



PRAIRIE SMOKE

Nachusa Grasslands Newsletter

Issue 16

February 1993

SECOND ANNUAL STONE SOUP PARTY

It takes a hardy bunch to make a cold December work day into a traditional stone soup party, but that's just what 25 regular volunteers for Nachusa Grasslands did on Saturday, December 5th. Mixing work with fun is always rewarding.

Our plant ecologists, Dennis Lubbs and Kathy Motto, report that between 600 and 700 pounds of seeds were sorted, mixed, and put into winter storage during the day. Another successful year of seed collecting for Nachusa!

Although the seed mixing was the primary chore for the day, a great deal of planning work was also accomplished through various conversations. The upcoming calendar of events was also discussed at length.

With everyone bringing an ingredient or two, the Stone Soup was a rousing success for the lunch menu. Thanks to our "fire tender", Karl Merbach, the 25 gallon caldron was soon bubbling with a thick mixture of vegetables, pork, and beef ingredients, as well as a couple of well scrubbed stones. Judging by comments made, the soup was a rousing success.

Over lunch, Sally Baumgardner made some remarks about the various volunteers who have worked at Nachusa Grasslands over the past year. Many of them were singled out and awarded a Volunteer Stewardship Network patch. A hearty thanks for a job well done was extended to all our volunteers.



"Fire tender" Karl Merbach, left, surrounded by hungry volunteers eager to sample the Stone Soup!

Gene St. Louis

PRAIRIE UNIVERSITY

This mythical "university" is actually a catalog of ecology oriented course offerings from throughout Northern Illinois, although primarily in the Chicago metropolitan area.

The Winter '93 Offerings has just been published. This 52 page booklet details what a specific course will cover, where, when, and how much. Some of them are actual university courses (e.g. Lake Forest College Biology 152 - Biology of Organisms) or workshops offered by forest preserve districts (e.g. Lake County F.P. - Owl Prowl). This is a quarterly publication. If you would like to receive a copy of this catalog, contact either Carol Merbach at 815/284-1505 or The Nature Conservancy at 312/346-8166.



2 NACHUSA GRASSLANDS MANAGEMENT PLAN

by Ed Collins

Nachusa Grasslands has a written plan of action for the entire site. The 1992 Management Plan consists of four sections; Significant Site Features, Management Objectives and Activities, Management Units, and Notes and References.

One of the more prominent features of the plan is how the entire 933 acres of Nachusa Grasslands are broken down into nine management units. These divisions make objectives and activities easier to identify. For instance, the plan recommends that in Management Unit #4 we conduct a prescribed burn on Coneflower Knob in the Spring of 1993, done by TNC staff and Nachusa Grasslands volunteers. By utilizing the plan, we will have a better handle of what needs to be accomplished and when.

The Management Plan also made a number of specific recommendations to The Nature Conservancy Board of Directors. Several of these recommendations have already been approved, such as the hiring of a full-time site manager, incorporating interns into the work force, and purchasing a tractor. (See related story.)

HELP WANTED SITE MANAGER

The Illinois Board of The Nature Conservancy approved the hiring of a full-time site manager for the Nachusa Grasslands. After considerable research by the Nachusa Grasslands Task Force, it was pointed out that a 933 acre nature preserve needed full-time oversight in order to accomplish the many tasks that go along with operating and restoring such a large tract of land.

While this was an unbudgeted item for TNC, it was felt it was sufficiently important to pursue raising additional funds in order to pay for this site management objective. For information on how to contribute to this important position, contact The Nature Conservancy at 312/346-8166.

APRIL

by Debra A. Carey

April....A feminine frippery
Dancing through the pussy willows.....
Graceful posturing, softly swaying
Azure sky filled with cloud pillows....

Bestowing ephemeral kisses
Granting spring wishes come true....
Leaving far behind winter's fury
Bringing sweet promise of life anew.....

VSN APPRECIATION LUNCHEON

The Volunteer Stewardship Network, an arm of The Nature Conservancy, honored 30 volunteers from throughout northern Illinois during a luncheon held at the Brookfield Zoo on January 23rd. Among those honored were Nachusa Grasslands volunteers Ed Pleskovitch and Sally Baumgardner.

Ed was sited for his tenacity to the job of brush cutting. When he sets a work day, he keeps it, often working alone or with one or two other volunteers in his pursuit of brush and tree cutting, fence removal, and other heavy labor jobs. One important contribution Ed made this year was the donation of a face cord of wood, cut and delivered, as a raffle item at Autumn on the Prairie.

Sally was honored as one of the more visible volunteers at Nachusa Grasslands. She is frequently the first on the scene at a work day, and the last to leave. Her primary goal this year was to harvest seeds from the more common prairie plants, such as goldenrod, asters, grasses, and milkweed, in order to encourage a healthy plant community in the restoration areas.

Another frequent visitor to Nachusa is West Chicago Prairie Steward, Mel Hoff, who was also honored as a Nachusa Grasslands volunteer. Mel has been instrumental in organizing work days to specifically tackle Kittentail Knob and bring his own volunteers from the west suburban area.

Our thanks go out to these three Nachusa Grasslands volunteers, as well as the numerous others that were not this year specifically chosen for this VSN honor.

NEW LOOK FOR THE OLD MEINERS WETLAND

3

by Ed Collins and Gene St. Louis



Gene St. Louis

Agriculture has significantly altered this area. First, the fields along Franklin Creek were tiled to drain the land. Rain water, which was previously held by the wetland geography and flora, now pours directly into the creek, significantly increasing the amount of water being carried at times of peak flow. Secondly, portions of Franklin Creek have been channelized to straighten its course, allowing water to flow much faster than before. As a result, the river has eroded into its bed, dropping significantly below the current land surface. This cut off the flow of water from the river into the wetlands.

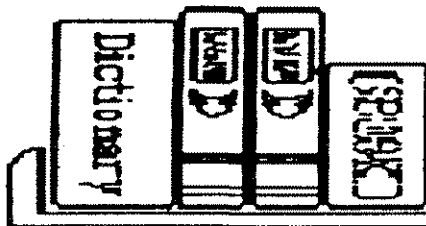
The new pothole is situated on a previous pothole site. The original area was partially filled in with soil washed down from the adjacent slope after the introduction of agriculture. This portion of the site is composed of Comfrey soils, which retain water very well, and the Reed Canary Grass needed those moist soil conditions to exist. Determining the extent of the Comfrey soils was also important in determining how large to make the resulting pothole. All of the excavated dirt will be removed from the site to eliminate the grass seed, restore the original contours of the land, and to be in compliance with Federal laws which prohibits dumping fill dirt into wetlands.

This project is being funded entirely by the Meiners family. The 80 acre Meiners Wetlands was donated to Nachusa Grasslands by the family as a memorial to their father, Jay Meiners. They are continuing their generosity and commitment to our much endangered wetlands ecology by funding this new restoration project. Since gaining statehood in 1818, Illinois has lost over 90 percent of its original wetlands. Of our original 8.2 million acres of wetlands, about 920,000 remain. As a state, we rank 6th in the nation in converting wetlands to other use. Between 4 to 6 thousand additional acres continue to be lost every year.

The new year began with the start of excavation work at Meiners Wetlands. On January 1st, Hardesty Excavation initiated two projects to help restore this wetland area. The first was to close off an old ditch toward the southeast end which drained into Franklin Creek. This will allow more accumulated water to remain in the wetlands. The second phase was to excavate a half to three-quarter acre pothole at the north edge just to the west of Franklin Creek.

Creation of this pothole will serve two purposes. First, this area has become infested with Reed Canary Grass, a Eurasian species which could potentially take over the whole wetland. The extent of this grass was marked out with flags during the summer by Ed Collins, our site manager. The area was then dug out to a depth of two feet, which should remove the entire grass seed bed.

Secondly, this pothole will help reconstruct one of the original ox-bow ponds which would have been a prominent feature of this area over 100 years ago. At that time, extensive wetlands bordered Franklin Creek, which ran much closer to the existing land surface than it does now. The creek would have frequently flooded over into the surrounding areas during rain storms, filling shallow ponds which could persist well into summer. As the river itself meandered over its flood plain, numerous ox-bow ponds were left behind to provide a wetland habitat.



For Your Information

YELLOW-EYED GRASS

by James B. Long

Another of the interesting plants of the moist sand-flats is the Yellow-eyed Grass (*Xyris torta*). This species usually grows in small patches on the sunny-side of ponds. It is usually about a foot tall. It consists of a bulbous base and a cluster of narrow, stiff and twisted leaves. The naked scape is topped by a miniature "pine cone". The magic is that each scale of the cone opens and a tiny 3-petaled, yellow flower "peeks" out. It has a fairly long flowering period but you cannot always see the flowers because they last but a short time.

This plant is not hard to find in the sandhills of Lee County.

DRABA

From - "A Sand County Almanac"
by Aldo Leopold

Within a few weeks now *Draba*, the smallest flower that blows, will sprinkle every sandy place with small blooms.

He who hopes for spring with upturned eye never sees so small a thing as *Draba*. He who despairs of spring with downcast eye steps on it, unknowing. He who searches for spring with his knees in the mud finds it, in abundance.

Draba asks, and gets, but scant allowance of warmth and comfort; it subsists on the leavings of unwanted time and space. Botany books give it two or three lines, but never a plate or portrait. Sand too poor and sun too weak for bigger, better blooms are good enough for *Draba*. After all it is no spring flower, but only a postscript to a hope.

Draba plucks no heartstrings. Its perfume, if there is any, is lost in the gusty winds. Its color is plain white. Its leaves wear a sensible wooly coat. Nothing eats it; it is too small. No poets sing of it. Some botanist once gave it a Latin name, and then forgot it. Altogether it is of no importance - just a small creature that does a small job quickly and well.



L. to R.- Dennis Lubbs & Kathy Motto supervise the processing of seed.

A FRAGRANCE REMEMBERED

by James B. Long

My first acquaintance with the Sweetfern (*Comptonia peregrina*) was in the sandy woods on the south shore of Lake Superior. I will always remember the odor of the plant as one of the great aroma's of the "Northwoods". If someone could incorporate the sweet, spicy, fresh-air aroma of Sweetfern in an after-shave lotion it would out-sell all other such products.

This plant is not a fern; it is a small woody shrub that grows about two feet tall. It has leaves that are scalloped and blunt-lobed like some ferns. It grows in patches.

The only known locations of the species in Illinois was in Cook and Will Counties until I found it growing in Lee County. I never after passed near the plant without stopping to inhale the aroma of the "Northwoods".

I first found the plant in the Woodhaven Lakes area many years ago. It may still grow there. I also found a small patch growing along a sandy roadside in Amboy township but it was killed by chemical spray in 1963.

CLEANUP AT TRASH KNOB AND TRASH GULLY

by Gene St. Louis

Stroll over Coneflower Knob these days and a former landmark will be conspicuous by its absence. The rusted hulk of the old combine has a last been removed. On December 19, 10 Nachusa Grasslands volunteers and 12 local FFA members and their advisor cleaned out the Trash Gully area and a good portion of the material dumped at Trash Knob.

Under the guidance of their advisor Rich Pettit, Chad Bracunier, Rus Bivins, Jeremy Chupp, Jamie Chupp, Josh Harmon, Roy Lohse, Robert Ramsdell, Brandon Roop, Nate Smith, and Jason Wilson came out from the Franklin Grove FFA Chapter. Robert Voorhies represented the Amboy FFA Chapter. Nachusa volunteers were Gene St. Louis, Tim Keller, Steve Laffy, Karl and Carol Merbach, Max and Sally Baumgardner, Ed Pleskovitch, Ed Collins, and Mike Crowe.

The trash was piled into pickups provided by Ed Collins, Tim Keller, and Ed Pleskovitch, and two farm wagons loaned by Rich Pettit, and hauled to the old farm yard where it will be accessible by a scrap dealer.

We oldsters always assumed the combine would have to be cut up with a torch and removed in pieces. The FFA members, with the impatience and exuberance of youth, simply picked the whole thing up and

dumped it on a farm wagon. Some tangles of iron at Trash Knob had to be snipped apart with a cutting torch by Ed Pleskovitch before they could be removed.

Another large piece of machinery was pulled out of the Knob with Rich Pettit's tractor and dumped onto the second wagon. A huge pile of barb wire also proved a challenge. Max Baumgardner and Tim Keller finally used a chain to grab a few rolls at a time and pull them out of the pile with Tim's truck.

The whole crew took a break at noon for a chicken lunch provided by The Nature Conservancy. Sally Baumgardner went into Dixon to pick it up, and kept hot coffee flowing throughout the day.

Thanks to the many volunteers who turned out, a significant portion of the Trash Knob



Gene St. Louis

junk pile will be heading back to the blast furnace. However, we still have not hit prairie dirt at Trash Knob.

If you missed out on the excitement this time, you can still get in on the next round of volunteers vs. trash in March. And, after Mike Crowe burns through this area next spring, there will be cans and bottles to pick up that are still hiding in the grass.

If you are interested in assisting with this clean-up, please contact Gene St. Louis at (815) 756-8747 or our volunteer coordinator Sally Baumgardner at (815) 456-2083.



Gene St. Louis

BIRDS AND UPSIDE DOWN FEEDERS

by Isabel Johnston

In Sterling near Sinnissippi Park, Carol Jackley has about a dozen pine siskins and eight gold finches which hang upside down to feed on thistle seed. House finches are too large to do this.

Three upside down feeders in Rock Falls need a park to attract gold finches and pine siskins.

Betty Brown's nephew was asked to put up one of these feeders. He decided it needed two more holes. After he put them in, it was no longer an upside down feeder. House finches could then use it. House finches are too aggressive. They keep other birds from the feeders and eat up all the feed.

Upside down feeders not used this winter will probably be used during spring migration.

Carol has located a Carolina wren at Sinnissippi Park. The wren's loud song for such a small bird is a welcome surprise.

On Rock River sea gulls by the hundreds, and sometimes an eagle, are eating fish that rise to the top of the water. These fish are stunned when they go through the electric plant. The many sizes of the gulls range up to nearly eagle size. The usual gulls are Herring and Ring-billed gulls.

BURN SEASON APPROACHES

by Carol Merbach

Due to an extraordinarily wet Fall '92, no prairie burns took place at Nachusa Grasslands, in fact, only one took place in all of northern Illinois. This means there is a great deal of acreage that must be burned this spring in order to catch up with the management schedule.

A truly successful burn depends heavily on ideal weather conditions, such as recent rainfall, humidity, wind direction, and the dryness of the prairie. For these reasons it is impossible to schedule a specific day for burns. If you are not already on the phone tree to receive notification for a burn day, contact either Carol Merbach 815/284-1505 or Sally Baumgardner 815/456-2083 for information on how to be notified of upcoming burns. The season runs from mid March through the end of April.

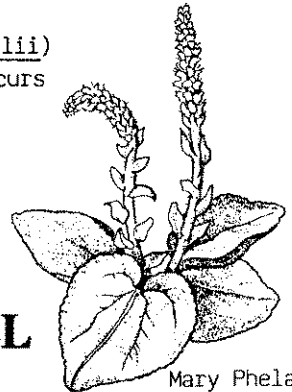
Periodic fire is a management tool used in prairie restoration to reduce excessive dead plant material which can be detrimental to native plants. The true prairie natives thrive after burns, usually through increased seed production.

A great deal of care is given to areas selected for burns in order not to eliminate all animal or insect individuals. Fire breaks are mowed to control how much of an area is burned at a time and usually nearby untouched areas will serve to replenish burned areas within a short period of time.

When you visit Nachusa Grasslands and notice an area blackened by fire, think of it not as destruction, but rather construction.

Kitten Tails (*Besseyia bullii*)

Threatened in Illinois - occurs in sand savannas and gravel prairies. Presently known from 17 populations in 6 counties.



Mary Phelan

LETTER FROM MEL

by Mel Hoff

The West Chicago Prairie Stewardship Group has scheduled our spring Nachusa Grasslands workday for Saturday, May 1. We plan, as usual, to work at Kittenail Knob and to rake-in whatever seed you (Nachusa) provide us. We will work from 9:00 AM to about noon and since we have invited the Kane Co. Area Volunteers to join us, I expect 15 - 20 people. So, save us plenty of seed/mulch, we can do something of the order of 2000 - 3000 rake-ins.

We plan a field lunch and then a field trip in the afternoon. If any of the Nachusa group wants to join us for all or part of the day we will welcome them.



DRABA (*Draba reptans*)

Blooms April - May / 2"-10"

Disturbed ground, sandy or rocky prairies

H. Reuter

BLACK PLASTIC HALF BARREL BOG UPDATE

New cobalt blue bottle gentian seeds are in 3 bogs with a single square layer of cotton sheeting over each of them. Dot Wade had seeds and found directions in Allen Wade's Prairie Moon Nursery catalog.

Last year one bog had a pale blue bottle gentian. Hopefully the cobalts will grow.

West of Rock Falls there are many marshes marigolds on a farm. Perhaps the farmer would sell three plants. My two need more water. If three inches of dirt were removed they would probably be down where it is wet.

Stems of cardinal flowers by fall had a ring of babies around them. In spring these babies will be lifted and replanted. Are these seedlings or offshoots? There may be as many as 35 bright scarlet spikes by fall.

A watered part of the flower garden had one fluffy, pale lavender blue, wild hyacinth blossom in 1992. Only leaves grew for probably 5 years. It needs to be in a bog.

After division the white turtle head was bigger and prettier.

Great blue lobelia and culver's root like water but self sow and grow well in the garden.

Queen-of-the-prairie's delicate ethereal plumes should all be in bogs. Some are.

Is that wild rice or a cattail? It hasn't bloomed yet.

Water plantains were many but quite small.

Swamp milkweed, arrowheads and wild iris would be nice. Pickel weed was once on a farm southeast of here.

These all want sun.

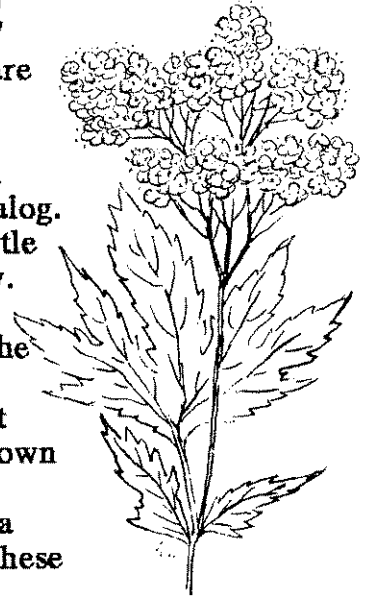
If there were shaded bogs one could grow orchids. If!

Bogs are fun!

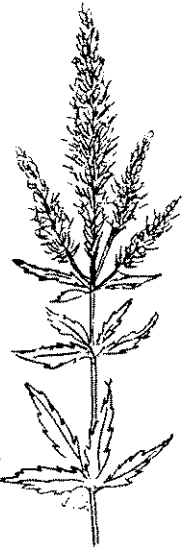


Gene St. Louis

by Isabel Johnston



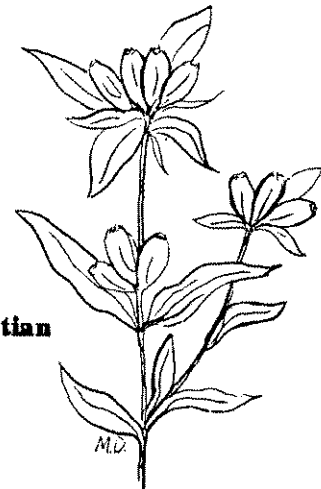
Queen-of-the-Prairie



Culver's Root



Cardinal Flower



Bottle Gentian

All illustrations are by Mae Domack. We very much appreciate her lovely art!

☆ WANTED ☆

EDITOR FOR PRAIRIE SMOKE. KNOWLEDGE OF AND ACCESS TO COMPUTER HELPFUL. NEXT ISSUE SUBMISSION DEADLINE MAY 1, 1993 - - TO BE PUBLISHED MAY 15. PAST EDITOR WILL ASSIST WITH THAT ISSUE. CONTACT - CAROL MERBACH - 815/284-1505. AN OPPORTUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE EXCITING THINGS GOING ON AT NACHUSA GRASSLANDS!

Nachusa Grasslands Interns Sought

Nachusa Grasslands is seeking intern for the 1993 seasons. Individuals interested in learning "hands on" management techniques for natural areas management and receive college credit to boot should contact Chris Helbig at TNC - 312/346-8166.

IN THIS ISSUE

Second Annual Stone Soup Party.....page 1
 Prairie University.....page 1
 Nachusa Grasslands Management Plan.....by Ed Collins.....page 2
 Help Wanted Site Manager.....page 2
 April.....by Debra Carey.....page 2
 VSN Appreciation Luncheon.....page 2
 New Look for the Old Meiners Wetland...by Ed Collins & Gene St. Louis.....page 3
 Yellow-Eyed Grass.....by James B. Long.....page 4
 A Fragrance Remembered.....by James B. Long.....page 4
 Draba - by Aldo Leopold.....submitted by Sally Baumgardner.....page 4
 Trash Clean Up Continues.....by Gene St. Louis.....page 5
 Birds and Upside Down Feeders.....by Isabel Johnston.....page 6
 Burn Season Approaches.....by Carol Merbach.....page 6
 Letter from Mel.....by Mel Hoff.....page 6
 Black Plastic Half Barrel Bog Update.....by Isabel Johnston.....page 7
 Want Ads.....page 8
 INSERT.....1993 CALENDAR FOR NACHUSA GRASSLANDS

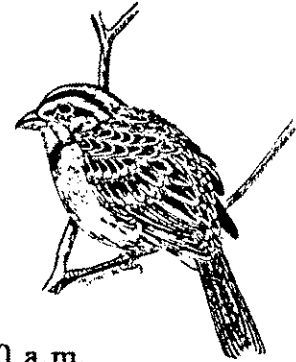


brings you **Prairie Smoke**, the Nachusa Grasslands Newsletter.
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1993 CALENDAR NACHUSA GRASSLANDS



FEBRUARY

- 27 Brush Control - Benson's Fenceline - Ed Pleskovitch - 9:30 a.m.

MARCH 15 THROUGH APRIL 30 Spring Burn Season - Mike Crowe

MARCH

- 13 Tree Cutting - AOTP site - west side - Ed Pleskovitch - 9:30 a.m.
- 20 Plant Identification for Volunteers - Yellow House - 9:30 a.m. - Given by Dennis Lubbs 815/379-9060
- 27 Kittentail Fenceline - Ed Pleskovitch - 9:30 a.m.

APRIL

- 10 Steering Committee meeting at Yellow House - 9:30 a.m.
Cut & Spray multiflora rose - Naylor Road - 9:30 a.m.
- *17 Tour - Skunk Cabbage, Wetlands, and Springs - Tim Keller - 10:00 a.m.
- 24 Seed Scattering Workday - Yellow House - 9:30 a.m. - Dennis Lubbs
Cut & Spray - Fenceline west of Nachusa Grasslands sign - 30 acre field - 9:30 a.m.



MAY

- 1 Seed Scattering Rain Day Date (if it rained on April 24th) - 9:30 a.m.
Red Cedar Removal - Benson Road - 9:30 a.m.
Deadline for Prairie Smoke submissions - articles, photo, etc.
Submit to: Hazel Reuter, 897 Union Rd., Amboy, IL 61310

- *11 Tour - Shooting Stars & Cream Indigo - Dot & Doug's Knob- Sonia Vogl & Dot Wade - 10:00 a.m.

- 15 Prairie Smoke published

- * Tour - Violets - Bob Parenteau leader - 10:00 a.m.
Cut & Treat MFR - Main Complex - Ed Pleskovitch - 9:30 a.m.

- 29 Cut & Treat MFR - Beaver Pond - 9:30 a.m.

JUNE

- 12 Steering Committee meeting at Yellow House - 9:30 a.m.
Seed Collecting - Yellow House - 12 noon - Dennis Lubbs & Kathy Motto
Trail Trim - West Boundary - Ed Pleskovitch - 9:30 a.m.
- *19 Tour - Coneflowers & Warm Season Grass - Ellen Baker - 10:00 a.m.
- 26 Weed Control Workday - Lowden Road entrance - 9:30 a.m. - Sally B.
Fence & Tree Removal - Beaver Dam - Ed P. - 9:30 a.m.



Bill Rogers

- 27 PICNIC-ON-THE-PRAIRIE - Details to follow

JULY

- 10 Weed Control & Seed Collecting Workday - 9:30 a.m. - Meet at Lowden Road entrance - Sally Baumgardner
Cut & Treat MFR - Ed Pleskovitch - 9:30 a.m.
- *16 Tour - Come listen to the whip-poor-wills - Ann Haverstock - 7:00 p.m.
- 17 Seed Collecting - 9:30 to Noon - Meet at Lowden Road entrance - Lubbs & Motto



JULY

- 24 Cut Brush & MFR - Naylor Road - Ed Pleskovitch - 9:30 a.m.

AUGUST

- 1 Deadline for Prairie Smoke submissions - articles, photos, etc.
7 Seed Collecting - 9:30 a.m. - Meet at Lowden Road entrance - Sally Baumgardner
Cut & Treat Trees & Sumac - Schafer's Knob - Ed Pleskovitch - 9:30 a.m.
14 Steering Committee meeting at Yellow House - 9:30 a.m.
15 Prairie Smoke published
*21 Tour - Enjoy the flora, learn seed picking first hand, view the blazingstars in bloom,
Meiners Wetland - Hazel Reuter & Ellen Baker - 10 am
Tree Cutting - Benson Road - Ed Pleskovitch - 9:30 a.m.

SEPTEMBER

- 4 Brush Cutting - Corner Benson Road & last knob of main complex - 9:30 a.m.
11 AOTP Workday - Yellow House - 9:30 a.m.

18 4TH ANNUAL AUTUMN-ON-THE-PRAIRIE

- 25 Seed Collecting - 10:00 a.m.

OCTOBER - Seed Collecting Month

Seed collecting will take place every Saturday (10 a.m.) and Sunday (11 a.m.) throughout the month.

- 2 MFR Cut & Treat - Beaver Dam - Ed Pleskovitch - 9:30 a.m.
9 Steering Committee meeting at Yellow House - 9:30 a.m.
16 Tour - Autumn Splendor - Ellen Baker - 10:00 a.m.
23 Brush Cutting - Degraded Savanna - 9:30 a.m.

NOVEMBER

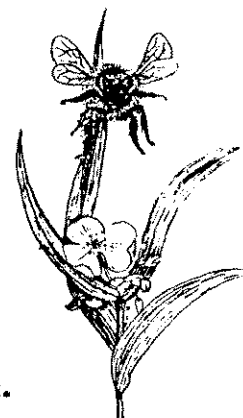
Brush Cutting to be announced in a later calendar

- 1 Deadline for Prairie Smoke submissions - articles, photos, etc.
15 Prairie Smoke published

DECEMBER

Brush Cutting to be announced in a later calendar

- 4 3rd Annual Stone Soup Party & Seed Blending Workday - 9:30 a.m.



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- * **Tours** - All tours start at the Nachusa Grasslands sign on Lowden Road at 10:00 a.m., unless otherwise noted. Update information will be attached to the post at the entrance sign.

Please register whenever visiting Nachusa Grasslands. Leave a note or use book at box at entrance. Your findings, information, and number in your group keeps us informed. If your tour group is visiting the Grasslands, please contact Ellen Baker, 1742 Reynolds Road, Franklin Grove, IL 61031 (815)456-2283, with an estimate of the number of people in your group so we may know how many visitors we have in a year. Thank You!

Franklin Creek State Park picnic area (shelter, water & restrooms) is three miles south. Bring lunch to enjoy at the park or the Grasslands if desired. The nearest restaurant is in Franklin Grove (approx. 6 miles).

Brush Cutting Crews - Please meet at the Yellow House on Lowden Road at 9:30 a.m. Bring along a pair of heavy gloves to protect your hands.