

More Outdoor Learning...



Marci Epp

Yet another "SOAR in the Fall" day was held on September 19. The first annual field day at Griffith Prairie & Farm was organized by life science teacher and SOAR staff member Mike Stewart. Above, students are using the prairie as inspiration for watercolor paintings; below, another group is on their way to some insect netting and a diversity study on the prairie. Other activities included playing old-fashioned baseball on the open green, a lesson on prairie plants, prairie literature and a heritage session where the students heard Hertha Gjerloff Olson's story that appeared in the June-July Link

Thanks to Marci Epp for the photos.



Marci Epp



Our youngest group of outdoor enthusiasts was the 2nd grade class from Trinity Lutheran School in Grand Island. They had a fun day of discovery at Bader Park on September 24. Here, the group is enjoying the look and feel of milkweed seeds.



Prairie Restoration Tour

September 9 was another great weather day for our second annual tour of restored prairies. This year we carpoled to a 200-acre 2004 planting on Ducks Unlimited's Verona Complex in Clay County, approximately 23 miles south of Aurora. Then we headed down the Clay-Fillmore County line 12 miles south of Sutton to a 40-acre 2002 planting on Redhead Wildlife Management Area owned by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Finally, we ended the day at our own Marie Ratzlaff Prairie Preserve near Henderson, where we sowed a 10-acre site by hand in 2001. In preparation for this field day Mike Bullerman prepared two maps showing aerial view and topographic relief of the landscapes.

The point of holding field tours, in addition to enjoying the sights and sounds of the prairies, is to get people together to discuss the goals, challenges and benefits of high diversity

(continued on page 4)



This young bullsnake was one of our discoveries during the FAMFest hike at Griffith Prairie on September 7.



Olson Nature Preserve



Beautiful, diverse ONP, located in Boone County, continues to serve as an ideal outdoor classroom and laboratory.

**Creative Writing:** On September 17, Boone Central juniors and seniors in Cheri Blocher's creative writing class went to ONP with Cheryl Sherburne's fifth-graders to write creation myths. First, the older students performed some of their stories for the fifth-graders, who participated by adding sound effects (prompted by flash cards) and wearing masks of the animal characters in the stories. Then the younger students went with their high school partners to the various habitats of the preserve to write their own myths. Finishing touches, including flash cards and animal masks, were made back at school, and each group read their story while their classmates added sounds and wore the masks.



Cheri Blocher

Boone Central fifth grade students with their high school partners during a writing activity at ONP.

**Fish Inventory:** Boone Central and Newman Grove students recently teamed up during the ONP research class to inventory the various species of fish inhabiting the waters of ONP. Phil Chvala, Fisheries Biologist from the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission, met with the group, explaining fish biology and the procedures involved in a fish inventory. Students then worked together for several days of seining and trapping in the river and wetlands. A few individuals of each species were saved and housed in aquaria at the lab for identification; the others were released back to the water. Chvala then returned to help the students identify the species caught.

The inventory was a snapshot of what species were present in ONP waters at the time of sampling and certainly was not all-inclusive. The results: flathead and channel catfish, red shiner, fathead minnow, green sunfish, river carpsucker, common carp, silver chub, large mouth bass, river shiner, and brassy minnow.

ONP research instructors were Mark Seier and Mitch Osborn. Boone Central Schools, Newman Grove Public Schools, and the Albion Education Foundation provided funding.



Mitch Osborn

Newman Grove and Boone Central students conducting a fish inventory in Beaver Creek at ONP.

Thanks to Cheri Blocher and Mitch Osborn for ONP events information and photos.



Education Center Update

September was a big month of construction on the Charles L. Whitney Education Center. It now is possible to envision the entire structure because the south end is almost completely framed. The photo shows this progress with the rafters extending the large barn roof and the new south-facing roofs which enclose the vaulted entry space and two upper-level privacy baths on either side of the entry. We are awaiting Rob Roberts of Mid-Nebraska Land Developers to place fill up to the level of the black foundation membrane.

(continued on page 4)

**Prairie Restoration Tour continued**

prairie restoration. Participants represented the Natural Resources Conservation Service, The Nature Conservancy, Lower Platte South Natural Resources District and the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. We were pleased to have Brad Seitz from Nebraska Game and Parks and Tim Horst from Ducks Unlimited introduce their areas and describe their management. For people not as familiar with high diversity plantings the tour is also an excellent opportunity for us to advocate what we believe is a great multiple-use resource, whether it is for hunting, wildlife conservation, erosion control and water purification or recreational enjoyment. Next year we will be planning one or more tours in conjunction with The Nature Conservancy.

**Education Center Update continued**

When the final grade work is completed, visitors will be able to walk a stairless path to the doors at the center of the framing, step into the entrance area, then enter the large barn room through doors on either side of the elevator shaft (the gray wall behind the front doors in the photo). With the south framing at this stage, plus the floor work reported in last month's *Link*, we have stabilized and braced the entire structure and will be able to enclose the whole building before winter.

Costs have risen with fuel, labor and present economic conditions in the country. Because of this and the fact that much of our work up until now has been important structural work, such as the elevator shaft, we need to keep the momentum of fundraising alive in order to finish and use the lower level by summer. Please consider a Center donation to keep the project moving.

**PRAIRIE PLAINS LINK**

is a publication of



-An educational land trust incorporated in 1980 as a non-profit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt membership organization based in Aurora, NE.

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

Link Editor & Layout  
Jan Whitney  
Photos by Prairie Plains staff members unless noted otherwise.

Learn more and  
**BECOME A MEMBER** at  
[www.prairieplains.org](http://www.prairieplains.org)

**Wish List**

- Pickup Truck - good for many miles yet
- ATV-pulled DR heavy duty mower for trails and tough cutting
- Tractor with loader
- Hayracks
- Good quality new or used wooden and steel fence posts

**September Thank-yous:**

- to **Mert Griffith** for his work on Summer (SOAR bus);
- to **Lynda Ochsner** for seed harvesting at Pokorny Prairie; and
- to **Lynda Ochsner** and **DawnMarie Moe** for their assistance with the last *Link* mailing.
- to **Wenda Eckerson** at **Espressions** for providing coffee for the Restoration Tour.

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Permit No. 21  
Aurora, NE 68818-2126

1307 L Street  
Aurora NE 68818-2126  
402-694-5535 pprl@hamilton.net  
prairieplains.org



**Gettin' out:** September's weather was great for seed harvesting - and for a record number of events on the land. Above, two of the 46 hikers that participated in the September 27 Volkswalk at Griffith Prairie.

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER  
OF



September, 2008



Aurora fifth graders during "Wet & Wild" - one of several outdoor learning sessions held on their field day at Bader Park Natural Area on September 17. They found an abundance of aquatic life, including bullheads, bluegill, snails, tadpoles and crawdads. Teacher Amy Wilson, who organizes the annual event, is well within her comfort zone teaching outdoors with her 17 years of SOAR experience.



Left - Heartland sophomore English and Biology students, led by teachers Sharon Bishop and Marc Regier, during their annual trip to Marie Ratzlaff Prairie Preserve on September 10.



Below - On September 4, Prairie Plains teamed up with the Edgerton Explorit Center to host a SOAR-like day for area home schoolers and their families at Griffith Prairie. Left, the prairie hike to the river; right, enjoying Raindrop Relay in the Platte at Gjerloff Landing.

