

PRAIRIE PLAINS LINK



The tradition continues! The Annual New Year's Day Hike at Gjerloff Prairie provided the perfect start to a hopeful 2021. Although this year's hike was set up as an open house - hikers were invited to come throughout the day to avoid large gatherings - the turnout was good and everyone enjoyed a beautiful, snowy hike on the prairie, with some occasional sledding mixed in. (Photo below.)



Annual Meeting of Members

Another tradition taking on a new look in 2021 - the Annual Meeting of Members, held via Zoom on January 16. And while we missed seeing everyone in person, it was fun to include some members from afar who were able to attend for the first time! 64 attendees voted in 6 board members and enjoyed a video tour of the Education Center. Pictured above in a screenshot from the meeting are staff members Amy Jones and Mitchell Lyon and board members Anniece Friesen, Dane Sutherland, Brock Wyatt, Jessica Piskorski, Brad Bangs, Kim Sosin and Wayne Mollhoff. The group expressed much appreciation to Kim, whose board service came to a close in January after serving for 6 years. THANKS KIM!

*Hang in there,
SPRING is coming!*



Partnership with UNK Introduces Students to Prairie Plains Properties, Offers Important Land Management Data

In the fall of 2019, Dr. Greg Pec, an Assistant Professor in the Biology Department at the University of Nebraska – Kearney (UNK) reached out to Prairie Plains inquiring about opportunities for collaboration. As a soil microbial ecologist, Dr. Pec is interested in studying the linkages between plants, soil-microbes and their environment. He and his lab students are addressing both basic and applied questions on the restoration and management of local prairie ecosystems, with a specific interest in how plant and soil microbial communities respond to biological invasions, biotic disturbance and other drivers of change.

Together with Prairie Plains naturalist educator and greenhouse manager Sarah Bailey, Dr. Pec narrowed down some research questions that not only fit well with his lab's interests, but will also help Prairie Plains gain a better understanding of soil and plant community responses to our management and restoration practices. Since fall 2019, Greg and his students have been collecting data from sites at Sherman Ranch and Gjerloff Prairie to address three different research objectives: understanding changes in soil properties across an invasion gradient of eastern red cedar trees following mechanical removal of cedars, following the effects of herbicide treatment (to kill non-native smooth brome grass) and subsequent over-seeding on native plant community recovery and soil properties/microbial communities, and assessing the effects of prescribed fire and grazing on plant diversity and forage quality.

In addition to this research, Greg began visiting our Pearl Harbor Survivors Prairie (PHS) with undergraduate ecology lab students in the fall of 2020 to study the effects of water runoff into the pond from surrounding crop fields. Finally, Prairie Plains will be partnering with UNK on a community outreach program for younger students interested in science and the outdoors. The University of Nebraska's Young Nebraska Scientists program has plans to host their Field Naturalist Camp for middle school students at the Charles L. Whitney Education Center at Gjerloff Prairie.

We're grateful for the partnership with Dr. Pec and UNK, and can't wait to see what we learn next!

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is a publication of



Grasslands are disappearing. At Prairie Plains we restore and protect grasslands and invite you to visit the prairie and help us care for these wild places.

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Contact:

402-694-5535

contactppri@hamilton.net
1307 L St. Aurora NE 68818



Photo left: Dr. Greg Pec taking soil samples from an area where eastern red cedars have encroached on the prairie at Gjerloff Prairie .

Photo right: Undergraduate Research Fellow, Ty Masco, collecting data on plant communities and forage quality.

Are you a member? Prairie Plains depends on the contributions of its members to fulfill its mission! Please sign up or renew your membership today on our website: <http://www.prairieplains.org/friends>

