



Harvesting grass seed at Mormon Island

Seed harvesting was top priority in October. The combine grass harvest from Mormon Island south of Grand Island and The Leadership Center in Aurora yielded 200 barrels of seed, enough tall grass seed to plant at least 500 acres. In addition, we have hand-collected many barrels of other late-season species such as asters, harvested from the Springer Basin restoration done in the late 1990s.



Autumn beauty:
Coralberry & Little Bluestem

Thank you

-to member Bill Zales from Westfield, Iowa for contributing 45 barrels of grass seed for use at the restoration at Ponca State Park in Northeast Nebraska. That's about 110 acres worth of seed; and
-to Mert Griffith for all of his help during the harvest, including designing and installing a new receiver hitch for the old ATV.

Nebraska is an early fog fingering
a sunrise tinted mallow pink ducks dawdling
in from dreams alfalfa fields all freshly
mowed and drinking dew pastures spilling spotted
cattle round a bend birdsong clear as trill
of silver bell sunshine shimmering like a halo
over cornfields on hot days wheatfields sprouting
bashful green turning rich and molten gold wind-
mills guarding grasslands sumptuous with sand and
space whose gentle hills house prairie dogs and side-
oats grama wide band of river trailing shallow water
west to east calling cranes to wamble
down and wait rainbows sunsets
sometimes rain hills and valleys hand-
in-hand a lookout where a coyote howls
and sumac ragged as a fire running up a hill.

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Marilyn Dorf, author of several poetry books and other published works, grew up on a farm near Albion. Her writing has always been influenced by the natural landscape of Nebraska. She now lives in Lincoln. Poem published with permission from the author.

Approaching Events
NOVEMBER:
Education Center Construction!!!

DECEMBER 16:
Winter Bird Hike
at Bader Park Natural Area
9:00 a.m.
followed by lunch at Espressions

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

October, 2006

Address presented by PPRI Board of Directors President Cliff Dill at the Groundbreaking Ceremony, September 29, 2006

It's hard for me to believe that this day has finally come. I think it was in February, 2001 at a weekend board retreat that we first talked about it in earnest, and decided that one of our goals would be to build an education center. We envisioned it to be located somewhere along the Platte River, but had no idea of exactly where. That commitment was pretty scary then, and it's still a little scary today (although much less so).

The idea of a center for education existed in Bill Whitney's mind long before that retreat because it is part of our 1980 Charter.

This will not be just a building. It will become the Prairie Plains Education Center on the Platte River. It will become the home base of SOAR (Summer Orientation About Rivers), our award winning nature day camp for grade school kids that just completed its 15th successful year. It will also become a place for kids, families, artists, scientists, naturalists, community organizations and many others to learn, study, write, paint, teach and be inspired.

With this structure and the people and programs that will make it great, many exciting events, opportunities and experiences will come forth. It pleases me greatly to know that the inspirations we gain from those experiences will be passed on to future generations.

Many of us are lucky to have been graced with an appreciation of this land and its heritage. It amazes me, knowing the profound effect mankind has had on the appearance of much of this planet over the past few hundred years, that as we look out on this bluff today, other than a power line, a few fences, several introduced weed species and an abundance of trees along the river, this bluff looks very similar to what it looked like 100 or even 2 or 300 years ago.

Prairie Plains is a grass roots organization. It's the most grass roots organization I have ever known or experienced. After receiving their education, Bill and Jan returned to Bill's hometown of Aurora. Somehow a spark was kindled and the idea of Prairie Plains began to take form. Over the intervening 26 years since its inception, Bill and Jan have invested their lives in this organization in more ways than most of us will ever know.

As promised,
more on the
**Education Center
Groundbreaking
September 29, 2006**



All smiles for the event are, l-r, center architect Lee Schriever, Brady, PPRI director Bill Whitney, and board president Cliff Dill.



Envisioning: Aurora mayor/member Marlin Seeman and member Orvin Bontrager.



Left, board member Dennis Ferguson with son Grant, enjoying time together on a beautiful day at a wonderful place. Right, others doing likewise!



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RESOURCE INSTITUTE

As much as we owe to Bill and Jan for their tireless efforts over those 26 years, PPRI is more than just its founders. It's an organization of people, many people. We're made up of our membership, our supporters and our friends. And, it's only through the commitment, efforts and monies of these people and groups that our organization has survived and flourished.

To my wife Jeanne and I, the measurement of the effectiveness of this grass roots organization is best realized kid by kid, farmer by farmer, bird by bird, rancher by rancher, wildflower by wildflower, seed by seed and acre by acre. This building, for which we break ground today, is a monument to all those individual efforts.

Prairie Plains Resource Institute is about planting seeds, both in a literal and symbolic sense. It's about bringing people and communities together and celebrating the land and the heritage of the people who have lived, worked and played here. I have a marvelous image in my mind from the first Prairie Festival that we celebrated here on PPRI's 25th anniversary about a year and a half ago. On a Friday evening in May, over 300 people gathered and wandered these bluffs. The most common remark I heard was "I didn't know anything like this existed!" Through this building and with the help of you and many, many others, we will help countless others to realize not only that this wonderful place does exist, but to gain a greater understanding of why it is here, what can be done to preserve it, and hopefully to be inspired by it.

With one exception, I'm not going to mention any individuals, but I would like to thank the Nebraska Environmental Trust for their generous grant that allowed us to purchase the property. I'd like to thank the Hamilton Community Foundation for its grant that allows us to move the roof of an existing local barn onto our new foundation. I'd also like to thank all those volunteers who help us with the stewardship of this land. I'd especially like to thank Mert Griffith for his ongoing help in all aspects of this marvelous piece of land.

I'd like to thank you all for being here today and for seeing the value of our vision. We need people like you to continue to invest your energies, spirits and dollars for the benefit of our and future generations.



The real groundbreaking began on October 16 when Rob Roberts of Mid-Nebraska Land Developers donated excavation services. Here, the concrete contractor is pouring the foundation footings.



Range-judging contestants at Griffith Prairie

2006 Nebraska State Range Judging Contest held at Griffith Prairie

Over 350 contestants from 21 schools across Nebraska took part in the annual range-judging event October 3. Students from West Holt High School at Atkinson were the top individuals, while two teams from Ord High School won the team competitions.

The 2006 state contest was sponsored by the Nebraska State Range Judging Committee, University of Nebraska Cooperative Extension, Upper Big Blue Natural Resources District, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Nebraska Association of Resources Districts.



In range judging, contestants must be able to identify range plants by name and know their growth habits, livestock forage value and other characteristics. An understanding of the range plant community, range condition and range sites is also important. Contestants must know the concepts of proper range use, wildlife habitat management, and how to manage rangeland resources.



The ONP Enchanted Evening on October 7 attracted over 200 people to the Boone County preserve - many for a first-time visit. They came from Albion, Petersburg, Aurora, Spalding, Fullerton, St. Edward, Elgin and other surrounding communities to enjoy the breezy autumn evening festivities.

Local youth led moonlit hikes on the trails, which included a moon-viewing station with telescope provided by Dr. Anthony Kusek. The crowd was further entertained by Nebraska Humanities Speakers Bureau storyteller Dorothy Rieke at ONP.

Nebraska Humanities Speakers Bureau storyteller Dorothy Rieke at ONP.

Paul & Lori Hosford and Mitzi Fox did a wonderful job planning and publicizing the event, and already have plans in mind for the 2007 Enchanted Evening.



A new sign on Highway 14 was in place in time for ONP Enchanted Evening participants. Admiring the sign is PPRI board member Colleen Babcock.

History Channel Visits Griffith Prairie

A few hours after the range judging contestants departed on October 3, a small film crew from The History Channel arrived to interview Mert Griffith about farming in the area and to get some footage of an historic prairie. They also visited the Plainsman Museum in Aurora to see and record the sod house there. The images are to be used in an upcoming series on "The States" to begin airing in May, 2007. The Nebraska piece is to appear in the tenth episode.



Above, History Channel film crew interviewing Mert; below, filming the prairie with Mert as chauffeur.



The Harvest Festival at PPRI's Lincoln Creek site

in Aurora on October 14 was yet another successful fall celebration. Over a hundred gathered to enjoy hikes on the trail, storytelling and s'mores around the campfire, Paul Hosford's dulcimer music, and several other games and activities.

