

First, few children have the opportunity to participate in a community-supported outdoor program as diverse and exciting as SOAR. We have a rare gem in the middle of the great American prairie, and we must continue to invest in this program and expand it for the sake of our youth.

Second, since its inception in 1980, Prairie Plains has pioneered its particular approach to high diversity prairie restoration in Nebraska. Our methods have significantly influenced other organizations and state and federal agencies in Nebraska, including Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Farm Bill programs. We are also recognized in other states for this work – and for how we incorporate it into an education process. The multi-dimensional prairie has become a passion for thousands of people interested in livestock grazing, wildlife, natural beauty, recreation, history and clean water. Prairie Plains has huge opportunity in the future to serve this growing interest.

Third, the Charles L. Whitney Education Center under construction on the Platte River bluffs of Griffith Prairie is the nucleus of an emerging campus. Progress on the Center building and its surroundings is critical because our program growth will soon be centered there. I am reminded of another great architectural icon, the Nebraska State Capitol. This building, dear to all Nebraskans, was built during the Great Depression in the 1930s on a pay-as-you-go basis. People kept pressing forward optimistically in the midst of events portending a bleak future. Likewise, our Center is one brick or board at a time, and we are, at times, fueled by little more than our optimism and idealism about our work. We have seen its successes in the eyes of SOAR campers and landowners we have worked with on our projects. *We have a gift to share.*



Charles L. Whitney Education Center under construction - soon to be enclosed.

What about the Center's programs? Participants will be from all walks of life, young and old, including local citizens as well as students, teachers, great thinkers and dignitaries from around the world. They will congregate to learn, break bread together, resolve differences and work on natural resource issues of our time. These issues revolve around agriculture, nature, energy, water, education, community development and governance. Our approach to these topics stem from our foundational work in ecosystem restoration of native grassland environments, education and the process of developing effective models of public participation. Concurrently, we will broaden our scope and geography beyond the state to include the Great Plains and Midwest regions, and wherever opportunity arises to exchange information. We are in a global marketplace for ideas and innovation.

The core program we are planning now is the student intern program, based on the idea of a "farm school," where a group of students divides their time between work and study. We envision 6-12 year-long interns working on Prairie Plains restoration projects and studying global environmental resource topics. This type of study program is not widely available through colleges and universities, but it can be accredited through existing degree programs. What makes it unique is that we have ready access to an incredibly diverse and large plains landscape, and the tools to make it work.

In summation, Prairie Plains needs to keep on a steady course to build a more expansive program on the foundation of what we have been doing well for years. We must finish the Center, and need somewhere in the \$400,000 range to do it. No doubt this will rise the longer it takes. We need substantial year-end support to take care of our equipment needs and to be solid going into the new year. We also need to recruit new members and attract people with the capacity to donate at a higher level. We thank you heartily for your past generosity and loyalty. Anything you can do to continue and increase that support will be appreciated.



"Gjerloff Landing"
50" x 60" oil painting by Ernest Ochsner to appear in Education Center entrance.

Ochsner Painting Donated

Thanks to a gift from member Gerhard Assenmacher from Niwot, Colorado, and in-kind donation from artist and member Ernest Ochsner from Aurora, Nebraska, the Charles L. Whitney Education Center will display an Ochsner landscape painting, "Gjerloff Landing." The 50" by 60" oil painting is an image of Griffith Prairie and the Platte River from the north end of the Bush Island Bridge. It is a most appropriate addition to the Center and will welcome visitors as they enter through the building's south doors. Members and staff who have been familiar with Ernie's work over the years have occasionally discussed the possibility of acquiring a painting, so this gift came as a wonderful surprise. It is truly a fantastic addition to the Center.



ONP's Enchanted Trail

It was a wonderful evening for the approximately 100 people who took part in the annual Enchanted Trail event at ONP October 4th. Trail walkers learned more about the various habitats on the preserve, and enjoyed telescopic observations of the moon and Jupiter, a campfire, sing-a-long and popcorn treats.

The highlight of the evening was the presentation by Lakota "tribal rememberer" Sibby Lebeau, great-grandson of Sitting Bull. He shared stories about his life growing up on the Cheyenne River Indian Reservation in South Dakota, and his role later in World War II as a code talker. He served in the 11th Naval Demolition Combat Unit.

Special thanks to Paul Hosford for his excellent coordination of this event, and to all who assisted him. And as always, thanks to Ted and Mona Thieman for the outstanding job they do maintaining the trails.



Sibby Lebeau, WWII code talker from Grand Island, was the featured speaker at the Oct. 4th ONP event.



Prairie Plains board member Mitzi Fox served as an experienced guide for groups hiking ONP's Enchanted Trail.



Prairie Plains restoration ecologist Mike Bullerman has a sharp eye for Sullivant's Milkweed, and harvests it wherever he can - including this spot along I-80 near Alda.



The harvest at TNC's Derr site. Seed quality and yield were excellent this fall. We have ended the year with a sizable harvest of sandy, upland, lowland and wetland species of grasses and forbs.

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

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Photos by Prairie Plains staff members unless noted otherwise.

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Missouri River bottomland restoration acres planted by Prairie Plains in 2001 in Ponca State Park. The park is located in Dixon County in northeastern Nebraska, and covers 2400 acres of forested rolling bluffs and floodplain along the river.

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER
OF



October, 2008

A Message from Director Bill Whitney

As we near the end of 2008, it is time to reflect back on the year and look forward to some exciting possibilities for 2009 and beyond. This may sound cliché, but I do have some important points to make about our future.

First - a few 2008 highlights: Fortunately, we secured a number of significant Wetland Reserve Program (WRP) projects along the Loup River near St. Paul, and Prairie Creek near Clarks, Nebraska, which helped our budget significantly. The 2008 SOAR programs (Big Bend and Aurora) were both very successful, thanks to continued community support, experienced and organized staff and enthusiastic campers. Construction progressed on the Charles L. Whitney Education Center on Griffith Prairie, and it will soon be enclosed. And the *Link* has been well received; we appreciate our members' feedback.

The Missouri River as viewed from the restoration area pictured above. Ponca State Park is the eastern gateway to the 59-mile section of the Missouri National Recreation River, one of two unchannelized stretches of the river bordering Nebraska.



We also had our share of challenges in 2008. Weather was a constant pressure against field work – heavy rain, wind, then more wind, more rain. Because we had a remarkably mild summer with cool August temperatures, the fall seed harvest was compressed into a shorter, more intense period, and extended later in the season. Equipment breakdowns - including the trucks, ATVs, lawn mowers and combine - were common, as our machines have aged.

Membership support played a significant role in our ability to meet the demands of the year so far. We cannot emphasize enough how critical these contributions are, and how much they are appreciated. At this time I must stress that Prairie Plains needs your continued support to complete our year on solid ground. It is difficult as a non-profit leader to appeal to members for year-end financial help when I know so many other needs are competing for a piece of everyone's shrinking pocketbook. But please consider what is at stake.

October Thank-yous:

- to Mert Griffith for his ongoing work improving and maintaining the entrance road and road to the Center at Griffith Prairie and Farm;
- to Greg Harrison for donating a spotting scope and tripod;
- to Gerhard Assenmacher and Ernest Ochsner for the Ochsner painting, "Gjerloff Landing;" and
- to Chris Helzer from TNC and Brad Seitz from the Nebraska Game & Parks Commission for allowing us to harvest on their properties.

Wish List

- Pickup Truck
- ATV-pulled DR heavy duty mower
- Tractor with loader
- Hayracks
- Good quality new or used wooden and steel fence posts
- Picnic tables

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