

PRAIRIE PLAINS LINK



SOARing into the night at Griffith Prairie - bat and watercolor sessions on the hill by the barn, followed by a hike to the river for campfire, stories, songs, owl release and s'mores...then star-gazing back on the hill.



Learning about prairie restoration - planting wetland area on the Platte at Bader Park.



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is a publication of



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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Photos by Prairie Plains staff members unless noted otherwise.

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Thank-yous:

- to Harry & Wenda Eckerson and the FAMFest committee for their donation of lumber for the Center;
- to Austin Bontrager for volunteering his time harvesting seeds;
- to Scott Schaefer, Caitlin Muldoon, Charlie Skavdahl and other Sioux County friends for their help during the Ranch Trek; and
- to all SOAR volunteers, presenters and supporters (see insert).



Scene from this and every summer's high point: SOAR, Summer Orientation About Rivers. Highest attendance on record, wonderful night sessions and lots of water in the river made SOAR '08 especially memorable.

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER  
OF



June-July, 2008

Summer finally arrived - after a particularly wet, cool and stormy spring - and with it the season for Wildflower Week walks, sedge seed harvesting, progress on the Center, the Sioux County Ranch Trek and SOAR. All of these things went very well, and we now are looking forward to the fall harvest and corresponding events, including the FAMFest hike (see "Approaching Events" on back page). For now, though, enjoy this summer's review in pictures!

**Wildflower Week (June 1-7) Walks - upper left clockwise:** Walk participants exploring Marie Ratzlaff Prairie Preserve; enjoying the view from a hilltop at Griffith Prairie; Rebecca Clark from Dannebrog with her wildflower bouquet; showy vetchling (*Lathyrus polymorphus*, present on both preserves); the sky show seen by wildflower hikers. As it quickly approached, it also cut the hike short!



Ernest Ochsner

**Approaching Events:**  
FAMFest Arts & Musical Festival in Aurora (see famfestaurora.org) including FAMFest hike at Griffith Prairie on Sunday, Sept. 7, 9:00 a.m. followed by brunch. RSVP to amyppri@hamilton.net.  
Volkswalk at Griffith Prairie on Saturday, Sept. 27 - Details TBA.

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**Sioux County Ranch Trek '08** - We were modest in number but grand in enthusiasm at this June's membership gathering in the Panhandle June 4-6. From left: enjoying the scenery on the Saturday afternoon ranch tour; UNL professor Bob Hunt presenting geology and paleontology of the area; a beautiful sego lily (*Calochortus nuttallii*) emerging on a site damaged by years of drought. Spring rains this year brought some relief to the area and it was encouraging to see the landscape greening up. Following the tour, our gathering grew to around 100 with Sioux County neighbors and friends joining us for the evening barbecue.



**Charles L. Whitney Education Center**  
Work on the Center is progressing steadily. Clint Petersen and his assistant, Chad Garrett, built the floor over the south end of the foundation (right), and structural components in the south end wall of the barn. This included a portion of the concrete block elevator shaft, which will effectively bear the weight of the south end of the building. The next step is building the rest of the upper level floor and framing the addition to the south end, which will become the main entry to the Center.



Another new sign is up - This time at Frank L. and Lillian Pokorny Memorial Prairie in Colfax County. Pleased to have the job done are Laura Whitney (left), on board to help out for a few days this summer, and her dad, Director Bill.



Upland sedge (*Carex molesta*) from the Platte River bluff prairies in Hamilton County. Sedges are a family of grass-like plants. Few have easily remembered common names and many are hard to identify. Prairie Plains collects more than 20 species of sedges, about three fourths of which are

cool season wetland species. The harvest season began in June but was delayed by the weather - one of the wettest springs on record. In contrast to many years of seed collecting in the past, this year has exhibited a one- to two-week delay in the maturity date of most species, which is continuing into mid- and late summer.

After a late start to the year we collected a bumper crop of major wetland sedges which will be an important part of a wetland mix to be planted in central Nebraska and along the Missouri River.

**SOAR '08**  
SUMMER ORIENTATION ABOUT RIVERS

**Aurora Camp Flight 17**

July 7-11 & July 14-18

We SOARed higher than ever this summer with a fully loaded (and then some) crew on board. 130 campers and 24 older student peer leaders enjoyed the ride through fair weather and generous river flows. And both weeks' "SOAR into the Night" sessions were outstanding! We hope you'll enjoy these scenes from the camps, continued on the back page and insert with acknowledgments. If you want more still, go to our web site - prairieplains.org; on the home page, left side, click on scrap-book, then SOAR.



Fishing, canoeing, limnology (on boat), and Wet & Wild were some of the activities at Lake Mary.



Nadja Stamm from Germany came the longest distance; she enjoyed fishing with her grandpa, Ernie Ochsner from Aurora.



GPS treasure hunt at Bader Park.

continued on back page and insert . . .

**Big Bend Camp Flight 12**

Co-sponsored by  
Rowe Sanctuary, Gibbon, Nebraska  
rowesanctuary.org  
June 16-19 & June 23-26

The Big Bend SOAR camp, held at the Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary, also had record attendance with a total of 136 campers. Being an earlier camp in a year of plentiful rainfall, plans for new river sites with less water were made just in case. Fortunately, the rain stopped and the water came down.

Highlights from this year's camp include herpetologist Dennis Ferraro, making bug print SOAR t-shirts, working with the stream table, solving clues during "The Amazing Race" (emphasis on maze!), watching the peer leaders in the hot seat during "Are you smarter than a SOAR camper?," breakfast burritos, playing "Wet Your Noodle," and of course getting to spend time in the river connecting with nature.

Details about the camp will appear in the *Big Bend SOAR Journal*, available from coordinator Jenny Hultquist, 402-756-0677.



Jenny Hultquist

Big Bend SOAR campers excited about their catch on River Day.