



This little guy found his way into a cozy spot in the blue barn at Griffith Farm one cold March morning - a surprise for Mike, who was there to process and mix more seeds for spring plantings. He's completed about 275 acres of high-diversity restorations so far.

**THANK YOU**  
to  
**Bill & Shirley Snyder**  
for hosting the  
**February board retreat**  
and  
**April board meeting!**

### APPROACHING EVENTS



**Mid-Nebraska Trail Seekers Volkswalk**  
**Griffith Prairie**  
**Saturday, April 17th, 8:00 - 3:00**  
For details, call Barbara Fletcher  
**308-382-5962**

**May Earlybird Tours**  
**Bader Park**  
**Saturdays - May 1 & 8, 7:00 a.m.**  
Focus on migrating & nesting birds

**2010 Sioux County Ranch Weekend**  
**June 11-12-13**  
Details TBA

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*Celebrating 30 Years!*

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

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

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# Prairie plains Link



March landscape of the Beaver River as it winds through the Olson Nature Preserve in Boone County - a natural ribbon of prairie and forest.

newsletter  
of



March, 2010

**Ribbons of Prairie through the Great American Breadbasket**  
A 100-year vision for restoring native prairie and wetlands along stream corridors  
Bill Whitney, Executive Director, Prairie Plains Resource Institute

### History of Prairie Plains work on stream corridors

Sometime in the early 1970s the city engineer of Aurora, Nebraska introduced the idea of creating a linear park along Lincoln Creek on the town's eastern edge. With his idea in mind, I began exploring the creek land in 1978, and was intrigued. I discovered an interesting property belonging to a family friend, Wilma Aalborg, and thought we could do some work there. We then began to promote a greenway concept to the community as a way to connect land areas along the creek, such as the Aalborg land, The Leadership Center, Streeter Park, a residential area and the golf course, and to turn what was widely perceived as a waste area into an asset. The creek corridor could become a place for people to recreate and learn about nature - a tiny linear prairie wilderness providing environmental, educational and recreational benefits.

Timing was right for this project, especially since a major flood occurred a few days after our first historic Lincoln Creek prairie planting in 1980 (the Grand Island tornado super storm), bringing attention to the creek. Prairie Plains carried out its first prescribed burn and planted some of its first tiny prairies on the Aalborg land in the early 80s. In 1983, Wilma donated her six acres. We then proceeded to lease an adjoining ten acres from the City of Aurora, thus creating the first Prairie Plains land preserve. What ultimately germinated on this small acreage, however, was the first inkling of a larger vision which could someday affect how people look at this prairie region and their place in it.

If it is possible to restore a small stretch of creek by planting seeds and moving some earth, followed by basic management activities, then it should be possible on a larger scale. If stream corridors are restored to accessible and beautiful greenways that preserve native prairie, provide wildlife habitat, improve water quality and quantity, connect us to the natural world and add to quality of life, why not expand the concept?



July, 2009 - Trail through the first Prairie Plains restoration project (1980) along an oxbow of Lincoln Creek.

### Perennial Garden in Spring

The first warm day I carry the rake  
to the semi-circular garden outside the breakfast window,  
cluttered with the past season's oak, maple, and sycamore leaves.  
I stab down hard and quick into each dusty leaf cluster  
that chokes the neck of last year's pink astilbe and Russian sage,  
pick and toss clumps of matted leaves and dried stalks—  
old summer's thrill—into messy piles at the edge of the plot.  
And so unveil this Spring's dirt.  
New as the chorus of green hooded shoots  
huddled around the woody stems,  
fallen sedum of another season.  
Fresh as the stand of pale chives showing itself,  
as I comb gently over its tufts to rout the rusted leaves.  
Seeing how a sharp-headed crocus has speared  
a papery oak leaf, I throw down my rake to watch and wait.  
Spread out before me is the ready ground, already holding  
every good thing that will come to me.

—Anne R. Whitney

Throughout our 30-year history we have been interested and concerned about the fate - and more importantly, the potential - of stream corridors. In 1999 we began working with The Nature Conservancy and University of Nebraska Extension on a project called the Platte Corridor Initiative (See "The Grand Island to Columbus Platte River Corridor Initiative" in *Prairie Plains Journal* #14, 1999 – at prairieplains.org under publications – other downloadable files). Through this Initiative we catalyzed the formation of locally self-determined working groups to accomplish resource and organizational objectives on the river, e.g. Bader Memorial Park re-organization, the sand and gravel working group PACE (People, Aggregates, Community, Environment) and a Platte Habitat Partnership. Ribbons of Prairie is the next step forward.

### A Proposed Vision for America's Agricultural Heartland

Culminating three decades of thought and action, Prairie Plains is soon to implement a major new program: *Ribbons of Prairie through the Great American Breadbasket - a 100-year vision for restoring native prairie and wetlands along stream corridors*. Ribbons of Prairie will promote restoring prairie – preferably high diversity prairie (see last month's *Link*) - along streams and rivers that pass through the cultivated landscapes of the Great Plains and Midwest. The scope is the Central Plains states, all of Iowa, and large parts of Missouri, Illinois, Minnesota and Wisconsin. Prairie Plains will begin this work in central and eastern Nebraska where we have gained the most experience; however, the idea and process is exportable to other states in the region, with many partners potentially involved. Although prairie is our forte, eastern extensions of this program would undoubtedly include a blending of prairie, savanna and eastern deciduous woodlands.

The Ribbons of Prairie program emphasizes our perception of this region as extraordinary in its wealth of natural resources as well as natural beauty - a good place to live. It holds vast, untapped potential for environmental, cultural and economic development. It is a place to stay, or to come back to, or to accept newcomers who can appreciate its special qualities. People here are expressing a growing desire to connect to and restore enriching aspects of this region's natural heritage, be more involved with food production and benefit from the region's traditional sense of community.

### Our Environmental Vision

We see a new merging of nature, agriculture and community, a picture of a cultivated landscape laced with strips of green and blue, linking towns and farms. The green is a corridor of high diversity prairie grasses and wildflowers along waterways – a strip of land between stream and cropland devoted to native prairie wilderness, diversity, recreation and much-needed education about land and water. These prairie "ribbons" will also be ecological service providers - protectors, collectors and cleansers of a resource we can't live without – clean water.

### Our Agricultural Vision

We envision the agricultural landscape evolving in the next 100 years to include more people in the primary act of growing food. This may be difficult to imagine right now – even more than prairie plantings in all the stream corridors - but we believe it will be possible and even necessary. There is a growing need for conserving precious natural resources and limiting dependence on oil - and consumers are demanding a safe and local food supply.

Certain cultivated lands along streams – rough, erosion and flood-prone, odd-shaped parcels – will, over time, be taken out of crop production. Productivity of these areas will no longer be measured in



Open spaces within stream corridor "prairie ribbons" are wonderful places to gather for educational and/or social events. Above, Mitzi Fox addressing a group of trail walkers relaxing on benches in the cottonwood grove at Olson Nature Preserve; below, Paul Hosford and Bill Whitney provide the musical background at a Lincoln Creek Harvest Festival.



bushels per acre, but by their contribution to clean water, flood control, wildlife habitat (including habitat for pollinators), biodiversity and human quality of life. Restored prairie stream corridors would also be a good fit for various perennial forms of agriculture that can be integrated into the grassland, such as diversity-sustaining livestock grazing - and along the boundaries of the grassland, with orchards, vineyards or nut groves. The prairie plantings and field edges would include edible species, allowing people to "forage the planted wild." Corridor prairies would also build up carbon in the soil, while also occasionally contributing to above-ground biomass/biofuel harvest at the end of the growing season (striking a balance between other uses, such as habitat). Any loss in farm productivity by converting stream corridors from cropland to prairies could be mitigated by better stewardship of the best farmland between the streams.

### Our Social Vision

The Ribbons of Prairie picture also includes economically and culturally vital villages, towns and small cities. The foundation of this vitality is the health of a local agricultural economy, and a popular embrace of the natural and cultural landscape – that connectedness often described as "sense of place." Restored stream corridors would substantially increase the access and opportunity to experience local natural environments. Landowners and communities will take part in the discussions of how the "ribbons" will be used – e.g. exercise trails, habitat, hunting, foraging, outdoor education, ecotours, fishing holes, orchards, etc. The commercial economic development model will grow in such an atmosphere, resulting in mutually sustaining positive feedback where attitude about place feeds the economy and vice versa. At this stage of development, the arts prosper as well – adding to the well-being of the community. Our vision is more than just planting grass. It is also what we do to develop a cultural connection to the land and each other in the process and aftermath of restoration of the stream corridor.



August scene at Lincoln Creek Prairie (in a stream corridor) - Monarch Butterfly on Pitcher Sage; Indiangrass in the background.

### Prairie Plains Resource Institute's Role in Ribbons of Prairie

- 1) **The Big Picture** - Continue development of the vision and establish guiding principles and goals.
- 2) **New Prairie Plains Projects** - Implement new high diversity prairie and wetland restoration projects.
- 3) **Interns and Volunteers** - Plug interns and volunteers into research, planning, outreach and implementation of Ribbons ventures.
- 4) **Group Process** - Establish effective working group processes to carry out projects in ecological restoration, agriculture and education.
- 5) **Funding** - Find innovative new ways to finance and sustain conservation, education and community development projects.
- 6) **Policy** - Align existing government policies and programs with Ribbons of Prairie, and help create new ones within a Ribbons nature/agriculture/community framework.
- 7) **Leadership** - Create new leadership within this vision.
- 8) **Community Social and Economic Development** - Assist in developing community social and economic objectives after the restoration work is completed.
- 9) **Documentation** - Record results and get the word out.

The concepts described here are not original or new. In fact, on various scales and in widely scattered locations, some aspects of the vision are already being advanced. Prairie Plains aims to bring focus to this work and increase capacity to move it forward. It is important to realize some of its goals now; others will extend into the next generation and beyond. Our job is to get the ball rolling – and as it picks up momentum with each success story, more people, communities and organizations will have the opportunity to take part in shaping a more sustainable, positive future for the prairie and plains region.