

## PRAIRIE PLAINS LINK



SB

**November 9, anticipating sunset: Since their recent move to Aurora, Britt and Barb Bailey have enjoyed many hikes around Sherman Ranch (above) and Gjerloff Prairie. An avid photographer, Britt has a friendly competition going with his daughter, Sarah, for outstanding images of Prairie Plains sites!**



**NEWSLETTER  
November, 2019**

### **Prairie Plains is approaching its 40th Anniversary!**

During these 40 foundation-building years, we have acquired eight beautiful and diverse land preserves, restored over 12,500 acres of prairie and served the public, especially youth, with a variety of memorable experiences along the Platte River and in other Nebraska landscapes. We have documented a rich history that chronicles our accomplishments as well as many of the people with whom we have worked over the last four decades.

The approaching completion of the Education Center in the coming milestone year will mark the beginning of an exciting new era of expanding outreach and program development, with an emphasis on the most important conservation issues in the Great Plains.

**We have built a solid foundation, thanks to the support of members and friends** over the years, and we'll need that more than ever as we go through this major transition. As usual, it's the time of year for our appeal for general support in the form of a year-end gift; see the enclosed form and remittance envelope. Also, if you need to make a qualified IRA distribution please consider Prairie Plains! **Thanks so much for your generous support!**



**YNP campers hiking through Olson Nature Preserve.**

### **Notable in 2019**

**Education:** Other than a bit of weather interference, it was another stellar year for our regular annual programs and activities, including the New Year's Day Hike and Fun Run at Gjerloff Prairie, Sioux County Ranch Trek, Youth Naturalist Program (Year 6), SOAR (Flight 28), Winter Explore Days and regular hikes at Bader Park, Gjerloff Prairie and Sherman Ranch. The ongoing and expanding work with the Nebraska Christian and Boone Central greenhouse classes was described in last month's newsletter (note April issue also). Unfortunately, weather events—including flooding—eliminated the two annual programs at Olson Nature Preserve, but we hope those will be successfully resumed in 2020.



Notable in 2019, continued:



**Dr. Gregory Pec, from the University of Nebraska-Kearney, taking a soil sample at Sherman Ranch. He and his students have begun a study of soils in cedar-cleared areas of Sherman Ranch and Gjerloff Prairie.**

Beyond the usual programming, we also hosted field days for two groups, Women in Beekeeping and UNL's Research Experience for Undergraduates—both in June at Gjerloff Prairie, and described in more detail in the June-July newsletter.

The August-September issue announced the launching of a new three-year project, "Milkweed in the Classroom." Project partners are UNL, Prairie Plains and Pheasants and Quail Forever; funding is from the Nebraska Environmental Trust. The aim is to engage Nebraska's youth in saving monarch butterflies by creating curricula, including a series of short films, about grassland restoration and conservation, with an emphasis on the critical need to protect pollinator species. The films will include footage of Sarah Bailey at Gjerloff Prairie and in the greenhouse.

Two young women interested in ecological restoration job-shadowed Sarah Bailey for a few days this year—Sydney Dyer (Aurora High School) in June, and Josie Ivy (Norris High School) in September. We anticipate an increasing number of these short (and longer) "internships" in the future.

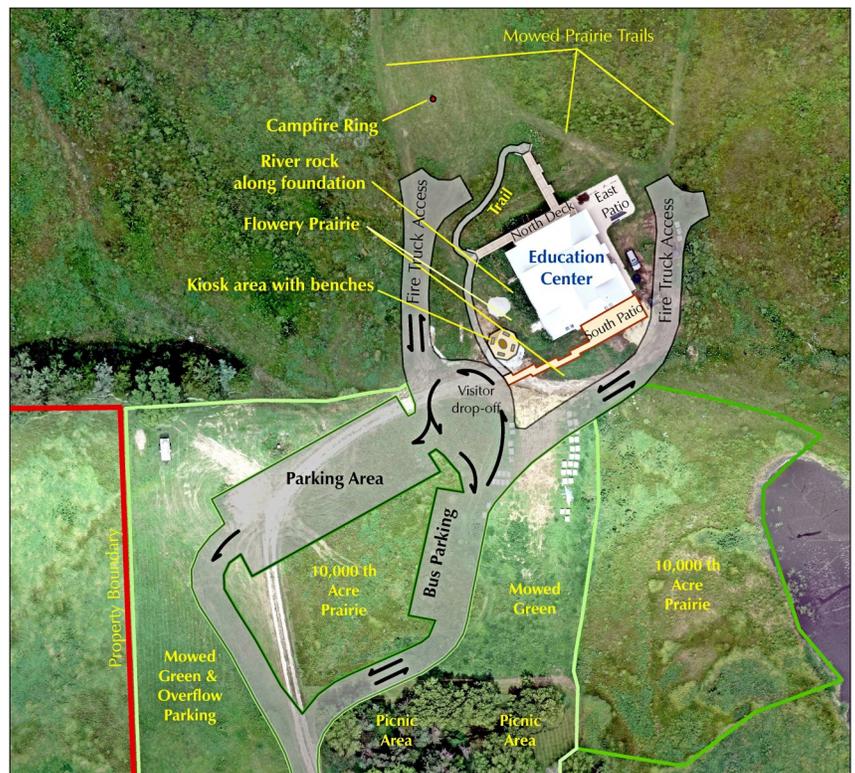
Most recently, we've developed a connection with the University of Nebraska-Kearney biology department through Dr. Gregory Pec, who is excited about research possibilities on our Platte River preserves. He and some of his students will be studying soils in cedar-cleared areas of Sherman Ranch and Gjerloff Prairie. This is an encouraging development, as it has always been an important part of our mission to have our land preserves used for educational purposes (e.g., recall story in last month's newsletter about Aurora's Environmental Ag and Wildlife Management classes), as well as for research of all kinds.

**Charles L. Whitney Education Center:** It was a big year for the Center, taking several leaps forward toward completion. The site plan drawing (using Mike Bullerman's drone photo) by architect Lee Schriever details the entry road, parking and drop-off areas and fire truck access lanes. Regarding the roads, we experienced a serendipitous situation in that the Aurora Airport recently built a new runway, leaving the old one in a huge pile of ground asphalt. Mid-Nebraska Land Developers offered to recycle this old runway material at a cost considerably less than the white rock or crushed concrete we had considered. We accepted the offer. Asphalt is a good choice as it is less dusty and packs down firmly.

Other final exterior site work includes finishing the sidewalk from the turn-around and visitor drop-off point of the entry road to the south Center doors, placing large river rock along the Center's west side and under the deck ramps and planting selected areas to create a flowery prairie landscape.

Presently we are lining up the elevator installation with O'Keefe Elevator Company, and preparing to install interior windows, doors and finish woodwork in the upper level.

The Education Center fund drive is progressing successfully toward completion in 2020, which will be the subject of our December year-end update.



**Ecological Restoration:** A banner year! According to Restoration Director Mike Bullerman, we harvested 234 species of grasses, sedges and forbs. The hand-collected forbs and minor grasses totaled 3,668 gallons, and combine-harvested grass seed yielded 2,520 gallons. This adds up to 1,000-1,400 acres worth of high diversity seed mix.

On the planting side, we've seeded 288 acres, including 14 project sites in 12 counties, with 199 acres still on the slate for this year. We've also provided 356 acres worth of high diversity, local ecotype seed mix to partner organizations for numerous projects in central and eastern Nebraska. For the record, since 1980 we've planted 12,581 acres on 262 project sites in 57 Nebraska counties.

In the greenhouse, Sarah Bailey grew 1,400 prairie violet seedlings; 900 went to the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission for restoring/enhancing regal fritillary habitat at various sites, and 500 went to a Denton planting along the Haines Branch Corridor to enhance a restoration site next to adjacent prairies and fritillary habitat (see details in August-September newsletter). Sarah also supplied 880 native prairie seedlings to five different Pheasants Forever Pollinator Habitat Project Program sites, and 800+ seedlings to other projects and organizations including TNC Omaha Sacred Seed Pop-Up project, Prairie Loft and the Legacy Conference. Many individuals also purchased seedlings for pollinator gardens and small restoration sites.

As mentioned earlier, Sarah continued working with the Nebraska Christian and Boone Central greenhouse classes. They grew around 30 species of native prairie plants in winter/spring 2019 in their schools' greenhouses. Boone Central had a great opportunity to begin restoration work along Beaver Creek at ONP after flooding; the students overseeded the area and planted hundreds of seedlings they'd grown. Nebraska Christian students planted their (few hundred) seedlings into the 2013 restoration at Gjerloff prairie to enhance species diversity.



**The record harvest was made possible, in part, to the addition of Jared Sullivan to our staff as restoration and stewardship assistant this fall.**



**Presently, it's seed processing and mixing time. On November 14, we tested a new method of processing milkweed seed. From left, Jared Sullivan loads milkweed pods into a hopper at the front of the combine; from the other side of the combine a blizzard of milkweed down was ejected; the cleaned seed.**



**Jeff Gustafson clearing cedars at Sherman Ranch.**

**Stewardship:** In addition to monitoring all of the Prairie Plains land preserves, managing farming and grazing leases, serving as fire boss for all prescribed burns, fencing upkeep, etc., Land Steward Jeff Gustafson continued his invasive tree clearing work at Tamora and Waco Rainwater Basins, the Little Blue River project site in Clay County and at Sherman Ranch.

**Other notables:** Two awards were received this year. Prairie Plains Resource Institute was presented with The Nebraska Land Improvement Contractors Association's first annual Stewardship Award on January 16 in Kearney—and Sarah Bailey was named Conservationist of the Year by the Nebraska Wildlife Federation on October 17 at NWF's Fall Fundraiser Gala near Ashland.



This 2019 notable bears repeating. Perhaps the most striking visual sign of Education Center interior progress is the beautiful hickory floors in the upper level Great Room, classroom/labs, board room and stairway. It was installed by expert "Volunteers of the Year," Dwayne Wilson (on the left) and Cliff Dill. Another big thanks to these two dedicated Prairie Plains supporters!



One of Britt Bailey's Nov. 9 Sherman Ranch sunset images. (Reference top shot, page 1.)



And yet another 2019 notable worth repeating: a new storage shed for SOAR & YNP. It may be a little thing, but it's sure a big improvement! Thanks again to Scott Jones and his (spring, 2019) AHS Construction Technology students Caleb Collingham, Cam Jones, Kaleb Kindt and Coleton Sorgenfrei.



Unbelievable! In last month's newsletter we mentioned that Aurora High School Ag Teacher Tony Sigler's Wildlife Management class has had a game camera set up at Sherman Ranch for the past several years (during their nine-week class time). What they have anxiously anticipated for so long is a bobcat. And it happened on November 10 at 3:55 a.m.: a clear image of a bobcat and its prey. Six other species were documented by the same camera over the course of ten November days: skunk, deer, coyote, opossum, raccoon and a turkey . . .



*Happy Thanksgiving!*

PRAIRIE PLAINS LINK  
is a publication of



Preserving, restoring and maintaining Nebraska native prairies - Creating opportunities for education, research, stewardship and place-based community development.

Prairie Plains Resource Institute is an educational land trust incorporated in 1980 as a non-profit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt membership organization based in Aurora, Nebraska.

Board of Directors:

Carol Bodeen (North Platte)  
Brad Bangs (Aurora)  
Kim Sosin (Omaha)  
Wayne Mollhoff (Ashland)

Staff:

William S. Whitney, Exec. Director  
Amy Jones, Admin. Director  
Mike Bullerman, Restoration Director and GIS Specialist  
Sarah Bailey, Greenhouse Manager, Restoration Ecologist and Youth Naturalist Program Director  
Jeff Gustafson, Land Steward and Restoration Assistant  
Jared Sullivan, Restoration and Stewardship Assistant  
Jan Whitney, Publications Editor and SOAR Coordinator

Learn more and become a member:

[www.prairieplains.org](http://www.prairieplains.org)

(and follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter!)

Contact:

402-694-5535

[ppri@hamilton.net](mailto:ppri@hamilton.net)

1307 L St. Aurora NE 68818

### APPROACHING EVENTS

**December 7: Winter Bird Hike at Bader Park, 9 a.m.**

**2020**

**January 1: Annual New Year's Day Hike at Gjerloff Prairie, 1:00 p.m.**

**January 18: Annual Meeting of Members; Details TBA**  
You won't want to miss this one!