

Letter to Members: Introducing *Prairie Plains Link*

The first half of 2006 has flown by, and some of you may be wondering if you missed an issue of *Prairie Plains Quarterly*. In fact, we have been discussing our publication for some time and have decided on a major change. Enclosed find the first issue (July) of *Prairie Plains Link*, our now monthly newsletter. Why "Link?" When defined as something that connects, bonds, or unites - it is an accurate description of what we want our publications to do. We are making this change for a number of reasons. After listening to some solicited critiques of the *Quarterly*, we think it is time to deliver a more frequent and brief communicate that includes color photos. The new format will not only keep us in closer contact with you, our members; it will also save us considerable time and money. We still plan to develop occasional publications on specific topics, such as a guide to our land preserves. Let us know what you think!

The next step will be to offer the newsletter online. Members will have the option to receive the electronic newsletter only or to continue receiving a hard copy in the mail. Until that option is possible, everyone will be receiving the paper version.

First, the "Pre-Link," January - June, 2006:

The annual meeting was held in Aurora on Saturday, January 14, with 32 members and guests present. Colleen Babcock gave her final address as President of the Board; the new president is Cliff Dill from Lincoln.

Four board members were reelected: Colleen Babcock, Mitzi Fox, David Meyer and Wayne Mollhoff. Carl Roberts and Dolores Johnson left the board, and Dave Vetter, Rick Schuessler and Steve Anderson were elected to serve. Dave is president of The Grain Place near Marquette; Rick is professor of graphic design at the University of Nebraska-Kearney; Steve began his association with Prairie Plains as a SOAR camper, then summer intern, then temporary restoration technician and is now a management trainee at Cornerstone Bank in York.



Twenty-six adventurous souls gathered to enjoy the annual New Year's Day Hike at Griffith Prairie this year.

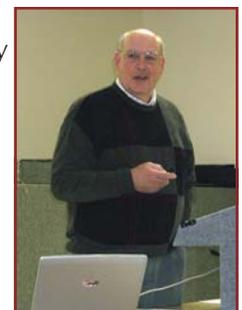
Director Bill Whitney addressed the gathering, reviewing 2005 highlights. Commenting on the 25th Anniversary Festival, he noted how rare and wonderful it was for people of all ages to gather on a farm to celebrate the land. Bill also stressed objectives for the near future: completion of the Education Center and prioritizing land stewardship and program development.

Following other committee business and a presentation about SOAR, Bill presented the Charles L. Whitney Outstanding Service Award to Howard Juhl. He included the history of Howard's involvement with land from the 1930s through WWII, to his business in California. Howard bought his home place near Amherst and later donated it to Prairie Plains; later he purchased a ranch in Sioux County which he also donated. Howard Juhl made it possible for our organization to literally have its roots in the land.

The keynote speaker was Dr. Jim Goeke, UNL Professor and State Hydrologist. He presented "Nebraska Water," a fascinating account of the connection between ground water, surface water and related water issues.



Quite a find: Board member Wayne Mollhoff came across this road victim, a snowy owl, en route to Griffith Prairie for the post-annual meeting hike.



State hydrologist Jim Goeke spoke on Nebraska water issues at the annual meeting.

-Land Stewardship-



Ray Kusek, Jon Soper, Bill Snyder and Scott Snyder were 4 of 20 Cedar Attackers on Feb. 11 at Griffith Prairie.



Above, Ella Eckerson torching Lincoln Creek Prairie; below, Cale Jones explores the aftermath.

-Education - at Bader Park



There was some great birding during the spring hikes at Bader Park. A combined list of 58 species was recorded for the April 29 and May 6 outings. Above, a few of the 18 Bader hikers who ventured out to enjoy Platte River scenery - and breakfast at Fayne's - on Feb. 25. Below, Sandy Creek third graders enjoy a big Woodhouse's Toad during their annual visit to Bader Park.



Working on the land gives many opportunities for sightings like this Common Nighthawk.



-Prairie Restoration

Total acres planted in this season: 653

Date	Site	County	Acres
12/19/05	Lower Platte South NRD King Tract	Lancaster	22
12/30/05	NGPC Thompson-Barnes SWMA	Wayne	17
1/30/06	Jess Putnam	Phelps	45
2/7/06	Bush Island	Hamilton & Merrick	58
2/23/06	Joel Hansen	Wayne	94.5
3/16/06	Ponca State Park	Dixon	225
3/30/06	Dowdy	Jefferson	20.5
4/10/06	Cuba WRP	Merrick	131
4/17/06	Swertzic WRP	Merrick	40

Joel Hansen & Bill Whitney planting high diversity prairie at Joel's place in Wayne County, Febr. 23.





-Celebration !-

The 25th Anniversary Festival at Griffith's was such a big hit last year that we decided to make it an annual Spring Festival. The second run was better than ever, bringing over 300 people of all ages to enjoy the land, the sky, great food, music and each other.



-Kudos!-

Other Honors:

Bill and Jan Whitney were presented the Nebraska Wildlife Federation's 2006 Conservationists of the Year Award on March 25. The award was given to recognize the Whitneys' many years of work to conserve native prairies and educate others about their value.

Two more Prairie Plains members were also recognized by the Federation:

Chris Helzer was named Conservation Professional of the Year. Chris has served nine years as director of science and stewardship for the Central Nebraska Project Office of The Nature Conservancy.

Deb Hauswald was awarded Conservation Educator of the Year. She is a naturalist/educator at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center near Denton.

Chris and Deb are also regular presenters at SOAR; Deb is known by SOAR campers as the Spider Lady.



Aurora's SOAR staff gathered on May 10 to honor Hamilton County Extension Educator and Prairie Plains member Andrew Christiansen for 14 years of outstanding service to the SOAR Program. Andy is retiring from the Extension Service and is moving back to his home state, Washington. Earlier this year, he also received the 2006 Holling Family Award for Teaching Excellence. From left, Amy Wilson, Ron Haden, Bill Whitney, Andrew Christiansen, Jan Whitney, Mike Stewart and Bruce Ramsour.

THANKS to The Grain Place for assistance with printing the "pre-Link" and "Link" this run!

-More Stewardship / Restoration- De-fence Team Volunteer Days



Thanks to Joe Ford (organizer) and 17 other local member volunteers, six consecutive volunteer work Wednesday evenings were held at Griffith Prairie from mid-May through June. One evening was dedicated to seed collecting and five were spent "de-fencing."



Tony Curtis and Colleen Babcock were dedicated de-fence team workers.



Volunteer seed collectors Marianne & David Meyer and Cale Jones.

Catsclaw sensitivebriar was blooming profusely on Griffith Prairie in June and July.



....and More Education



ONP Summer Enrichment students composing poetry in the shade of the oak forest.

June brought another successful Summer Enrichment Program to the Olson Nature Preserve. The 7th & 8th-graders' studies included turtle telemetry, geocaching, photography, poetry writing, snakes, and pioneer cooking. The program is taught by Boone Central teachers Mitch Osborn, Mike Blocher, Cheri Blocher, and Lonnie Zrust, and Newman Grove teacher Mark Seier. ONP turtle research will be featured in *Nebraskaland Magazine* this fall.

June also saw a great tenth run of the Big Bend SOAR Program, which is cosponsored by Audubon's Rowe Sanctuary near Gibbon. Big Bend SOAR staffers continue to publish their own journal about each year's program; anyone interested in receiving the publication should call Jenny Hultquist: 402-756-0677.

...and yet more kinds of activities and people at Griffith's



Doane College's Grand Island campus writing class visited in June, enjoying the sights and sounds of the spring prairie during a hike led by Bill Whitney.



National Trails Day, June 3: Over 30 central Nebraska horses and riders participated in an open ride across Griffith Prairie to Tooley Park and Tom Sherman's land a few miles east.