



# Prairie Smoke

NACHUSA GRASSLAND NEWSLETTER

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## PRAIRIE'S PROGRESS

BY CHRIS BRONNY

This fall, over 60 burlap bags of little bluestem, showy goldenrod, grey goldenrod, pale purple coneflower, rough blazingstar and round-headed bush clover mix were harvested off the preserve by Dennis Lubbs and Rich Welch. Large amounts of Indian grass and big bluestem were harvested earlier in the season. With this volume of good viable seed, we should be able to do quite a large planting next spring (1990). In fact, most prairie species produced an exceptional seed crop throughout the region this fall. The knobs at the preserve were matted with wave upon wave of little bluestem and were quite beautiful. Even the healthy recovery of Indian grass in the swales between the knobs was a pleasant surprise. In the two short years I have been helping out with the restoration of the grasslands at Nachusa, I can already see the dramatic difference from one year to the next - especially where fire has been employed as a critical tool for restoration. After 150 years of ecological degradation and disruption, the prairie is reclaiming its former domain.

I was finally able to scatter some bottle gentian seed that Isabel and Hazel collected and donated. This seed went out

into the two prairie potholes in the center portion on the preserve, and in other wet meadow areas where hopefully in the next 3-4 years, we should see its return to Nachusa.

Full scale seeding of the savanna areas in the NW corner of the preserve also took place this fall. We already have a good assemblage of savanna grasses such as bottlebrush grass and the wild ryes. Now we've saturated the savannas with forb seed including cup-plant and rosinweed, showy and elm-leaved goldenrod, pale Indian plantain, Culver's-root, purple Joe-Pye weed, horse gentian, wingstem, Short's aster, wild quinine, yellow coneflower, and tall coreopsis.

Most seed collecting days were accompanied by excellent turnouts overall. Seed collecting on October 28 and 29 had over 16 people each day! The crews on both days helped to harvest pale purple coneflower, rough blazingstar, side-oats grama, mountain mint, horse gentian, and showy goldenrod. This is no small way reflects the growing interest and commitment on the part of all volunteers in the region who support and participate in the ecological healing of this one small but important part of our badly damaged planet. A big THANK YOU to all!

CON'T. PG. 2

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## PRAIRIE'S PROGRESS

Seeds of Sullivant's milkweed, Culver's-root and prairie dock were scattered in the large swale near the solitary bur oak in the main complex of knobs of the preserve. Northern dropseed, wild quinine, rosinweed and compass-plant was gathered off Schafer Knob in the southern portion of the preserve.

Mel Hoff's West Chicago group did an outstanding job of sickle-barring and stump-treating a one-half acre portion of brush near the west-central entrance to the wetlands. Into this cleared area was scattered big blue, Indian grass, white false indigo, Culver's-root, yellow coneflower, wild quinine and rosinweed.

Ed Pleskovitch, our "brush control" manager, has been doing an excellent job of slowly but surely wacking away at the fence rows of the preserve. When you see the now beautiful sweep of open prairie grading down into the cleared bottomland area that once ran into a mess of fencing and brush, thank Ed and the "crew" (including our very own Jennifer Delisle!) who worked this area with a fury over the past summer and fall.

Ed has removed a significant amount of old woven-wire fence. If someone has the resources to recycle this, or could utilize it in some way and haul it out, please contact Ed at 815/626-8092. The same holds true for the trash on top of "Trash Knob" (hopefully, we can change the name of this knob fairly soon)!

Finally, if you get a chance, see the November issue of The Atlantic, it has a cover story on Wes Jackson and the Land Institute's efforts to utilize the prairie as an alternative to our present forms of agriculture that currently diminish our natural resources. Pretty powerful concept! I understand the recent Audubon also carried an article on Wes Jackson (The Land Institute is the place where Jennifer Delisle worked as an intern before coming out to Nachusa).



### ORNATE BOX TURTLE AND FAMEFLOWER

The box turtle can close up his shell more completely than any other species. Basically land-dwelling they do cool themselves in woodland pools and puddles. Fameflower grows in sandy rocky places. They store water in their thick, succulent leaves.  
artwork..Jennifer Vogelgesang



Jack Keegan, a local bird lover, checking one of the bluebird nest boxes on the well established trail at Nachusa Grasslands the past season. The boxes are there due largely to Jack's efforts. Many young birds have been fledged. Wrens took up residence in some of the homes. It is very difficult to evict those lovely songsters! When you visit the Grasslands this spring watch for those bright blue visitors as they return for another season!

## PLANT MONITORING

BY MARY ADAMS

This past summer, my husband Gene and I learned how to do plant monitoring. I missed the monitoring sessions earlier in the spring, so Gary Horn came to Nachusa Grasslands and showed the methods to use. We counted all the plants in a one meter, by one meter area. Next we counted all the plants with flowering stems. All the information was recorded.

Twenty-six samples were done at the Kittentail site. Permanent stakes were put in place so monitoring can be done yearly. I also did a count of Fameflower at two different locations. When dealing with a large number of plants it is best to have two people on your team. One to do the counting and one for recording.

Perhaps in a few years we will know if the Kittentails (*Besseyia bullii*) and Fameflower (*Talinium rugospermum*) populations are stable, increasing or decreasing.

# REMEMBERING THE GRASSLANDS

Reminiscences of John Spangler on September 12, 1989 while standing at the entrance gate of Nachusa Grasslands --- "I used to check cattle pastured on this land back in the 20's; then I worked for a cattle company up in Dixon one time when they rented this farm and had a bunch of Western cattle out there along about 1928 or '29.

The cattle got their water from the creek. I had a Western horse and I'd ride up there and look over the cattle about once a week. That horse was used to quicksand; you couldn't get him in it. He'd just go so far and then he wouldn't go any further. Some horses didn't have that sense and they'd wade in it. We lost a lot of cattle and horses in that quicksand hole. They didn't tile it out till - I think it was in the '50's, they started to farm it then. Before that it was just bogs and springs.

The part with the rock outcrops used to be covered with flowers in the spring. It was pretty up there - had prairie grass on it. You could see more rocks years ago than you can now. In the fall it'd get awful dry and grass didn't grow so good on those rocks. Of course, vegetation covers a lot of it now. I don't remember any trees at all.

This is the old Dutcher farm; it was 300 acres. Most of it was our grazing land. There was a little field out here west from the Nachusa gate. Homer, he was my mother's cousin, bought the farm - in the 50's, I think - 300 acres for \$10,000 and paid \$4,000 to have it tilled out to make more crop land.

The next farm north was the Spratt farm; Robert Spratt had it. Wee Robert we always called him, he was a little man. I remember my Dad telling that Wee Robert was plowing with Morgan horses and a walking plow - they hit a rock and the plow flew up and hit him. The plow handle hit him in the intestines and ruptured him and he died. Then she and the boys had the farm for a while. We always thought that land wasn't worth plowing. What isn't swamp and rock is sand. It's an ideal place for what they're using it for now, I guess. I always figured it wasn't worth nothing else.

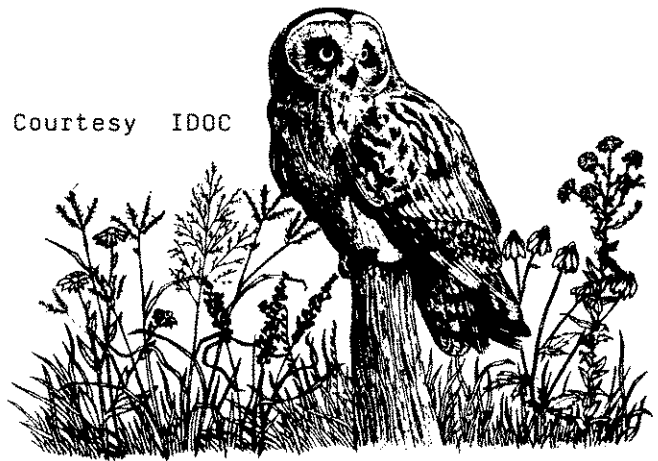
We had foxes up here in those days, rabbits and pheasants and quail. I never heard of any wolves up here, but we have foxes, coon, ground hogs and coyotes. Coyotes got some of my chickens and a goose this summer.

I remember as a boy we had prairie chickens in here. You don't see them any more. We used to have ducks down in that swamp. Geese, I remember, years ago. It was year around swamp. Another thing! Turkeys are coming in back there - wild turkeys. We never saw them before but they tell me that the last couple of winters they've seen wild turkeys back in those hills and timber. We didn't have deer until about the '40s or '50s.

I remember years ago when we were little, Dad had a carriage and two horses, and some Sunday in the spring we'd go up to Oregon, up this road here. My mother always wanted some flowers from this hill here. There were all kinds of flowers - purple, light blue, yellow, white. They were sand flowers and the land wasn't molested. Mother used to go on this hill here and walk down toward the rocky outcrops and get all kinds of flowers."

..... THANKS TO MARILYN RASMUSEN!

Courtesy IDOC



## SPRING BURN SCHEDULE

Tim Keller and Mike Crowe are making plans now for the spring burn! Mike is the contact person. "I would like to hear from volunteers now so I can get our calling list ready for spring", Mike stated. You can reach him at 815/393-4572.

Tentative dates are March 24 and 31 and April 7 and 14. Of course, burning depends on weather conditions. With the exception of two knobs the whole preserve will be burned. When weather permits this winter, back fires will be used to ring the two knobs.

Mike suggests, "We can use flappers and water pumps if you have them". Meet at the Nachusa Grasslands sign on Lowden Road.

Get in touch with Mike now so the burn schedule is ready to go for this exciting spring event!

## NACHUSA GRASSLANDS AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE

Our first guide is off the presses and available at the Grasslands. You can find a copy in the "Bird House" as you enter the area at the sign gate. This attractive and informational guide was edited and designed by Jennifer Vogelgesang. Helping Jennifer out was some of our other faithful volunteers; on art work, Chris Bronny, Mary Phelan, Marlene Hill Werner, and Jennifer. Kerry Perlmutter did the pasteup.

The guide is a first in a series of guides being prepared. This first one covers topics such as: The Land, The Importance, The Purpose, Preserving Nachusa Grasslands, Caring For Nachusa Grasslands, Visiting Nachusa Grasslands, Why Trails Are Absent At Nachusa, and The Illinois Nature Conservancy.

"The guide is designed to direct visitors around a portion of the preserve by means of natural landmarks" is the stated objective of the guide. The first guide covers only a third of the preserve. Also included is a illustrated map to help you enjoy Nachusa Grasslands to its utmost.

We hope you enjoy this newest addition to Nachusa Grasslands!

### EVENT OF INTEREST

February 16-18, 1990. Winter Weekend: A Winter Wilderness Carnival, at Lorado Taft Field Campus (NIU), Oregon, IL. A 2 1/2 day workshop offering academic and recreational activities such as winter river ecology, storytelling, and tracking. The workshop is perfect for outdoor enthusiasts, teachers, and students (NIU credit available). Contact Bora Simmons, 815/732-2111, Lorado Taft Field Campus, Oregon, IL 61061.

### Reader's Corner

This is your corner, where are your comments? We don't want to dispense with this corner! But we must if we don't get some information from you.

### LATE NEWS!

New land has been added to Nachusa Grasslands. An 80 acre tract with wetlands and Franklin Creek has been purchased. Details next issue!

At the last minute we had the opportunity to include the new Nachusa Grasslands Guide with this issue of PRAIRIE SMOKE. Hope you enjoy it!

### GUEST BOOK!

We now have a guest book of sorts at the Grasslands, all be it rather crude! You will find a spiral notebook in the "Bird House" at the entrance gate. We urge you to sign your name, address, and date when you visit. Won't it be interesting to see where our visitors come from? Please jot down comments, suggestions, or criticisms.

Just a short list of hometowns listed: Beloit, WI, Cary, Naperville, Chicago, Evanston, Downers Grove, Dixon, Rochelle, Berwyn, Earlville, Chillicothe, St. Charles, Stillman Valley, Franklin Grove, Moline, Malta, and Rockford. One visitor suggested more boundary line signs or an actual map of the land. They added, "Buy more!"