

The Future of Prairie Plains

by Bill Whitney

(continued from January *Link*)

Just as it was difficult in the early 1980s to envision a future where even one staff member could be supported to develop a full-time program agenda in central Nebraska, it may be challenging presently to envision a much larger team of staff and interns working on a wide variety of education and natural resource projects in Nebraska and other Great Plains states. But this is just where we're headed.

Prairie Plains owns seven unique and beautiful prairie properties in Nebraska with tremendous education potential. One of these, the Griffith Prairie and Farm, located along the Platte River in Hamilton County, is where we are now building the Charles L. Whitney Education Center. We have arrived at this point with a solid history of accomplishment: the network of preserves just mentioned; the creation



Steve Winter

The first planting of the year - three acres of the Jack Winter family property in Lancaster County - was completed on Feb. 15. Next came 18 acres of Audubon's Spring Creek land (also in Lancaster County) on Feb. 22 and 38 acres of Wetland Reserve Program sites in Burt County on Feb. 27. This project is our first attempt at restoring Missouri River floodplain sedge meadow.

of the Summer Orientation About Rivers (SOAR) program - our award-winning nature day camp for elementary students; a successful prairie and wetland restoration program; extensive experience in land management and effective application of public participation in the Platte Corridor. In order to fully utilize the assets and skills acquired in the last 28 years, we will involve an ever-increasing number of people in everything we do. Furthermore, because of widespread interest, demand and opportunity we will be expanding our geographic scope.

Two new programs will be created and run from the Whitney Education Center: The Academy for Great Plains Restoration and The Prairie School. Through the Academy we will teach student interns about the art and science of ecological restoration through 1) the study of restoration as it is being practiced around the world, and 2) carrying out restoration of prairie, river and wetland ecosystems in the Great Plains.

Ecological restoration is destined to be one of the fastest growing global disciplines of the future. Prairie Plains is positioned to play a significant role in its development. Not only can we teach a new wave of restorationists; we can invite people from other regions to our Center to exchange information, and send our graduates out into the world to put their ideas and experiences to use elsewhere. Many landowners, community members, businesses, farmers and ranchers will also be affected by the Academy's projects.

Prairie Plains started working on a Lincoln Creek greenway plan in Aurora, Nebraska in 1980, including a hiking trail and restored prairie - connecting parks and other community amenities together. This idea is now a central theme in Aurora's planning process. Since that time we have also participated in other diverse projects with similar goals. The Academy can promote and work on these types of projects in many other locales. Potential projects are endless - and including interns in the planning and restoration process has wonderful implications for our region and for the people involved.



Eagle Scout Project Proposal Approved

Nine members of the Olson Nature Preserve Stewards met in Albion on Monday, Feb. 18 at Boone Central High School to hear Boone Central sophomore Miles Wynn's Eagle Scout project proposal. His plan for building a kiosk for ONP that will display signs, maps and other information was approved.



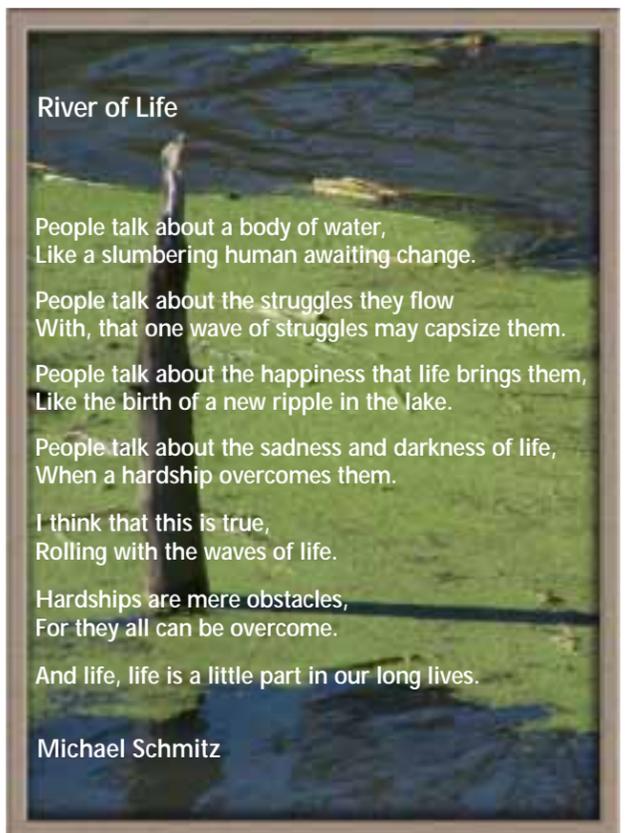
The Prairie School will extend our land education programs to all ages and interests. We will offer courses, workshops, and SOAR-like programs to people in Nebraska and beyond, including such topics as flora and fauna, surface water and groundwater, stories and literature about the land, agriculture and much more. The Center will be a comfortable and beautiful place to spend time in the pursuit of knowledge about place. The Prairie School will emphasize youth education. Young people will experience the outdoors like the SOAR campers have been doing for 16 years. The Prairie School will also act as a regional nerve and information center for online services and outreach to help others create similar programs where they live.

The first step into this exciting future is to complete the Charles L. Whitney Education Center so that we can bring people together in a comfortable setting on the Griffith Prairie. We are nearing the halfway point in raising funds for the building, i.e., about \$300,000. When we finish the lower level we can occupy that space for program use. We will be continuing to raise funds for its completion and an endowment fund. We will market the Center as a community special event space as well as for our own events, including seminars, lectures, workshops, field trips, festivals, area school outing and SOAR and similar programs for students from outside the region.

We are well aware that we will need sound business planning and management, and a continuing successful capital campaign, to make this vision of the Center and its two major programs a reality. You, our supporters, have helped us get to this point. We're counting on you more than ever - along with businesses and foundations - to successfully launch the next challenging phase. We will have to build it one step at a time, just as we have done with the Center building, and as we have done with the organization for 28 years. Please participate!



From left, ONP Stewards Mark Seier and Paul Hosford, Miles Wynn and his father/Scout Master Todd Wynn, and Prairie Plains director Bill Whitney.



River of Life

People talk about a body of water,
Like a slumbering human awaiting change.

People talk about the struggles they flow
With, that one wave of struggles may capsize them.

People talk about the happiness that life brings them,
Like the birth of a new ripple in the lake.

People talk about the sadness and darkness of life,
When a hardship overcomes them.

I think that this is true,
Rolling with the waves of life.

Hardships are mere obstacles,
For they all can be overcome.

And life, life is a little part in our long lives.

Michael Schmitz

One example of the photos and poetry created by Boone Central students in Cheri Blocher's English 10 class. The project began during the October field trip to ONP; the students then spent two days in the classroom polishing up their poems and working on their photos in Photoshop.

THANK YOU

- To board members David Meyer, Mike Powell, Dennis Ferguson and Jack Potts for manning the Prairie Plains booth at the Home and Garden Show in Aurora February 9-10;
- To the Cooper Foundation for the third installment of a \$61,250 grant beginning in 2005, which has supported Prairie Plains fund development and administrative processes;
- To Neal White for his assistance with the February 27 WRP Missouri River floodplain plantings;
- And once again to Steve Winter for all the eastern Nebraska seed he collected - some of which landed on Winter property - and also to Steve and his mom for the Valentine cookies!

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MISSION:

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

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Approaching Event



Cedar Attack!
(Rescheduled)
Saturday, March 8
at Griffith Prairie
9:00 at the prairie
or
meet at the office
in Aurora at 8:30.
Lunch provided.

WISH LIST

- ATV blade
- Truck - half or 3/4 ton crew cab, long box
- 6' wide trailer (the longer the better)
- \$ for new computers



The 2008 Bader Park Tour program - now in its 27th year - got off to a great start on Saturday, February 23. Below, hikers venture into the woods to the river with the moon in the west; above, greeting the sunrise over the Platte. All photos by Amy Jones.

monthly newsletter of



February, 2008



If the first Bader Park hike of the year is any indication, we're in for a wonderful year of events in 2008. It was cold all right, but there wasn't much wind. We witnessed a gorgeous sunrise over the Platte, as well as flocks of mallards, white-fronted and Canada geese and three bald eagles. Other birds spotted during the hike were robins (including one tree full), a field sparrow, a white-breasted nuthatch and rough legged and redtail hawks. To top it all off, we warmed up in the Bader house and enjoyed a wonderful breakfast prepared by Fayne Petersen.

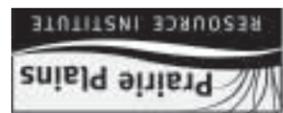


Our next "celebration of the land and its people" will be the rescheduled Cedar Attack at Griffith Prairie on Saturday, March 8 at 9:00 a.m. Lunch will be provided at a place to be announced.

Above - "Which way now?" in the 2005 prairie restoration on the north side of the park. Below, left to right - the group shot, Gerry Steinauer's Corgi, Callie, entertaining us with her break dance on the ice, and hiking through the main prairie that was hayed last summer.



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