

PRAIRIE PLAINS

QUARTERLY

Volume 2, Number 4: October-December, 2004



DEDICATED TO ECOSYSTEM STEWARDSHIP, EDUCATION,
AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

PRAIRIE PLAINS

RESOURCE INSTITUTE

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PPRI MISSION

**MAINTAINING AND RESTORING NEBRASKA ECOSYSTEMS:
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR EDUCATION, RESEARCH, STEWARDSHIP,
AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT.**

Prairie Plains Resource Institute (PPRI), is an educational land trust incorporated in 1980 as a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt membership organization. The mission of PPRI is being carried out through four major efforts: **Ecological Restoration, Prairie Preserves, Education** and the **Platte River Corridor Initiative**.

PPRI is governed by a twelve-member board of directors (soon to expand to fifteen): Colleen Babcock, Ernest Ochsner, David Meyer, Mike Stewart, and Charles L. Whitney, all from Aurora; Steve Rothenberger from Kearney, Cliff Dill and Lana Flagtwtet from Lincoln; Dolores Johnson from Schuyler; Mitzi Fox from Albion; Wayne Mollhoff from Ashland, and Scott Seagren from Barrington, IL. There are presently three permanent staff members: William S. Whitney, Executive Director; Jan Whitney, Assistant Director and SOAR Coordinator; and Mike Bullerman, Restoration Cooperative Project Ecologist, and one temporary stewardship technician, Steve Anderson.

Prairie Plains Quarterly (formerly the annual *Prairie Plains Journal*) is a publication of **Prairie Plains Resource Institute (PPRI)**, an educational land trust incorporated in 1980 as a nonprofit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt membership organization. Its pages highlight the activities and accomplishments of PPRI, and may also include poetry, essays, and other writings related to prairie and Great Plains natural history, ecological restoration, resource use and management, and culture.

Contribute to the mission of Prairie Plains Resource Institute by becoming a member. Members receive seasonal publications and gain opportunities to participate in unique educational, recreational, and volunteer activities in diverse Nebraska landscapes. Contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES ARE:

\$25-34	BLUESTEM	\$100-499	PRAIRIE FALCON
\$35-49	GOLDENROD	\$500-999	BISON
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PLEASE NOTE: We are compiling a member e-mail list so that we can send periodic announcements, reminders, and other news flashes. PLEASE SEND US AN EMAIL if you would like to be included. And since mail sent to large lists are often dumped into junk mail or blocked, be sure to instruct your firewall program to allow messages from janppri@hamilton.net. Thanks!

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Cale Jones exploring Platte River on December 18 Bader Bird Hike

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QUARTER FOUR, 2004

FIXIN' UP

The year's end brought about a lot of moving around and sprucing up at PPRI's world headquarters in Aurora. We thought perhaps our members would like to see just where that is. The left photo below is of what is now our main office - where Bill & Jan Whitney and Amy Jones are stationed. It is an historic building (a bank at one time) on the south end of the east side of the village square. We just happened to snap this shot as one of our members, Brent Lathrop, was walking to work - The Nature Conservancy office is less than half a block away, on the south side of the square.

The second photo shows, from left, the backside of the building, looking northwest from L Street; the smaller office which is PPRI's 1307 L Street address - now occupied by Mike Bullerman, our land steward, restoration ecologist and GIS specialist; and our neighbors, Leach Insurance Center - longtime members, SOAR sponsors and insurers.



Two carvings add to the atmosphere of PPRI's office, thanks to the contributions of two members, Curt Twedt and Joe Ford. Joe presented the piece on the left, a "tree spirit" carved in Griffith land cedar by native Kansan John Diehl. Curt donated the walnut bison piece, created by renowned carver and horticulturist Hans Burchardt.

More on the way : the office will be doubling as a local art gallery in the first quarter of '05, with photo displays by members Jerry Jacobs and Ernest Ochsner.





SHE'S STILL HERE!

Prairie Plains speaks a lot about diversity, and Amy Jones has come to realize that it's not just about the prairie. Hired in September as PPRI's Development Coordinator and Office Manager, she has also ventured into interior design (left) and football (right). Actually, the football thing was just part of Aurora's first "Scare the Square" in October - a fun promotional event where hundreds of families walked around Aurora's town square, receiving treats and information about all the businesses and organizations from strangely clad shopkeepers. Cheering Amy on through it all is the PPRI Publication & Education Director.



EMMA

Certainly one of the most exciting and joyous events of the last quarter of 2004 was the arrival of Emma Bullerman on October 13. She is the daughter of Mike & Michelle Bullerman, and sister to Nolan & Cy. Mike is PPRI's land steward, restoration ecologist and GIS specialist - but to Emma, he's just Daddy!

■ PRAIRIE RESTORATION

The final quarter of every year is the season for the final massive seed collection and storage - and the '04 harvest was abundant. The sites contributing the bulk of our seed supply were the Crane Meadows Nature Center native prairies and restorations which are owned by the Platte River Trust and PPRI's Ratzlaff, Pokorny, and Griffith Preserves. The Platte River Trust offered seed harvesting in return for prescribed burning assistance on many of their prairies.



Combining the tall bluestem of Pokorny Prairie.



Drying seeds - this fall our restorationists put together a long perforated pipe with a fan. The seeds dry overnight this way, improving on the old method of repeated turnings over a week's time.



Auger issues: Restoration science demands some skill in mechanics, and Mert Griffith has been a valued contributor and teacher. He assisted with the modification of the auger and chute, cutting and welding so seed unloads directly into the barrels.



MEMBERS CONTRIBUTE TO SEED HARVEST



Dotty and Bill Zales on their prairie land near Westfield, Iowa. In the background, the barn housing Bill's restored tractors, and the Zales's Bed & Breakfast place. (For reservations: 712-568-1006 or zales@acsnet.com).

Bill Zales with his restored John Deere bluegrass stripper, used in harvesting native seeds shared with PPRI. The stripper is pulled behind Bill's old John Deere tractor.



Just down the road...The Nature Conservancy's Broken Kettle site amidst Iowa's Loess Hills.



A fall Rainwater Basin wetland planting - Steve Anderson at Straight Water site, Seward County.



■ **PRAIRIE PRESERVES**



Joe Svoboda initiated the process by mowing the fenceline. Below, the completed fence at Pokorny Prairie.



PPRI's two 40-acre tallgrass prairie preserves, the Frank L. and Lillian Pokorny Memorial Prairie in Colfax County and the Marie Ratzlaff Prairie Preserve in Hamilton County received major improvements in late 2004. With funding assistance from the Wild Nebraska Program of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, donated time from Hamilton County surveyors, Duane Katt and Kelly Stevens, help from Pokorny Prairie neighbor Joe Svoboda, PPRI tree clearing effort from Mike Bullerman and Steve Anderson, and custom services from three local businesses both preserves now are fenced and have stock wells.

STEWARDSHIP ACTIVITY ON THE
**FRANK L. AND LILLIAN POKORNY
MEMORIAL PRAIRIE**
AND THE
MARIE RATZLAFF PRAIRIE PRESERVE



Beaver Creek Fencing's owner Mark Stamp and his son Derek.



Above, a few of the prairie seedlings on the 2003 Pokorny planting within the new fenced preserve boundary, left to right, leadplant, showy goldenrod and cup plant. Below, Duane Katt and Kelly Stevens surveying Ratzlaff Prairie.



These improvements will allow livestock grazing on both prairies, which will help control smooth brome, a primary management concern on small

eastern Nebraska native prairies. Cattle grazing will create more habitat variability due to hoof action and selective grazing habits.

MORE PHOTOS FROM MARIE RATZLAFF PRAIRIE PRESERVE



Extensive tree and plum thicket growth in the fenceline at Ratzlaff Prairie was handled by Steve Anderson with help from equipment time donated by Steve's father, Doug.



Wayne Faulkner and Mark Stamp setting posts, left; Henderson Well Drilling putting in the stock well, right.



■ PRAIRIE PRESERVES

■ EDUCATION

TWO ENCHANTED TRAIL EVENTS SUCCESSFULLY DEBUT

Long planned and anticipated, the Enchanted Trail evenings at the Olson Nature Preserve and Lincoln Creek Trail had great beginnings. Both events were blessed with good weather, which certainly contributed to the turnout: 325 ventured out to ONP on October 16, and 150 hiked the Lincoln Creek Trail on Halloween night. Unfortunately, we cannot share this story in pictures since (1) we weren't equipped for nighttime photography and (2) we were all very busy doing other things at the time!

We first became familiar with the Enchanted Trail concept for outdoor education from Eric Volden, who directed many such programs while at Crane Meadows Nature Center. We are grateful to Eric for his guidance, participation, and lending of costumes for our fledgling events.

At ONP the hike began with greetings from a friendly troll under the bridge, welcoming all to the preserve. Hikers followed a loop path along Beaver Creek, across the prairie along the oak woodland, through the cotton-

wood grove and back across the bridge to a campfire and treats. All along the way they were greeted by characters ready to share more tidbits about ONP - including a turtle, a shy and hidden bog monster, Prairie Penelope, a talking oak tree, and Bat Man.

Similarly, the Lincoln Creek event participants began their enchanted hike at the PPRI entrance to the property, following a path through the Aalborg Prairie, then north along the Lincoln Creek Trail, crossing the new bridge into The Leadership Center west prairie area, ending just across the creek, where they were bused back to the entrance for the campfire and treats. Characters encountered along the trail were Spider Woman, Owl, Coyote, Bat Woman, Talking Cottonwood, Troll (under the new bridge), Claire-in-the-Moon, and the Great Pumpkin.

The majority of characters and guides at both events were high school students; we relied on other volunteers for parking assistance, bus driving, campfire building, treats, and other tasks. Thank you, everyone, for a splendid first annual Enchanted Trail event for both locations.



NEW SHELTER FOR ONP

Yet another big October event for ONP was the completion of a 20' x 30' steel picnic shelter, located on the east side of the creek, north of the bridge. This addition to the preserve was made possible by the Prairie Hills Girl Scouts, under the direction of Joann Ward. The Scouts purchased the shelter from Sentinel Building Systems with a grant from the Grant

Olson Trust Fund.

The shelter was also made possible by volunteers. Lots of them! Mike Schutte, Estimator for Sentinel Building Systems (sentinelbuildings.com), was the chief volunteer and expert for the construction. "Mike's painstaking planning and preparation make the project one to be especially proud of. It really looks great thanks to the Girl Scouts and all of the wonderful volunteers," noted Ted Thieman.

Other Sentinel contributors to the project were Jerry Schafer, Kelly Harner, Bruce Benne, Brad Warner, and Tracy Coakes.

Many others volunteered considerable time and/or materials to the new shelter: Ted & Mona Thieman, Mitch Osborn, Mitzi Fox, Carmen Schutte, Don Noecker, Ron Christo, Randy Porter, Lanny Long, Boy and Girl Scouts and Boone Central students, Loup Power, Helena, and Boone County Concrete.

Many thanks to all who contributed to this job well done.



Shelter contributors - Prairie Hills Girl Scouts. Front, l-r: Mariah Henn, Elizabeth Ketteler, Sydney Schumacher, Miranda Ketteler, Courtney Schumacher, Breann Thorberg; Back, l-r: Kathy Thorberg, Patty Faust, Becky Thorberg, Kelsay Claar, Roxanne Coakes, Allison Claar. Photo courtesy Albion News.



Building the ONP Shelter

A beautiful autumn day - October 3, Mitch Osborn and Mitzi Fox assisted Mike Schutte in preparing the holes for the foundation of the new shelter. Top left, Mitch mans the posthole digger to get the elevation just right. Below left, Mitzi is holding the rebar assembly that Mike built to go into the holes to be filled with concrete, where the steel upright beams were attached at each corner. Above right, close-up of the rebar assembly; right, Mike Schutte; and below, the completed shelter. Photos courtesy Ted Thieman.



■ **PRAIRIE PRESERVES**

■ **EDUCATION**



NEWMAN GROVE ELEMENTARY OUTDOOR EDUCATION DAY

Newman Grove K-6 students used ONP as their outdoor classroom one sunny day last fall. Kindergartners walked the path looking for various colors in nature; first graders observed the different ecosystems to see how plants and animals - including birds, insects, and lizards - are adapted to their environments.

Second graders observed, listed, and identified insects. They had fun looking under rocks and plants to see what would scurry out.



Newman Grove second grade teacher Mrs. Barnes and her class exploring ONP. Photo courtesy Newman Grove Schools.

Third graders looked for signs of metamorphosis. They also studied different habitats for plants and animals.

Fourth grade students wrote acrostic poetry, using their observations of the different plants and animals to compose their poems.

Fifth-graders identified plants and kept a journal of the types of organisms found from each ecosystem.

Map-making was the project for sixth graders. They also graphed the number of organisms they observed and did some water testing.

Students and teachers had a great experience at ONP, and look forward to visiting again. Thanks to Keith Fuhrer, Newman Grove science teacher, for news of this outing.

ONP IS DESTINATION FOR BOONE CENTRAL ENGLISH & CHEMISTRY CLASSES

Boone Central High School teachers Cheri Blocher and Mary Christensen brought about 70 English and chemistry students to ONP in October.

Sophomore English students explored the preserve, taking photos. Afterward they worked with Photoshop for the perfect images to accompany poetry writing inspired by the ONP environment.

Chemistry students used various areas at the preserve in their study of chemical and physical changes and properties of materials. Since ONP is made of many different materials that are being changed and affected by nature, it was the ideal laboratory. Working in groups, students measured various properties of soil (density, moisture content, texture, pH, potassium, nitrate-nitrogen, phosphorus) and water (dissolved oxygen, pH, total solids, turbidity, nitrates, nitrites, phosphates). Measurements will be made again in the spring for comparison.

There follows one of the photos and poems resulting from the Boone Central English & Chemistry day at ONP.

The Sad Sapling

Now he waits like a hunter waiting for a big buck,
waiting for Winter to come.

As his father slowly approaches, the lingering leaves on his long arms turn to beautiful red and orange colors before dying because they are scared of Winter.

He is alone now that his leaves have left. He hears cries from the grass as his cruel and cold father tightens his grip on them. His long toes are frozen solid into the ground. The tree next to him explodes with a BANG from the frigid temperature.

The sapling's friend, Water, cannot save him from his cold father, as Winter has already started to freeze the river.

Now that Summer is gone and the sapling's friends can no longer save him, he must face his angry father. Winter plans to freeze his son like a new Kenmore freezer, but is unaware that the sapling plans to fight Winter's abuse with his big, bare, brown arms, unlike his frozen friends.

-Craig Majerus



■ PRAIRIE PRESERVES

■ EDUCATION



Enjoying the View

October 9 was one of the volunteer days for working on the shelter at ONP. The sun was shining, the land beyond the bridge beckoned, and we couldn't resist. Mitch Osborn just happened to be out with three of his students for one last day of turtle



Sights to behold - the colors and textures of the grasses, especially the wine-colored Little Bluestem with its fluffy seedheads, accented here and there with big spikes of yucca seed pods.



Amy Jones and son Cale setting out to explore the preserve.



Boone Central science teacher Mitch Osborn instructs freshman student Dustin McBride in the use of turtle tracking equipment.



... and warmer - but alas, the turtle had already burrowed underground for the winter.



Students Craig Bygland (left) and Calvin Frey, getting warm . . .

tracking. We tagged along. It was wonderful, fascinating! Once again, it is apparent how valuable a preserve such as ONP is for educating all ages in all disciplines! For example The box turtle project involves computer and radio technologies, mapping, population biology, animal behavior and physiology. It is our aim to continue to develop the educational potential of all PPRI preserves using the ONP model.

SPOTLIGHT: PEARL HARBOR SURVIVORS PRESERVE

The story of the Pearl Harbor Survivors Preserve - also known as the Juhl Prairie - is the story of a fortuitous crossing of paths. It began with an Audubon gathering or two in the early 80's in Kearney. Attending those meetings were two chief players in the story: Hal Nagel, professor of biology at what was then Kearney State College - and founding member of PPRI; and Howard Juhl, from Los Angeles - visiting the family homestead north of Riverdale. The two men met and began to discuss the Juhl property. It was Howard's wish to give it to an organization that would preserve it and use it for educational purposes. Hal had just such a group in mind.

At about the same time, Auroran Gar Eckerson happened to mention PPRI to Howard at a Pearl Harbor Survivors event. Gar and Howard were Navy men, as was Charles Whitney, PPRI board member and father of founding director Bill Whitney.

All these connections resulted in the donation of the 320-acre Juhl property to PPRI. Howard dedicated it to his fellow Pearl Harbor Survivors. The land, located in Buffalo County in the central Nebraska loess hills, is comprised of native virgin prairie, restored prairie, and cropland. The preserve is used as a laboratory for the (now) University of Nebraska-Kearney, and as a destination for the Big Bend SOAR program.

Howard has a passion for the wide, open Nebraska prairie landscape. He was a sailer, and a plumber, but at heart he is an artist, and that is how he perceives his surroundings. It is the art and the beauty of the land that inspired him to have it preserved for future generations to enjoy.

It goes beyond mere appreciation;



The original sign crafted by Howard Juhl. 2002 seed collectors are, I-r, Jon Soper, Mike Bullerman, Tristan Friesen, and Krista Adams.



Above, Howard Juhl's Wheel Sculpture on the prairie.

Howard also creates. We know there have been at least a few paintings. And we are very aware that he dabbles in a unique form of sculpture. You know you have found the Pearl Harbor Survivors Preserve when you spot a fence that has been embellished with various recycled artifacts. Howard was there.



Fence enhancement a la Juhl.

Photo by Laura Whitney



Land donor Howard Juhl (center), 1996. Behind Howard, l-r, are Bill Whitney, Jan Whitney, Erin Whitney, and Howard's granddaughters, Jana and Carla Higbee.

One notable feature of the PHS Preserve is Howard's small herd of bison. They certainly add an historic flair to the scenery as they roam about, happily munching the big bluestem.



The first glimpse of this bison makes one anticipate an encounter with the herd. . . but no! . . . it turns out to be *Bison rusticus*, another Howard creation (below). It now resembles the fur-shedding stage of the animal.



A favorite bison scratching post.



Pearl Harbors Survivors Preserve, 1996. A small bison herd still resides on the preserve.

EDIT & ADD....include future...signage, educational program development

The Juhl land has served well as a representative historical relic, but it's use goes well beyond that. It has been the site of many restoration, stewardship, research and educational activities through the years.

Hal Nagel has a number of recollections from some of the stewardship and research....especially noteworthy is the soil profiling comparing core samples from a 1953 reseeded brome area with native prairie. There was little to no topsoil in the brome area, but several inches in the native prairie.

Hal also recalls the time he took his daughter, Anne - who was about ten years old at the time - out to watch his Ecology class burn the prairie. During the burn a particularly impressive smoke tornado was generated (probably similar to the one on the cover of PPQ Vol. 2 No. 1). Anne, terrified, raced to the car to escape what she thought was a real tornado.

MENTION SANDHILLS TOUR & PRAIRIE CONFERENCE TOUR ALSO THAT PHS MENTIONED IN LOESS HILLS BOOK, AND REVISIT YOUR ARTICLE IN THERE FOR IDEAS OF WHAT TO WRITE.



The PHS Preserve was a fitting location for Jim & Marilyn Gaster's history presentations at SOAR '98.





Several of the authors of *The Loess Hills Prairies of Central Nebraska* are shown standing in big bluestem of Pearl Harbor Survivors Prairie, 1998: (l-r) Marc Albrecht, Hal Nagel (PPRI founder who introduced Howard Juhl to PPRI, resulting in two major property donations), Stan Longfellow, Marvin Williams, Steve Rothenberger (PPRI board member), and Linda Spressard-Schueth. Photo by Glennis Nagel.



Christmas Bird Hike at Bader Park



GIFTS AND PROGRAM SUPPORTS

Prairie Plains Resource Institute (PPRI) is a nonprofit, tax-exempt Nebraska conservation land trust corporation. Your Support is necessary in carrying out PPRI's operations and mission goals. The Institute can assist in planning your contributions for your benefit. Contributions may have potential income, capital gain, estate, and gift tax advantages, and can even be structured to provide income for yourself and others. Donors may also direct the use of their gifts to specific PPRI projects.

GIFTS OF SUPPORT CAN BE MADE IN MANY WAYS INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

OUTRIGHT GIFTS Cash, real property, personal property, or securities. Gifts may be accepted in any amount at any time. Gifts of appreciated property may also be advantageous to the donor.

TESTAMENTARY GIFTS Created by bequests contained in your last will or codicil. Bequests may be absolute or conditional or may provide some financial security for a surviving beneficiary.

INTERVIVOS TRUSTS AS GIFTS

LIFE ESTATE RESERVATION

LIFE INSURANCE GIFTS Many forms are available to benefit a donor.

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THANK YOU

to
Paul Currier Estate - \$5000;
Norm & Donna Smith -
equipment donation
(chipper and tiller);
Glen Pollock -
equipment donation (shredder);
Doug & Pat Anderson -
use of tractor and skid steer;
Bill & Dotty Zales -
seed donation

PPRI Wish List Update

laptop computer for field use (at least a
Pentium 3/ Windows 98, 3.5" floppy
drive, CD drive, serial port)
heavy duty riding mower
picnic tables
chainsaw sharpener
steel and wooden posts
4-wheeler ATV (large preferred)
Skidsteer (i.e., Bobcat)
Good farmyard tractor with loader,
grapple and 3-point hitch with PTO

The PPRI "Network of Campuses"

Sioux County Ranch

Guadalcanal Memorial Prairie

5944-acre needle and thread/blackroot sedge northern high plains grassland with meadows, buttes and the Niobrara River headwaters.

Olson Nature Preserve

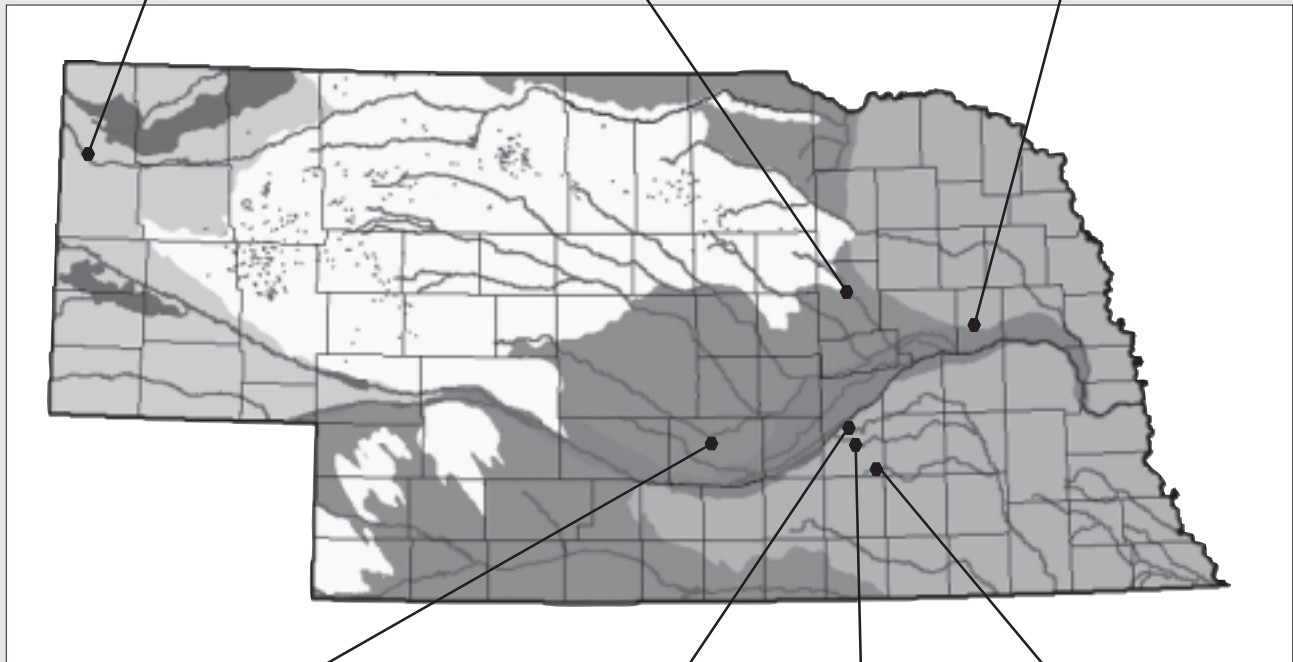
Boone County

112 acres of sandhills, tallgrass prairie, wetlands, and oak forest along Beaver Creek.

Frank L. and Lillian Pokorny Memorial Prairie

Colfax County

20 acres of virgin tallgrass prairie and a 20-acre restoration planted in 2003.



Pearl Harbor Survivors Preserve

Buffalo County

150 acres of Central Nebraska Loess Hills mixed grass prairie, including a 1983 prairie restoration, and farmland.

Griffith Prairie and Farm

Hamilton County

390 acres of scenic Platte River Bluffs prairie, farmland, and farmstead. Site of future PPRI center.

Marie Ratzlaff Prairie Preserve

Hamilton County

30 acres of virgin tallgrass prairie and a 10 acre restoration planted in 2001.

Lincoln Creek Prairie and Trail

Hamilton County

16 acres of tallgrass prairie and prairie restorations planted in the 1980s; including the Lincoln Creek hiking trail.

PPRI's Four Major Project Efforts:



Prairie Restoration

PPRI has been a pioneer of high-diversity prairie and wetland restoration since 1980. Restorations harbor both an abundance and diversity of plant and animal life, and are also a sustainable agricultural resource.



Prairie Preserves

PPRI presently owns seven prairie preserves, totaling more than 5800 acres, a solid foundation on which to build an ever-expanding "network of campuses." See the inside back cover for more details.



Education/SOAR.

All PPRI properties and many of its restoration projects are educational sites suitable for lifelong learning.

SOAR - The program which best exemplifies PPRI's educational efforts is SOAR (Summer Orientation About Rivers), an annual nature day camp for elementary school children.

PPRI sites offer educational and work opportunities in many aspects of natural and cultural resources.



Platte River Corridor Initiative

The goal of the Platte River Corridor Initiative is to establish a conservation process founded on public participation and local initiative. Its aims include:

- ◆ Establishing local citizen working groups to deal with their unique resource issues.
- ◆ Planning for long term resource sustainability.
- ◆ Educating citizens about the Platte's ecosystem.
- ◆ Restoring and protecting the Platte Valley's native prairies.

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\$50-99 Bobolink

\$100-499 Prairie Falcon
\$500-999 Bison
\$1000+ Golden Eagle

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