



Back to where we once belonged:

February has been moving month for the Prairie Plains headquarters, but we've only moved a few steps! Not even a change of mailing address, as the "new" office is a building we've owned since 1997, and the

mailbox never moved. For the past few years we've been renting a larger office space on the town square just west of our property, the latter having become more of a storage facility. But no more! Since most of us are out on the land most of the time anyway, it was concluded that office space could be down-sized to save money. There followed a massive sorting/discarding/recycling/relocating project with the contents of both buildings, and a complete remodel of the former "East Wing" into a very inviting, cozy - and rent free - office.

Lone Tree Corridor Planning Group

For the last five months, Prairie Plains director Bill Whitney has been facilitating a monthly gathering at Central City's Venture Center (and Merrick Foundation Office) known as the Lone Tree Corridor Planning Group. The group is comprised of people with interest in the Platte Corridor between the Grand Island Highway 34 bridge and the Clarks Highway 92 bridge approximately 32 miles to the northeast – basically the stretch of Platte that forms the Hamilton-Merrick County shared border. During these five meetings it has become apparent that there are many people who want to protect and enhance the Platte's unique prairies, forests, river channels and wetlands, preventing land use changes which could alter ecological, scenic and historic qualities. Most participants feel that public access to the river and adjacent lands is limited and needs to be expanded. Education about the corridor landscape – nature, agriculture, history, etc. is needed, as is developing a culture of respect amongst people who use and enjoy the area. Opportunities exist for



A favorite river-watching site in the Lone Tree Corridor at Bader Park.

interested groups, public entities, private landowners and business people to work together in ways that will maintain valued aspects of the corridor landscape. A firm belief clearly stated was that ultimately, no matter of what interest or user group, future residents of the region will have great respect, appreciation and awe for the Lone Tree Corridor.

The meetings have been a catalyst for a number of smaller working groups interested in history, canoe and kayak use, education and public use lands. The fact that many residents of the area are now talking about the Lone Tree Corridor is leading to new friendships, new ideas and positive thinking. Please stay tuned for more on the Lone Tree Corridor as it develops!

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MISSION:
Maintaining and restoring Nebraska ecosystems -
Creating opportunities for education, research, stewardship and community development.

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EARLYBIRD HIKES:
Saturdays, 7:00 a.m.
March 9th - Griffith Prairie
April 27th - Bader Park

THANK YOU to :
Laura Rubeck, for cleanup work at Olson Nature Preserve.



Winter beauty at Olson Nature Preserve - where Sarah Bailey and Jeff Gustafson are continuing to clear out dead wood. Sarah took a little time away from tree piling to record these frosty scenes.



It was a chilly day Feb. 23rd for the first Bader Park hike of 2013. The cold hardy participants enjoyed the sparkly environs, spotting bald eagles and a river otter trail. There have been several otter sightings at the park recently.



Prairie Plains
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NEWSLETTER
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Seedlings are bursting out all over in the greenhouse - while high diversity seed mixes have been planted in five small prairie & wetland restoration projects in February.

Conservation Jam: Saving the Plains in Three Minutes

UNL's Center for Great Plains Studies and The Nature Conservancy teamed up to organize the first ever "Conservation Jam," held February 1st at the Great Plains Art Museum, amidst a breathtaking exhibit of Michael Forsberg's Great Plains landscape photos. The two organizations challenged a few of Nebraska's leading conservationists to present their views on "Saving the Great Plains" – and limited each speaker's time to three minutes. Their brief but weighty presentations and calls to action were well received by the large and enthusiastic audience. For his part, Prairie Plains Executive Director Bill Whitney offered the following:

In the spirit of Nebraska visionary Emiel Christensen, I offer you *Ribbons of Prairie*, a vision for the agricultural cornucopia of the eastern Great Plains and Midwest. It embraces natural, agricultural and human diversity, celebrates creation, and elevates to a higher plane our role as restorers and stewards of all life.

Ribbons of Prairie, hatched by the Prairie Plains crew on a hot summer seed collecting day, is a metaphor suggesting a romantic regional vision. As if inhabiting a 19th century Plains landscape painting, we see a "ribbon" – a strip of nature along every stream, the water reflecting blue sky, the varied green meandering veins of riparian woodlands, savannas and prairie grasses contrasting amidst the deep green vastness of farmland rolling in every direction in the heart of America.

Ribbons of Prairie is a grand 100-year restoration plan for stream corridors. It is about seeing a unified landscape and its many parts; about restoring dynamic hydrological and ecological functionality to whole watersheds within both an agricultural and natural context; and restoring native biodiversity across the landscape.

Ribbons of Prairie is about people. An idea or technical capacity is not enough. Effective vision must evoke cultural aspiration - motivating, offering enjoyable benefit, understandable; everyone figuratively needs to own it. Citizens will have a voice, seeing themselves in this painting as creative participants. Beginning with conversation and education, they will decide what is vital for sustaining life and culture, and act on what is possible in their own watershed. Leaders drawn from all corners of society, from every institution and from all walks of life will emerge to guide the collaborative creation and continuing husbandry of what will be considered an enormous community asset.

Ribbons of Prairie is about forming a great commons, connecting people and communities together physically through a linear watery wilderness and its network of trails; drawing themselves closer in celebration of their places through festivals, recreation, growing food, commerce, art, music and stories.

Ribbons of Prairie is pragmatic. Water is necessary for all life, and in order to protect it we must think creatively about it. Likewise for diverse nature – the Mother Book of life. Through deliberate action we can intervene to heal watersheds. Restoring nature and maintaining the river of life offers us a vehicle to reclaim rural community and in the end a bit of ourselves - re-making the prairieland to give us spiritual as well as material sustenance. A vision that includes fun, whimsy, beauty and joy, while also doing the business of keeping the real world intact on the blue planet is not a luxury but a necessity. I think it's up to the artists and educators to lead the way.

And the good news is . . . the embryo of this vision already exists now in small scattered pieces. We have witnessed and been a part of it and will continue to nurture it.



Other 3-minute speakers included Ken Dewey (UNL professor of climatology); Ann Bleed (Lower Platte South NRD); Chris Helzer (The Nature Conservancy); Marian Langan (Audubon Nebraska); Jeff Rawlinson (Nebraska Game & Parks Commission); Chris Sommerich (Nebraska Humanities Council); Bill Taddicken (Audubon Rowe Sanctuary); Rick Edwards (Center for Great Plains Studies); Sarah Sortum (Switzer Ranch and Nature Reserve); Chuck Francis (UNL professor of agronomy and horticulture); Paul Johnsgard (noted author and ornithologist); Jane Kleeb (Bold Nebraska); Brad Mellema (Nebraska Alliance for Conservation and Environmental Education) and Annabel Lee Major (Nebraska Master Naturalist Program). *continued...*

Conservation jam continued . . .

Following concluding remarks by Mace Hack (The Nature Conservancy), Michael Forsberg pointed out that conservation begins with conversation; and that's what was happening that night. Also, that conservation needs community - and that was also happening in this diverse gathering. He concluded, "Having been very fortunate to spend so many years traveling up and down the Great Plains, I have learned . . . that in conservation, there is no finish line - ever. We have to keep reminding ourselves, and each generation that comes after us, why this place is important, why it matters, why it's our home."

The Conservation Jam can still be seen and heard at <https://connect.unl.edu/p40mgfvie8/>. Please check it out!



The Aurora Area SOAR Camp is scheduled for July 8th-12th and July 15th-19th. Registration begins on April 1st; all information including downloadable registration forms will be available on our website (prairieplains.org) on that date. Potential campers (students presently in grades 3 - 6) are encouraged to register early, as space is limited!

This summer we'll be SOARing to the theme of "Trails," exploring the Sherman Ranch, Bader Park and Griffith Prairie - all along the Platte - plus historic Farmers Valley Cemetery near Stockham. Wednesdays at Griffith Prairie will be the night life session including a sunset watch and campfire on the river, and a study of bats, night insects and the night sky. SOAR Coordinator is Jan Whitney, janppri@hamilton.net.

Big Bend SOAR, co-sponsored by Rowe Sanctuary near Gibbon, is June 17th-20th and June 24th-27th. Registration began March 1st. Contact coordinator Jenny Hultquist (rjhultquist@gtmc.net) for further details.



Prairie Plains is offering a new program for youth in Hamilton and Merrick Counties. This course of nature study, directed by Sarah Bailey, will be held on six Saturday mornings – May 25th, June 15th, June 22nd, July 6th, July 27th and August 3rd. Field sites include Griffith Prairie, Bader Park and Sherman Ranch. The program is open to Hamilton and Merrick County students presently in grades 7-11; we can register up to ten students from each county.

The new naturalist program students will study the "Ribbons of Prairie" concept, learning about the ecosystem in which they live and how to care for, protect and restore it. They will actively explore natural areas along the Platte River, observing the landscape, plants and animals present. Youth Prairie Naturalists will have the opportunity to meet those that work in the fields of conservation, agriculture and natural resources, and will participate in ecosystem restoration. They will be equipped with naturalist skills that will enable them to continue outdoor learning and conservation activity throughout their lives.

THANKS to the Hamilton Community Foundation and Merrick Foundation for their support of the Youth Prairie Naturalist Program. For further details, call or email Sarah Bailey: 402-694-5535; sarahppri@hamilton.net.



September, 2012: Sarah Bailey instructing a group of 7th-graders at Griffith Prairie. Lots more of this in store!