



Sarah Bailey



Mike Bulleman

observe the flora throughout the growing season. She hopes that her experience will help her land her next job, which she is presently searching for.

Cale Jones

Hardly a new face at Prairie Plains, Cale has been known as the apprentice since his mom, Amy, came on board eight years ago. But this summer Cale was officially on staff, continuing to prove himself a most valuable worker. We all hope that he will maintain his passion for our work in years to come. Not many 15-year-olds can claim eight years experience in ecological restoration!



Sarah Bailey

Education Center Progress

A big step forward this summer was the completion of the septic installation. Next in line: the exterior will be sided with weathered, recycled vertical barn siding; at least one working restroom will be completed; there will be more interior wall framing and finally, the screened porch will be finished before onset of winter.



Amy Jones

This progress will allow for more events at Griffith Prairie, and will finally discourage barn swallows and eastern phoebes from occupying the building (barn swallows will no doubt still enjoy the outside of the barn!). Next year we will finish plumbing, pour patio concrete and begin interior electrical work and insulation.

The barn siding story is noteworthy. Bill Whitney and Cale and Amy Jones drove to Esbon, Kansas (southeast of Red Cloud, NE) to pick up a load of barn siding from Martin (Marty) Hesting. He and his two sons spend summers tearing down barns and selling the wood. It is good to see the barns recycled and to meet others who appreciate them as we do. The siding is in excellent shape and is most appropriate with its rustic qualities, including a patina of red.

THANK YOU to Scott & Cameron Jones, Joyce Gleason and Lindsay Vivian for help with the Fun Run, to Alex Briner for greenhouse work and to Britt Bailey for photos.

Laura Rubeck

Prairie Plains is getting some extra help these days from temporary hire Laura Rubeck. She began assisting with seed harvesting and processing in June, and will continue through October. A Columbus native, Laura graduated from UNL in August with a degree in park management, with minors in ag leadership, wildlife management, Native American studies and grassland ecology and management.

Laura notes that her summer work has satisfied her goals of understanding the landscape of this part of the state better, and of becoming more proficient at plant identification, having had the chance to

BADER PARK WALKING TOURS

Saturday, Oct. 13th
9:00 a.m.

Saturday, Nov. 3rd
9:00 a.m.

Saturday, Dec. 15th
Winter Bird Hike
9:00 a.m.

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Link Editor & Layout
Jan Whitney

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PRAIRIE PLAINS LINK



Sarah Bailey

Griffith Prairie, July 2nd: A group of Art Farm resident artists, along with other area artists and friends, gathered at the prairie for an evening of hiking and photography.

Hot and dry - really dry. That pretty much sums up the summer of 2012. We were able to carry on as usual, however, with a surprisingly good seed harvest and excellent annual summer events. Take a look at the outdoor education supplement inside to see how well we fared at SOAR!

We are asked occasionally what effect this year's drought (see 12-week map animation at http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/12_week.gif) has had on our native prairies, new plantings and seed harvesting. While stable, predictable climatic conditions - including regular rainfall - makes life easier for ecological restorationists and land managers (and everyone else), we can learn more about an ecosystem by the way it responds to stress and catastrophe. Which species thrive and which go dormant? Can we

harm the prairie by grazing it hard in a dry year? If so, how? How do new plantings develop during drought?

We learned a lot during the last drought, August 1999-July 2006. Many species produce abundant seeds with little rainfall - sometimes in record yields. For example, as in 2000, when we also had a →

FUN RUN - Nothing like a beautiful day, beautiful site for facing the challenge of a 5K or 10K on the Platte River Bluffs of Griffith Prairie! Forty-nine participated in the run/walk on June 2nd. Left, then counter-clockwise: Two of our more serious racers; two more enjoying the terrain and landscape during their exertion; some of us reveled in the prairie at a more leisurely pace.



Amy Jones



Amy Jones



Britt Bailey



NEWSLETTER
Summer, 2012



Britt Bailey

THE SIOUX COUNTY RANCH tour was held June 9th, attended by 18 High Plains enthusiasts - growing to 80-90 for the evening barbeque. The weather and scenery were outstanding. Above, part of the group exploring Niobrara River headwaters; below (left, then clockwise, a few of the small fish seen there (the two on top are plains topminnows, the middle one is a creek chub); common nighthawk; a scene from the traditional Saturday evening "hike up the hill;" Sarah Bailey enjoying this great opportunity to engage in her art.



Sarah Bailey



Britt Bailey



Jana Whitney



Sarah Bailey

cessive years, will test it even more. As expected, the cattle concentrated on the burned site. They stayed on the 40-50-acre restoration area planted during 2001-03, and grazed that intensively. The burned area baked in the sun and dried out more than the unburned areas, stressing the plants beyond just the grazing effect. The cattle were also apparently less selective this year, and ate more forbs like leadplant. The effects, when we finally removed the cattle at the end of July, were that the burned area vegetation was quite short, with the grasses in dormancy, except for a few green sprouts here and there in low areas. Deep-rooted plants like ragweed and leadplant were still actively growing, though, and a small rain in August brought new shoots of bluestem. The thatch-covered unburned areas did not receive much grazing pressure, although cattle were using them more in midsummer. Parts of the unburned areas will carry a fire next spring. Then we will cut grazing rates to make up for the high intensity this year, hope for rain and enjoy seeing how the prairie responds to this year's extreme conditions.

(continued from front page) -

dry winter, spring and summer, this year there is a wild plum bumper crop. There are a few prairie plants which have produced seeds earlier in the summer. Others have produced an abundance of viable seed, having escaped the usual insect damage - perhaps due to the early onset of heat, which put seed and insect development cycles out of sync. There may not be large seed quantities of some species this summer and fall, but there will be seed-producing locations for most species because the drought is not geographically uniform.

Wild-harvested seed mixes vary from year to year; we never get everything we want. However, judging from our experience of 32 years of plantings, over the long haul the differences between areas seeded with our diverse seed mixes seem fairly small, probably due as much to site soil and water factors than seed mix variability. All species select to their favored soil and moisture environments; the weedy annual species initially established yield to a longer-lived perennial native plant community. Moderate grazing has proven on a few occasions to be helpful in promoting the development of the native community during ensuing drought years.

This year we set a record of 1,600 acres planted, primarily wet to mesic (medium moist soils) lowlands seeded on Wetland Reserve Program lands from the Missouri River west into the edge of the Sandhills near the Cedar River. Some of these lands received early spring rains, but well below average. Many of the plantings - from April into June - received little to no rain, so getting seed on the ground in early spring made little difference this year. How will these areas develop? Judging from our first series of drought year plantings (2000-2006), and depending on how long the drought continues, we will probably see a slower development of the prairies. Some species may become temporarily super-abundant. This may include Canada wildrye, evening primrose and a few others, both of which germinate with fall rains, but gradually the prairie and wetland species will respond to specific site conditions. Wetland plants will establish quickly as water returns to the heavy soils. The drought proves the wisdom of high diversity seeding in that something in the mixes will be adapted to site conditions. Within a few, albeit weedier, years the plantings should be filling in with grasses and exhibiting the diversity of wildflower species in the seed mix. To some degree this same dynamic of response to catastrophe happens in new plantings which are severely flooded. Severe conditions on the prairie can have surprising results. For a good read on this year's drought check Chris Helzer's blog: www.prairieecologist.com.

In March we adjusted our patch burn grazing system on Griffith Prairie, establishing three burn areas, each around 60-70 acres. We burned the area nearest the river, as well as an adjacent accretion shrub area. At the end of April, 45 cow/calf pairs entered the 180-acre bluff pasture. The overall grazing pressure could be characterized as moderate since we kept the livestock moving and took them out before the end of the season. Fire definitely plays an important role in this management process, whether one manages with cross fencing or the cattle distribute themselves based on their preference for the burned patches.

This summer will test our grazing assumptions, to say the least. Another year of drought, or suc-



Bill Whitney

Griffith Prairie in mid-July, during SOAR - the lack of height and color due to severe drought.

Left, Missouri milkvetch and prairie sandreed; right, blue (or hairy) grama - all found on Griffith Prairie - are species adapted to harsh, dry conditions and steep slopes.



Bill Whitney



Bill Whitney