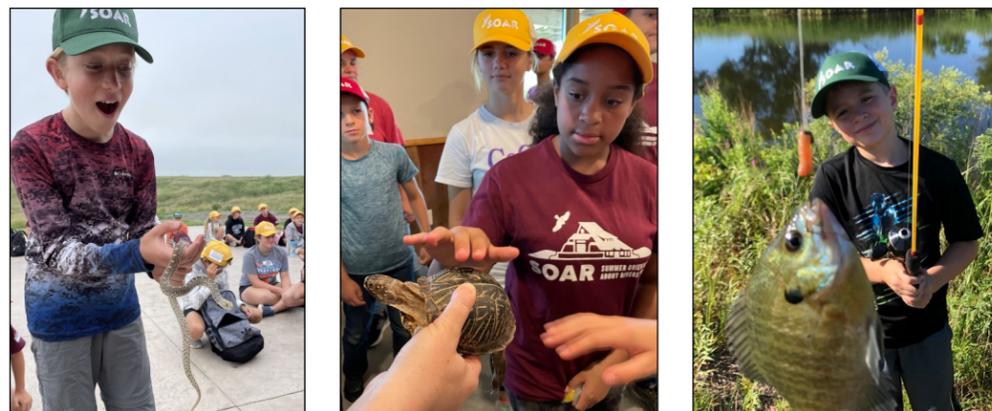


**Summer Orientation About Rivers (SOAR) - July 5-8 & 12-15**

SOAR is all about the experiences! Our goal is to provide campers with up-close, hands-on opportunities to connect with nature. Pictured below, top row, left to right: This bull snake (and many others) was introduced to campers by Dan Fogell, a herpetologist from Southeast Community College; Nebraska Wildlife Rehab taught us all about Nebraska's turtles, including this ornate box turtle (nebraskawildliferehab.org); Bluegill were the catch of the day at Bader Park.

Middle row: Campers met a variety of people who are passionate about many subjects. At Farmers Valley Cemetery, Suzanne Ratzlaff gave a fascinating tour including stories of the pioneers buried there; Prairie Plains founder Bill Whitney was on hand throughout the week to discuss the Platte River and the cool things that live in it; Retired SOAR Staff member Mike Stewart spent time in the Center with campers in the lab that bears his name looking through the microscopes that he and wife Diane donated.

Bottom row, left to right: Elementary teacher and SOAR staff member Amy Wilson created "One Heck of a Trek," an escape room/scavenger hunt hybrid that was a huge hit with campers; Musician Paul Siebert entertained us at Farmers Valley with songs about the history of the area; The hills of Gjerloff Prairie, combined with the Whitney Education Center, provide the perfect location to SOAR!



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**REACHING PEOPLE OF ALL AGES**

We're very fortunate to do the work we do. Every summer we're reminded of the importance of our 8 prairie preserves, our high-diversity, local-ecotype prairie restoration plantings and our mission to connect people with the land. Over the course of four weeks we see the prairie through the eyes of young people and watch in amazement as they explore and learn and make memories with nature.

The give and take of information and ideas between these kids and the talented and passionate presenters that lend their experience to our programs is a sight to behold. I wish all of our members and friends could observe the interaction between campers and Naturalist Educator Sarah Bailey when she leads a hike at Gjerloff Prairie focusing on insects or prairie plants (see photo right). There's an energy that comes from conversations on the land that is infectious. And while we can't quantify the impact these exchanges have on the kids, we believe that they make a difference in their lives and perspectives. They certainly make a difference for us.

The Charles L. Whitney Education Center has allowed us to expand our reach to people of all ages. Our summer has included workshops and meetings on the land intended to inspire conservation professionals, landowners and folks who just love prairies to connect and share information. And it's provided Prairie Plains staff more opportunities to share the knowledge and passion we've gained doing the work that we do.

Thank you for the role you've played in supporting the mission of Prairie Plains. All of our work is rewarding, but our time spent outside with SOAR, YNP and YNE and those attending workshops and training sessions at Gjerloff Prairie brings into sharp focus the importance of making people the priority of what we do.

*-Amy Jones, Executive Director*



**NEWSLETTER**  
**Summer Education 2022**



**WE LOVE BEES!**  
Gjerloff Prairie was the site of two bumble-bee focused workshops this summer.  
**July 9 - Nebraska Bumble Bee Atlas field day for volunteers of the Atlas to practice field protocols, netting and IDing bees (nebraskabumblebeeatlas.org).**  
**August 22 - Xerces Society workshop for agency staff, conservation professionals, land managers, owners, operators, and producers. Content included recommended practices for managing lands specifically for the conservation of bumble bees in Nebraska as well as general bumble bee ecology and identification (xerces.org).**

## Young Nebraska Ecologists (YNE) - June 20-23

YNE is offered to students in grades 9-12 and provides opportunities to gain valuable knowledge about Nebraska ecosystems and outdoor recreation while interacting with professionals with careers in ecological science, natural resources and conservation. Designed as a continuation of SOAR and YNP, this year's YNE participants spent time at Gjerloff Prairie with Dakota Altman from Platte Basin Timelapse discussing photography and storytelling - with time to photograph their observations throughout the 4-day program. Jayne Jonas from University of Nebraska Kearney and Sarah Bailey teamed up to present information about prairie insect biodiversity and ecology (photo below, top left courtesy of Dakota Altman). Days 2 through 4 were spent at the Nature Conservancy's Niobrara Valley Preserve near Johnstown, Nebraska. Avid outdoorsman Alex Briner provided an introduction to backpacking and orienteering (photo below, top right) and the group headed off into the sandhills for an overnight campout (photo bottom left), complete with Leave No Trace instruction and backcountry cooking. Nature Conservancy staff was on hand for a session on wild-fire ecology at the preserve, including a look at planning and equipment required for prescribed fire and a tour of the resident bison herd (photo bottom right). The group also enjoyed a birding/ornithology hike with Jen Corman of Northern Prairies Land Trust, aquatic netting at nearby Smith Falls and time for independent exploration.



Check out our Facebook page for more photos of all our education programs.



**Conserving Fragmented Prairies Workshop**  
July 25-26 - Hosted by Prairie Plains and The Nature Conservancy's Platte River Prairies, the workshop brought guests from around the Midwest to discuss prairie restoration/reconstruction, fire and grazing management, woody plant and other invasive species management and more. Day 1 was spent at Gjerloff Prairie, touring the seed barn, greenhouse and restored sites with Mike Bullerman and Sarah Bailey, as well as the native prairie with Prairie Plains founder Bill Whitney and the Nature Conservancy's Chris Helzer.

## Youth Naturalist Program (YNP) - June 27-30

YNP provides middle school-aged campers a great outdoor adventure actively exploring natural areas along the Platte River in Hamilton County and nearby. This year's schedule included creating a nature journal with artist and Wayne State College professor Carolyn Albrecht - photo top left; Meeting new aquatic friends - photo top middle; kayaking at Pioneer Trails Recreation Area east of Aurora - photo top right; learning about insect biodiversity in prairie ecosystems with University of Nebraska Kearney professor Jayne Jonas - photo bottom left; and aquatic netting at Bader Park - photo bottom right - with a follow up in the lab at the Education Center. Photos by Sarah Bailey and Britton Bailey.

Other activities included nature photography and ethnobotany at Gjerloff Prairie, a trip to the Crane Trust near Alda for a birding hike (including the Platte River, riparian forest and wet meadow), a discussion of wet meadow ecosystems and aquatic netting in a slough with Crane Trust staff Bethany Ostrom, Josh Wiese and Abraham Kanz and a presentation by Mark Brogie about Nebraska moths.



**Restoring & Enhancing Pollinator Habitat Workshop**  
August 3 - Conservation partners and landowners enjoyed a day of field hikes at Gjerloff Prairie, a tour of the Prairie Plains seed barn and greenhouse, a weed management panel discussion and presentations by Gerry Steinauer (Nebraska Game & Parks), Kent Pfeiffer (Northern Prairies Land Trust), Mercy Manzanares (HDR) and Jon Judson (Diversity Farms). The event was hosted by Prairie Plains (at the Charles L. Whitney Education Center), Audubon Nebraska, Nebraska Natural Legacy Project and Nebraska Game & Parks Commission.

