



PRAIRIE SMOKE

Nachusa Grasslands Newsletter Issue 12 February, 1992

Stone Soup Holiday Gathering

by Carol L. Merbach

The first annual Nachusa Grasslands holiday party was a rousing success. Held December 7th at the "little yellow house on the prairie", the party featured a pot of "stone soup". (If you don't know what that is, you'll have to ask Sally.) There was an awful lot of other food also, so if you went away hungry, it was your own fault.

An informal award ceremony was also conducted. Although the hours of work by each and every volunteer is greatly appreciated, several "spur of the moment" awards were worked out the night before the party. Those recognized included Ed Pleskovitch as Volunteer of the Year;

Bob Parenteau for his mapping and historical research; Dot Wade for her prairie plant proficiency; John Yunger for his work with small mammals; and Sally Baumgardner received an "Outstanding in Your Field" award for her hours of dedication to the Nachusa Grasslands.

This first holiday party was full of fun and companionship for all who attended, so if you don't want to miss the next one, make a note on your calendar for December 5, 1992 when the Second Annual Stone Soup Holiday Gathering will be held.



Sally Baumgardner, Bob Parenteau, Max Baumgardner, Ed PleskovitchPhoto - Gene St. Louis



brings you **Prairie Smoke**, the Nachusa Grasslands Newsletter.
Illinois Field Office, 79 West Monroe,
Chicago, IL 60603 -- Phone 312/346-8166

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Removal of Common Prairie Weeds

Before Amy Prosser left as intern at Nachusa Grasslands she gave your editor some interesting information to pass on to our volunteers. One of Amy's jobs was weed eradication. She wants us to keep on building on what she accomplished. With that in mind, here is the material she prepared for us.

SWEET CLOVER

- this plant is very aggressive and requires diligent attention. The removal of the plant is as follows: in its first year or vegetative state, the plant should be pulled out by the roots, preferably, or cut near the base of the stem. If the plant has begun to flower or set seed, it should be pulled or cut and removed from the area.

GARLIC MUSTARD

- another aggressive plant that can rapidly replace native prairie plants. It is usually found in wooded areas or abandoned fields. Use the following method to remove the plant. In its vegetative state, pull the plant out by the roots or cut at or within a few inches from the base. If the plant has begun to flower or set seed, pull or cut and remove from the area.

SMOOTH SUMAC

- it has grown rapidly and removal is necessary in some areas. The stem should be cut in July or shortly after flowering, when the majority of the plant's energy is above ground. If seeds have begun to form, it is best to remove the cluster before cutting and moving the plant to reduce potential seed dispersal. New sprouts, if found, should be cut in August. It is most often found on degraded savanna areas and at Schaffer's Knob.

MUTLI-FLORA ROSE

- is an extremely aggressive plant that expands rapidly. Pulling is only effective when all roots are removed or when plants that develop from subsequent roots are destroyed. Three - five cuttings or mowings every growing season for more than one year can achieve high plant mortality.

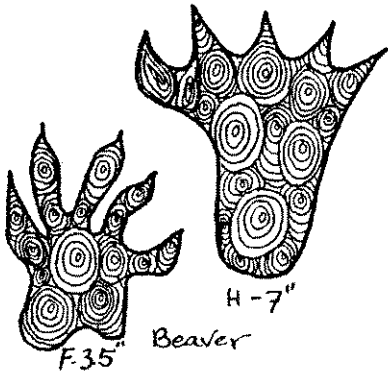
BRUSH & TREE REMOVAL

- Brush control involves the removal of all woody vegetation found growing in the open areas and overcrowding in the savanna areas. Growth must be cut so very little if any stump remains. Remaining stumps encourage perching birds and possibly the dispersal of weedy plants into the area.

Nachusa Impressions

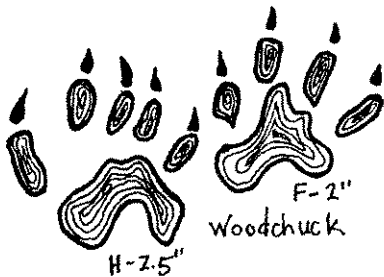
Can you identify animal tracks? Now is a good time to learn. Visit Nachusa Grasslands and search out and identify all the animal tracks you can find. Winter is the ideal time after a snow fall. Again Amy has helped us out. Here are her sketches of animal tracks. Let us know what you find, maybe you will make some new discoveries.

BEAVER



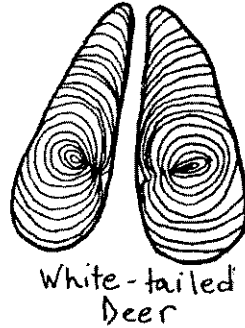
Identifying a species from a single print can be tricky.

WOODCHUCK



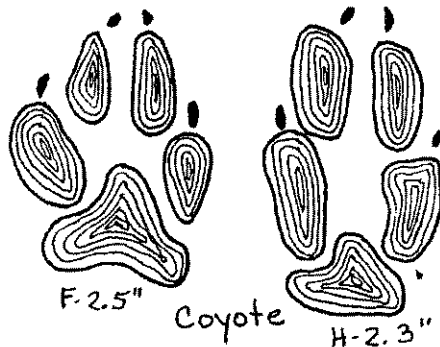
Prints do, however, tend to come in patterns. To help in reading track patterns, note the size of the footprint and count the number of toes and look for claw marks.

WHITE-TAILED DEER



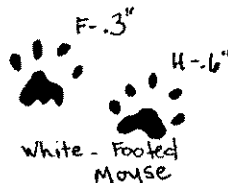
Note the distance between the tracks and the width of the pattern. Make a sketch and check in a field guide.

COYOTE



While looking for tracks also be on the lookout for other animal clues.

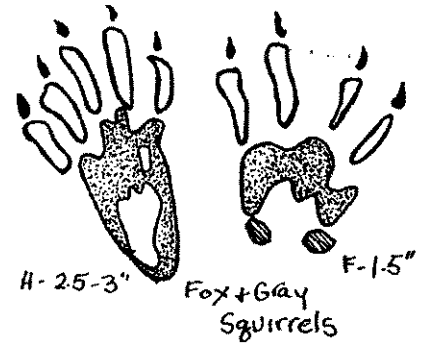
WHITE-FOOTED MOUSE



How about feathers, bits of fur, pellets, leavings from meals, and droppings? Use all your senses

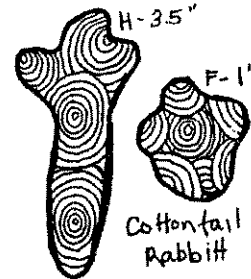
when you visit Nachusa Grasslands. Listen for sounds and calls.

FOX & GRAY SQUIRRELS

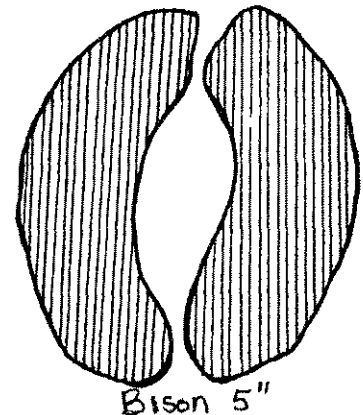


Hear the crunch of the snow or grasses, feel the wind, the rocks, and plants. Test for new smells. Some animals have very "de-stink-tive" odors. Some seedheads have delicious smells. You might even taste some new fallen snow. Enjoy and treasure!

COTTONTAIL RABBIT



Future Impressions ?



Illustrated by Amy Prosser



Diana Rod

Why Preserve the Grasslands -- by Carol L. Merbach

Why? Why are we working so hard to restore a preserve a prairie grassland?

When my husband, Karl, and I attended the open house at Nachusa Grasslands last July, I knew right away I wanted to be a part of the project. I wanted to smell the summer breezes blowing across a sea of grass. I wanted to listen to the music of the birds, to feel a part of the earth, to be one with nature and God. But even from the beginning, I wondered...why?

Why "save" a parcel of land that had long been used by farmers to grow corn and soybeans, and for cattle grazing. Wasn't the northern Illinois I grew up in mostly farmed or "used" by man in some way. Didn't this use of the land provide food for our tables and jobs for the economy? And when civilization needed to expand further from the big cities, wasn't it former farmland that provided the space to build homes for an ever growing population? In many respects, I believe in this civilized version of the "natural order" of the land. So why do I now want to work to restore and preserve a piece of land that has been greatly degraded by man?

The answer lies in a belief in the value of all things that are old. Antiques are highly prized because they represent a link with the past...grandmother's bread making bowl, great-grandfather's gold watch. We bought a hundred year old home, not so much to "own" it, but to feel a part of the history of the home...other people had spent significant parts of their lives here, another

woman appreciated the play of sunlight in the dining room much as I do. So when we make an improvement to the home, we consider what was there originally and hope to preserve much of it for future residents to enjoy. We hope and pray the home will be here for another hundred years.

At Nachusa, the hope is the same. The land had been lived on and worked for more than a hundred years. It was old and worn out, but there were still vestiges of what was originally there...the Prairie Bush Clover, the Kittentails, the Upland Sandpiper. Through the efforts of a dedicated group of volunteers, these remnants have been preserved and other plants and animals are being restored to a once broken down piece of land.

So why do we want to save the grassland? For the same reason much of society works to preserve old churches, theatres, train stations, and homes. To maintain a link with the past. To preserve for our grandchildren something that we feel is a valuable part of our history. Two hundred years ago, Illinois was a sea of prairie. Today only a small fraction of that sea is left. If we want future generations to have the opportunity to smell a summer breeze in an ocean of bluestem, we have to preserve it now.

As someone once said to Sally Baumgardner, "I didn't know that land could become extinct". I didn't before, but I do now and I want to work to preserve this piece of land before it's too late.

News from Sally

-- by Sally Baumgardner

Trunk Needed

We need a Trunk for our Tree! Call 52 people in 20 minutes! If YOU are the Trunk in our Telephone Tree, you can do it! Here's how:

Be ready on the day of the prairie fire (this also applies to the seeds planting day), and take one phone call*. Relay that message to four people (branches). The four branches will each call 4 branch-lets, who will call two twigs each.

In this way, 52 people (not counting you and the fire decision-maker) will be notified, all in 20 minutes or less!

This gives all of you time to re-adjust your day and travel to Nachusa Grasslands for a MAJOR prairie restoration event!

* You and I will discuss this well in advance. A complete Telephone Tree with phone numbers will be mailed to all involved parties.

NOTE: All members of the phone tree are expected to be SO excited for this opportunity to participate that they won't want to stay on the phone over 30 seconds!

The first one to call Sally at 708/655-4295 and say "I'll be The Trunk!" gets the job and gets a head start on everybody else!

Help Wanted

Nachusa Grasslands is returning to health. Every year new discoveries are made, and every year the scenery becomes more spectacular. Many of your neighbors have volunteered to help restore this fine natural area to its pre-settlement condition. You can join these people who:

* are doing something useful for the environment rather

than complaining about "all that destruction".

* enjoy being active (outdoors AND indoors, mentally AND/OR physically).

* feel needed. Yes, your neighbors are making a difference!

* didn't know anything at all about prairie or savanna or wetland before they got involved, and now they are excited about their contribution.

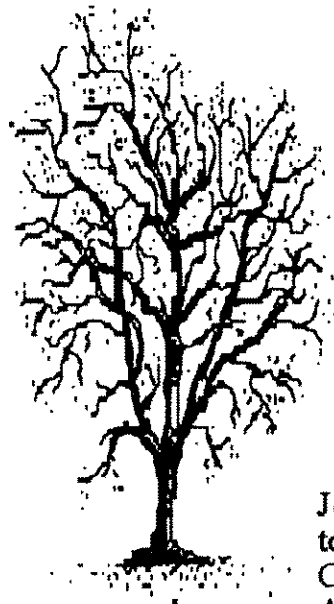
* wanted to learn as they acted. They have learned (with supervision) which seeds to pick, what woody plants to cut out, and which weeds to pull out.

* found volunteering to be fun.

And you will have fun! You'll be greeted at the sign on Lowden Road, you'll be introduced to each other, you'll be given an explanation of what we're doing and why. You won't be expected to be a Prairie Ace on Day One -- we're all still learning! You'll even be given a short walk to see what's in bloom.

And we lunch together. This munching and visiting becomes highly educational for all of us. Come, join with us to "make a difference" and find new friends.

Work days, times and tours are listed on The Calendar (see insert) or call Sally Baumgardner 708/655-4295, 409 Falcon Ct., Darien, IL 60559



(editor's note: Sally sent along a book report to include in this issue of Prairie Smoke. She obviously found it very interesting.)

PRAIRYERTH

by William Least Heat-Moon

Let the author of "Blue Highways: A Journey Into America", now transport you to the Flint Hills of Kansas, specifically Chase County. Here you'll enter an American deam-state, and travel down into the old inland ocean that covered the mid-west hundreds of millions of years ago. Then your travel agent will move you up to the present; and, at another time, back to early European settlement.

News from Sally (cont.)

This motion flows easily, sensibly, dreamily. To keep you focused, each chapter begins with a flat, modern day map depicting man-made roads and naturally-occurring waterways. Each chapter also begins with rich bouquets of marvelously appropriate quotes from writings spanning human time from Isaiah, 8th century B.C. and a Sanskrit apothegm, 4th century B. C., all the way up to the mid-1900's with Aldo Leopold's Sand

County Almanac and several of John Madson's works. Local newspapers are also quoted, from ads to articles to obituaries.

Do give yourself a gift and pick up "PrairyErth". Read a little at a time; it is much like learning the plants of the prairie one at a time. Allow yourself to read some, digest some, and get hungry for more.



Warbler Watch

-- by Carol Jackley

I recently received my first seed catalogs and even though it is still winter I am thinking spring -- and with spring comes warblers. Some will come early as mid-April. This article is to help you learn about the 9 species that nest in our area; places they nest, materials used, shapes and sizes of nests, and egg description. Maybe you will be one of the fortunate few who discovers one of these small nests!

#1. PROTHONATARY WARBLER. They spend most of their time fairly close to the ground in their preferred habitat - wooded swamps and bottomlands. As the only cavity nesting warbler in the eastern U. S., they prefer a natural cavity or an old woodpecker hole, near or over running water. Occasionally they nest over dry land. During the nesting season I have seen them many times, while fishing on the Mississippi River, close to an island. They would both disappear into a stump so I assumed that was the nesting site. The nest is usually 5 - 10 ft. above ground or water. The female does all the building with mosses, leaves, twigs, and rootlets. She finishes with fine grasses, leaf stems, and feathers. Four to six, glossy, creamy with brown spots, eggs are laid. The female incubates them from 12 - 14 days and has 1 - 2 broods.

#2. BLUE WINGED WARBLER. Even though this bird is seen singing at the very top of a tree, they generally nest on the ground or close to it. Habitat for nesting ranges from swamps, stream edges, overgrown pastures, woodland edges, to bottomlands. The nest is built mostly by the female, among and attached to upright stems of weeds, or grass clumps; often very narrow and deep, supported on a sturdy foundation of dead leaves. It is made of

course grasses, dead leaves, and bark shreds (often grapevine). Lined with fine bark shreds, grass stems, and horsehair, it contains 4 - 5 oval eggs. The eggs are smooth and glossy, white and finely dotted with brown. The female incubates them for 10 - 11 days and has one brood.

#3. BLACK AND WHITE WARBLER. It only seems fitting that this bird that spends most of its time foraging up and down a tree, would also nest near the base of one. The nest is on the ground, typically at the base of a tree, stump, rock, or under a log or a fallen tree branch. It is well concealed from above by leaves. It is built by the female with the male sometimes accompanying her. Made from dry skeletonized leaves and lined with grasses, weed fibers, inner grapevine strips, rootlets, and hair. The eggs are oval, smooth and glossy, white, and finely dotted with brown. Four to five eggs are laid and incubated by the female for 11 - 12 days. They have one brood.

#4. CERULEAN WARBLER. Habitat for nesting is in the upper stories of the tallest trees in a deciduous forest with little undergrowth. The nest is very tiny, shallow, and unwarbler-like. They nest in the Mississippi Palisades Park and often are very concentrated there. The nest is built on a horizontal branch 20 - 60 ft. above ground. The dainty, compactly built nest is made from fine grasses, plant fibers, bark strips, weed stems, mosses, and lichens which are neatly interwoven; then lined with fine fibers, mosses or hair and then bound on the outside with spider silk. Three to five eggs that are oval, smooth and glossy, white and spotted with brown are laid. They are incubated by the female for 12 - 13 days and they have only one brood.



#5. YELLOW WARBLER. This bird is often found in large colonies and the habitat for nesting is along waterways, edges of swamps, marshes, bottomlands, small trees, or briars from 2 - 12 ft. above ground. The nest is a strong compact cup, firmly interwoven from milkweed fibers, hemp, grasses, and plant down. It is lined with felted plant down, hair, and fine grasses. Three to six eggs that are oval, smooth and glossy, different shades of white and splashed with brown are laid. They are incubated by the female for 11 - 12 days and they produce one brood per year. A common victim of the cowbird, it has devised an ingenious way of combating this parasite. It builds a 2nd story on top of the cowbird eggs, burying them, then lays it's own eggs on the superstructure. Books state as many as 6 stories have been added with cowbird eggs buried in each layer.

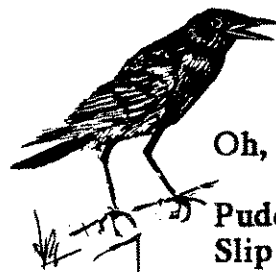
#6. KENTUCKY WARBLER. This superb singer, always seems to be in low branches, is also found nesting in Mississippi Palisades Park. Nesting habitat is deciduous woodland thickets; moist and shady ravines. The nest is found on or near the ground, sometimes in the base of a shrub, concealed by surrounding vegetation. It is cuplike, built on a foundation of dead leaves, and is made from grasses, plant fibers, and rootlets; then lined with weed stalks and grasses. Four to five oval eggs that are smooth and glossy, white and dotted with grays and browns are laid. Incubated by the female for 12 - 13 days,

they too, are common victims of the cowbird. One brood per year is the norm.

#7. COMMON YELLOWTHROAT. These energetic warblers that hop around like wrens, are found nesting in wet or dry areas with dense cover. The nest is securely lodged in surrounding vegetation on or near the ground in weed stalks, grass tussocks, or low bushes. It is a bulky nest made from grasses, reed shreds, leaves, mosses; then lined with fine grasses, bark fibers, and hair. Three to five eggs that are oval, smooth and glossy, white dotted with browns, gray or black are laid. The 2 broods are incubated by the female for 11 - 13 days.

#8. YELLOW-BREASTED CHAT. The largest warbler in North America, it is more often heard than seen. Nesting habitat is woodland edges, neglected pastures, thick shrubbery, and briar thickets. This bird has been found nesting on Nachusa Grasslands. The nest is built 2 - 6 ft. above ground in brush and briar tangles, vines, or low trees. It is bulky, made from leaves, vines, weed stems, and grasses; then lined with fine grasses and plant stems. Three to six oval eggs that are smooth and glossy, white dotted with brown are laid. Incubated by the female, they hatch in 11 days. One brood is produced.

#9. OVENBIRD. This bird, primarily a ground feeder and would rather walk than hop, has the most interesting nest of all. Habitat for nesting is deciduous forest floors having only low growth, if any. The nest is built on the ground in a depression of dead leaves. The top is arched over with dead leaves and surrounding vegetation to make it semi enclosed. It is shaped like an old-fashioned oven with the opening at near ground level. It is made from grasses, plant fibers, and hair. Four to five eggs that are oval, smooth and glossy, white dotted with brown are laid. The female incubates for 11 - 14 days and raises one brood.



CUERVO

by Debra Carey

Oh, Cuervo, where will you go?

Puddles of December dusk
Slip silently into the snow.
Ragged wings, bedraggled black,
Sweep the chill winds that blow.

Jet eyes, searching for she'ter,
Soft summer was long ago.
Fold your wings, say your prayers,
Melt into the woods below.

Oh, Cuervo, where will you go?

A Paisley Babushka ?

-- by Judy Hill

This memory is dedicated to Marilyn Lynch

It was Mrs. Simon who came to the rescue more than once. Her house was on the main highway. She supplemented her pension by selling eggs and fresh-dressed chickens to passers-by. She made my first pair of long pants that had big pockets. Granted, they had a bib with a ruffle around it and the straps crossed in the back. Another milestone was getting a pair of brown sturdy shoes for walking across the sharp burned-off prairie grass stems.

We first met Mrs. Simon because of a prairie fire. Teddy and I had been wandering and not being sure which direction the fire was coming from, we chose to head for the big empty highway toward the sound of cars and trucks. Teddy and I were in the big ditch of shallow water when a truck pulled off the highway. A big man got out and shouted at us. Since he wasn't carrying a gunny sack, we ran toward him. There was anger in his voice as he told us to get in the truck; he wanted to take us to the white house owned by the chicken lady. He was bigger than Dad and his face was red and he had a round red pin on his cap. He pulled the noisy truck into Mrs. Simon's drive as she was running out the door toward us. While he was lifting us out of the truck cab, he shouted to Mrs. Simon. "You'll have to find out where these two belong...I've gotta get outta here!"

The fire was north and no danger to us according to Mrs. Simon. She walked us home through her back prairie. Mom was sure upset, especially when Mrs. Simon said it was a tanker truck full of gasoline. I was grounded for days and don't care to tell you about the lectures and pain from sitting in my little chair staring into the kitchen corner. The dog too!

Mrs. Simon came to visit a few days later. She and mom talked a long time over warmed-over stake coffee. Just before she left, Mrs. Simon handed me something with the following lecture. We were on the side porch steps at the time. "Now Judy Ann, look out over that prairie. See how uneven it is? It is all burnt over and now you can see the old ant hills. Make plant and high-point land marks in your mind. When the prairie is tall, we cannot see you and Teddy. So when you are out there and your name is called, just get atop one of those big old ant hills, wave this babushka and yell, 'We are over here!'" Mom put her hand over her mouth and moaned, "A paisley babushka?". Mrs. Simon just smiled and turned and walked away.

I was fully aware there were few ants in those mounds. I had been unsuccessful in rousing them in full force when poking as compared to the ant hills in our yard. A walk in the high grass brought a view of the few big shiny black ants on top of the Joe-Pye weeds. The big flat-topped maroon flowers were best for bug watching. Once it was the ghosts' candlesticks I found, or as they are properly called: Indian-Plantains. Another time I came across rattlesnake masters, each with its own tenant green crab spider (did they really have two gold spots on their bodies?). We always made a walk in a loop; never entering the prairie or exiting it at the same point. Thus, there was always a new room to explore.

Yes, I did use the scarf as a flag. It was full of beautiful colors. All colors of the prairie and all colors of a night sky.....in one piece of cloth. Mrs. Simon is gone and so is the scarf. During my walk through Nachusa, I wondered if one could see the Milky Way in this prairie sky, just as I did so long ago and far away. Then I thought again about how much I loved and now miss the prairie, Mrs. Simon, Teddy, and that Paisley Babushka.

The Nature Conservancy
897 Union Road
Amboy, IL 61310



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1992 CALENDAR -- NACHUSA GRASSLANDS



JAN.

- 1 Happy New Year -- Nachusa Volunteers and Friends
- 25 Notices distributed for Logo Contest (Ann Haverstock and Carol Merbach)

FEB.

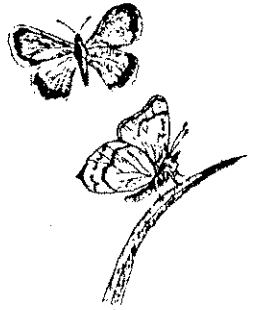
- 1 Deadline for Prairie Smoke input....articles, photos, etc.
Submit to: The Nature Conservancy, 897 Union Rd., Amboy, IL 61310
- 15 Steering Committee Meeting at Little Yellow House on the Prairie
- 15 Prairie Smoke published
(Note: All committee meetings start at 9:30 am)
- 22 Seed Blending Party and Stone Soup -- Dennis Lubbs & Kathy Motto

MAR. 15 thru APR. 30 Spring Burn Season -- Mike Crowe 815/393-4572



APR.

- 4 TOUR starting at Naylor Road entrance -- Bob Parenteau 815/235-2072
(Note: All tours start at 10:00 am)
Logos due for judging (Ann & Carol)
- 11 Post and Fence Removal - FFA and 4-H Day -- Ed Pleskovitch 815/626-8746
(Note: All work days start at 9:00 am)
- 18 Skunk Cabbage TOUR -- 10:00 am -- Tim Keller 815/626-4759
- 25 TOUR from Morton Arboretum -- Sally Baumgardner
MFR Cutting & Spraying -- 9:00 am -- Ed Pleskovitch 815/626-8746



MAY

- 1 Deadline for Prairie Smoke input....articles, photos, etc.
Submit to: The Nature Conservancy, 897 Union Rd., Amboy, IL 61310
- 9 Steering Committee Meeting at Little Yellow House -- 9:30 am
- 10 TOUR of Beaver Dams -- 10:00 am -- Bob Parenteau 815/235-2072
MRF Cutting & Spraying -- 9:00 am -- Ed Pleskovitch 815/626-8746
- 13 TOUR of Dot & Doug Knobs -- 10:00 am -- Ellen Baker 815/456-2283
- 15 Prairie Smoke published
- 23 MRF Cutting & Spraying -- 9:00 am -- Ed Pleskovitch
PHOTO TOUR -- 10:00 am -- Gene St. Louis 815/756-8747
- 24 Spring Savanna Seed Picking -- 10:00 am -- Dennis Lubbs & Kathy Motto
815/379-9060
- 30 Spring Seed Planting -- 10:00 am -- Dennis Lubbs & Kathy Motto

JUNE

- 13 Cutting Internal Fence -- 10:00 am -- Ed Pleskovitch 815/626-8746
- 14 TOUR -- Wade Creek to West Boundary -- 10:00 am -- Bob Parenteau
- 20 TOUR -- Coneflowers -- 10:00 am Dot Wade & Sonia Vogl
- 21 Wetland Sedge Seed Picking -- 10:00 am -- Dennis Lubbs & Kathy Motto
- 26 Sunset on Doug's Knob -- 8:00 pm -- Ann Haverstock 708/232-9398
- 27 West Boundary Trimming Party -- 9:00 am -- Ed Pleskovitch
PHOTO TOUR -- Gene St. Louis

