about 270 more acres near the Upper Green River Biological Preserve Friday.

Western currently has property on the preserve used for research, teaching and conservation, Biology Project Specialist Ouida Meier said.

The actual purchase of the land from the landowners is still in negotiation, Meier said in an e-mail. It's a long process including two state-approved appraisers, formal surveys and other procedures.

Western doesn't pay any money for the land. The Kentucky Heritage Land Conservation Fund Board pays for the property and its upkeep.

The land conservation board has dedicated \$605,000 for the purchase of the 270-acre property, according to the Board of Regents agenda.

Nature license plates' sales make up most of the land conservation board's money, Meier said.

The 270-acre purchase would extend the managed area of the preserve to about 1,070 acres, Meier said in an e-mail.

Based on the new property's landscape, it could have a prehistoric village, said Darlene Applegate, associate professor of folk studies and anthropology.

Applegate looks for evidence of prehistoric life on the property, she said.

She has conducted archaeological field schools on the preserve that teach students how to excavate and record an archaeological site in detail, she said.

The land conservation board requires that archaeological work be done on the land it purchases, Applegate said. Her work ensures that significant archaeology isn't disturbed by other activity on the preserve.

"It preserves for our future generations both natural and cultural resources," she said.

The preserve also serves as an outdoor classroom, Applegate said. When she gets money to do archaeological surveys she hires students, which gives them hands-on experience.

Other major projects on the preserve include restoration of native grasses, wildflowers and barrens, which are prairie remnants, Meier said. Barren County gets its name from its barrens.

Restoring native grasses has financial benefits, Biology Professor Michael Stokes said.

One native grass, called switchgrass, is being investigated as a source for biodiesel fuel, he said.

Tonya Taylor, a Bowling Green folk studies graduate assistant, works on a house on the property, she said. The house is the oldest in Hart County.

Students have helped strip wood and install gutters on the house, Taylor said.

Western owning the property has many advantages, she said.

Information sinks in better when students have hands-on experience outside the classroom, Taylor said.

The property also serves as a tangible reminder of history for future generations, she said.

"It ensures that we don't lose that chunk of history in that area," Taylor said.