



# PRAIRIE SMOKE

## Nachusa Grasslands Newsletter

Issue 20

March 1, 1994

### An interview with Kevin Kaltenbach

By Andy Jackson, Regional Publicist

We picked an average January day, not very sunny, somewhat chilly with a light wind. Our mile walk was to the Fen, an area Kevin has adopted for stewardship. As we walked toward the Fen the snow crunched beneath our feet, it was quiet and we could hear the calls of blue jays, juncos, and American tree sparrows. As we hiked we talked about a lot of things, but mostly the Grasslands.



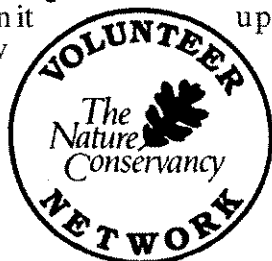
Andy: Just what is it that makes this area a Fen?

Kevin: It's an area where it stays wet enough so that the trees and woody plants can't grow. In marshes the water usually comes from the surface. [In a fen] the water, which is cold, is forced out from below ground at different points. You get a different variety of plants here and the soil is real black and real wet.

Andy: How big is the area you call the Fen?

Kevin: About five acres or so. The part I've adopted is actually like a finger of woody stuff that grows in between the Fen and another wet area called the Seep, and I'd like to get that area opened up, to get it back to more of what it was naturally. The woody plants can gradually take over the whole area, and I'd like to see it come back to how it was before. I don't think fire has been through here for a long time, a good burn would naturally clear out the area, open it up, and get the native plants to grow in.

(continued on page 3)



### Stone Soup and Seed Blending

By Gene St. Louis

Several recipes were cooking at Nachusa on December 4, when Nachusa volunteers gathered to prepare seed for next Spring's planting and to enjoy the fellowship of this year's batch of stone soup. Dennis Lubbs, our restoration ecologist, directed the preparation of several mixtures for replanting a variety of habitats, from dry mesic prairie to the soggiest of wetlands. Combining carefully selected seeds from this year's gathering, the group produced a choice selection of blends guaranteed to produce vintage prairie for years to come. Meanwhile, Ellen Baker was combining everyone's contributions into another marvelous rendition of stone soup. The hearty fare made for a relaxing break during the work day.



Mulching seed heads

Photo by Gene St Louis

### NACHUSA GRASSLANDS RECEIVES GRANT FROM TRUST

The Serendipity Trust of Illinois has given fifty-thousand dollars to Nachusa Grasslands for acquisition and stewardship. The monies will be spent on acquiring additional acreage and for stewardship of that new property. This grant gives a great boost to our fundraising efforts at Nachusa Grasslands, adding momentum to the fundraising needed for expansion. For now, the money is earning interest while we enjoy the beneficence of Serendipity.

## From the Preserve Manager Bill Kleiman

On a recent workday morning we walked upon ice crusted snow with bolt cutters and leather gloves and dispatched a quarter-mile of barbed wire fence on the edge of Kevin Kaltenbach's stewardship adoption area. We pulled the wire from among thickets of multiflora and buckthorn. We have honed our techniques and the fence came down easily without shredding our gloves. The deer will be leaping phantom fences for a while. As usual, Kevin stayed later than he said was possible and we all headed back with the sun casting deep shadows across the main complex knobs.

If this sounds like a good day to you then you should know that there are two working groups forming to increase the intensity of our seed harvesting and invasive weed control. We need lots of seed and many species of seed to keep up with our vigorous restoration schedule. Sally Baumgardner will be leading this important seed harvesting working group. As Sally says, "We need to gather the seed that the combines and automated seed strippers can't get to." We will need people to help harvest this season beginning at the end of May when the first seeds are available. The new seed strippers will need a small crew to operate this new equipment. This group meets May 28 when they will go over the harvest times for various plants and harvest some early season seeds (see schedule).

Exotic weeds are a major threat to natural areas and our restorations are particularly vulnerable because of the availability of open soil and a weak seed bank. An initial Weed Control working group will meet June 5 to develop a strategy, hike to some problem areas and battle some invasive plants.

Please join us in this important mission to restore Native Illinois.



## 350 Acres Burned

By Chris Matson

During October and December volunteer burn crews did prescribed burns on large sections of the preserve. In December, fire swept over the east end of the Grasslands as sunset vacuumed smoke from the fiery carpet of little bluestem, dazzling onlookers and participants. The final leg of the burns of a somewhat cold, windy day, crept up hills and knobs in a march as of soldiers side by side, in battle with *Rosa multiflora*, in all its thorny armor. [More burns this Spring]

## Signs of Spring

By James B. Long

Sometimes in February after a series of sunny days I may hear a cardinal singing. After three months of almost complete silence it suddenly whistles out its loud and characteristic song. This is my first sign of Spring.

If I wait until the snow is gone and visit the woods; I will look for a sugar maple tree that is oozing sap from a winter crack. If I'm lucky I will see a Mourning Cloak butterfly that has survived the long, twenty-below-zero winter in a hollow tree. A few honey bees will be out and other insects too will be collecting the sap. If the area has peat-beds along the creek; such as I find at Nachusa Grasslands, I will see the first flower of Spring; the brown and purple, smooth and shiny, spathes of the skunk cabbage. When I see these things I know it won't be long before the first pasque flower will bloom on the prairie hill and the first liverwort will bloom in the woods.

## NACHUSA GRASSLANDS SPRING WORKDAYS AND ACTIVITIES

At The Nature Conservancy's Nachusa Grasslands we are working to restore the natural processes and community structure that once dominated a wild Illinois.

During the Spring workdays we clear brush, remove interior fences, do controlled burns, sow seed and remove junk. Dress grunge style (work clothes) and pack a lunch. We meet at the barn by the Yellow House, 2055 Lowden Road, unless noted otherwise. The workday hotline is 815-456-2340 and if you arrive late we post where we are working on the barn.

*See the calendar for a specific dates and times.*

## Birds Spotted at Nachusa:

- Bald Eagle
- Cooper's hawk  
(endangered and formerly considered the most numerous large hawk in Illinois)
- Buffelhead duck

**An interview ... Kevin Kaltenbach .. continued**

Ever since I have been coming out here it seems like some of the other areas have gotten more attention because of their easier access, but I've been concerned about some of the rarer plants down here [in the Fen] ...I thought that if nobody else wants to do it maybe the only way I'll get it started is to do something myself.

*Andy:* Would you welcome anyone that wanted to help you clear some of the area out around the Fen?

*Kevin:* Oh yea. We are always open for help. Anyone could come out here with me, or anyone else at Nachusa to do the work.

*Andy:* What is it that got you involved in Nachusa Grasslands?

*Kevin:* I've always been interested in the outdoors. I grew up on a farm and I was always outside. I just like being out. The plants and animals are interesting. As I get older I like the conservation part more because I realize more that somebody's got to do it and I believe what they say - think globally, act locally.

I've known about [the Grasslands] ever since it started but it took me a while to find my way down here. Eventually I came here and explored the area, talked to some of the people here, and got involved in some Saturday burns, some seed picking, and it has gone from there.

*Andy:* How much time do you put in on average?

*Kevin:* It varies by the season. In the Springtime when there are burns to be done and everything is coming up there's more work. Sometimes I am out here Saturday and Sunday and stay all day.

*Andy:* Is the Fen area the only place you do volunteer work?

*Kevin:* No, I try to do everything, anywhere. I don't want to get tired of just one part... I have done seed collecting and worked on storing the seeds at the Stone Soup Party, and other things.

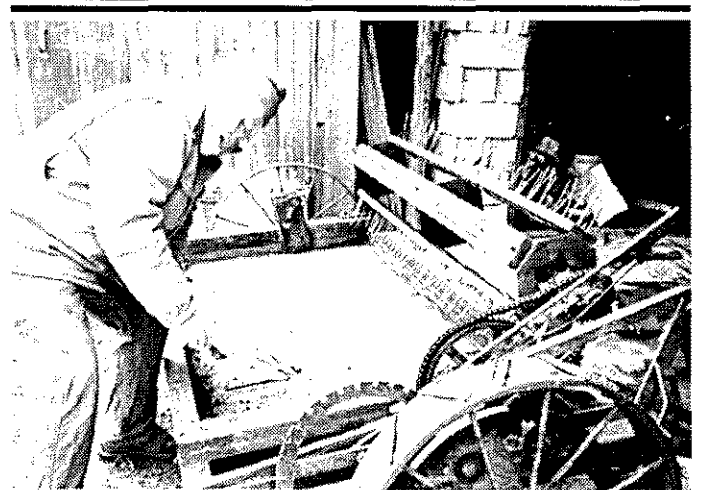
*Andy:* If someone were ready to adopt an area like you have done, that doesn't mean they're the only ones who can work in that area does it? They can bring in others to help them.

*Kevin:* Oh yea, I wish we had more people do that. People come out from the Chicago area, but I'd like to see a little more local help involved. We get quite a bit of help, but more people are always needed. Someone who adopted an area could even be a sort of monitor, just watch their area and say when it is time to burn, or what attention the area needs. It could be just a walk once a month.

*Andy:* What kind of education is needed?

*Kevin:* I've always had a lot of informal education, but I've never had any school classes. What you really need is a love for the outdoors and conserving what was here years ago... [Native Illinois] is rare, only one-tenth of one-percent of original prairie is left. I'm not a biologist and I don't think you need to be.

*When we finished our interview Kevin went to an area nearby the fen where others were taking out a fence row. He jumped right in to help and was probably there late in the day making his contribution, trying to think globally, but acting locally.*



John Holbo restoring the first seed stripper.

**Work projects that need you:**

If you're interested in participating in the work at Nachusa and want a special project to call your own, then you need to see page 7.



Dec 11 burn line - main complex.

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Isabel Johnston, how shall I remember her? In her waders trapping turtles! Isabel didn't miss one day of that interesting project carried on by the Lee county Natural Area Guardians. Isabel was always there baiting, setting, and checking traps. Not an easy task for someone in their seventies.

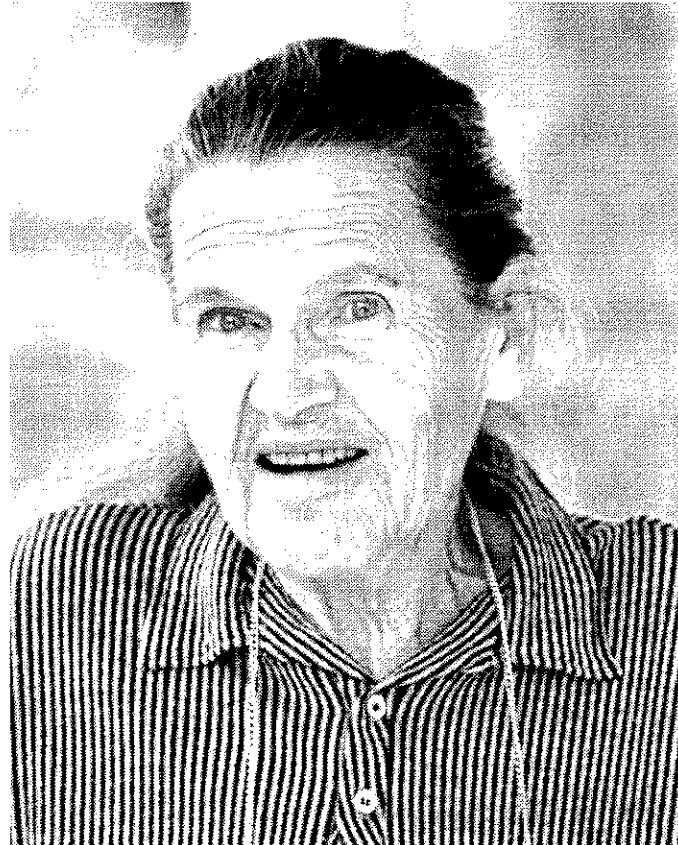
I remember going on rides with her collecting memories. Isabel loved the wetlands. I was with her when I saw my first osprey. The fascinating bird perched on an electric pole for our identification.

I remember sitting on my deck shelling and sorting wild indigo seeds with Isabel. For lunch she loved my creamed chicken on biscuits. Isabel was always busy, always learning. She was willing to share her years of knowledge and experience with those interested and sometimes even if they weren't interested!

Isabel has had an impact on many lives and our local environment in her inimitable way. I feel richer for having known her. She will be missed.

- Hazel Reuter -

I first met Isabel Johnston about 25 years ago when she was taking a pottery course under Gib Strawn at Lorado Taft Field Campus at Oregon. My husband, Doug, was on the staff at the campus at that time. I soon learned that Isabel was an avid gardener and we shared many interests in common.



When Doug and I started our Windrift Prairie Nursery in 1972 she was eager to learn the prairie species. She said, "What better way than to pull weeds in the nursery?" We were astounded at her generosity. She came every Wednesday - no from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. but from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. - and she wanted only a few plants for all that back-breaking work. Later she faithfully helped me tackle the garlic mustard in our woods.

We shared many field trips to Nachusa Grasslands in those days. She was always eager to see a new lovely spot we had found. Her dedication and hard work was appreciated by us all.

- Dot Wade -

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It is difficult to catch the essence of a person like Isabel Johnston in the written word. She was always in "ready gear" to tackle any task from collecting and propagating prairie seed, burning prairie, rolling up barbed wire fencing, turtle trapping, planting walnut trees and checking bluebird houses to single-handedly trying to bring multiflora rose under control. Her vitality put many a younger person to shame.

Isabel worked endlessly in her gardens, creating a bog and planting fruit trees at an age when others would say "Why bother?" If you knew Isabel at all, chances are quite good that you have a plant at your place from her gardens. She was a generous and sharing person, an artist with an unending range of talents.

Isabel was a vast store of knowledge, always open to and seeking new information. Though retired from education, Isabel never stopped teaching. She enjoyed sharing experiences. One day she tooted into our driveway in her VW van and drove us to Prophetstown to see baby hummingbirds in their nest. Countless times Isabel awoke others to the many treasures to be found in nature.

Isabel knew her mind, referring to herself as "persnickety!" She loved Mutsu apples and worried about the effect of the human population explosion. Refusing to have a radio or television in her home, Isabel's contacts with the world were of the direct kind.

We will dearly miss Isabel. The donation of her body to medical science is yet another example of her dedication to the living world, but was not her final act. Isabel's vital spirit remains with us as a challenge to keep in touch with the real world through nature.

- Carolyn Keller -

When I walk by the cardinal flower or great lobellia at the Grasslands, I will think of Isabel. She created a mini-wetland in her yard which was mostly composed of native plants. Her waning strength gave me the privilege to transplant those wetland plants to Nachusa Grasslands in 1993. She knew what should be here and worked hard to restore what once was native Illinois. Many plants were shared this past year.

Being with this teacher was always educational, fun, enlightening, and if a name wasn't at the tip of her tongue, a book she would share. You didn't just monitor butterflies, cut multiflora rose or hike; she imparted a lasting insight for how nature fits it all together. She'd take you to rare spots, even through mosquito thickets, to behold the gems of nature. I'll miss those special places that Isabel knew.

A book couldn't tell what she did for preserving native areas. On our last phone visit she wanted to know how the cardinal plants were doing at Nachusa. I'll cherish the values and understanding she imparted from her life. My hope for all who come to Nachusa Grasslands is for a realization of how much remains today because of Isabel Johnston's profound support and work.

- Ellen Baker -

In Memorial  
Isabel Johnston  
1909 - 1993

## Autumn-On-The-Prairie, '94

By Gene St. Louis

I will once again be serving as chairperson for this year's Autumn-on-the-Prairie, which will be Saturday, September 17. Having been last year's chairperson left me with two distinct thoughts for this year's event. First, start preparations much earlier, and secondly find more people to help organize it. To this end, I am organizing a new AOTP committee to be composed of a chairperson and five managers with specific duties. The chairperson will still have overall responsibility of the event, but would not be involved in arranging many of its specific details. These tasks will be carried out by the managers.

The proposed managers are as follows: The Site Manager will be in charge of the physical site for the event. This would include everything from renting tents to making sure the trash is cleaned up afterward. Bill Kleiman has offered to help with much of this assignment. The Welcome and Sales Tent Manager would oversee the Welcome Tent, from recruiting tent volunteers to handling the sale of items to cover costs of the event. Susan Heibert has volunteered to take up this challenge. Our Publicity Manager will be in charge of informing the public about the upcoming event. Andy Jackson has stepped forward to manage publicity. The Demonstrations and Exhibitors Manager would arrange for the educational displays and restoration demonstrations presented during the day. The Tours Manager would be responsible for recruiting tour guides, creating a tour schedule, and making sure the tours start as planned during the day. I still need volunteers for these last two positions.

I have prepared preliminary job descriptions for each of the above positions. If you feel strongly that Autumn-on-the-Prairie is a worthwhile event, and are interested in serving in one of the above positions, please contact me and I will send you a copy. We will also need volunteers willing to staff the Welcome Tent, the exhibits, and give demonstrations and tours. I would also welcome any comments or ideas readers may have on their previous AOTP experiences or suggestions for this year. You can reach me at (815) 756-8747, or write to:

Gene St. Louis  
220 E. Hillcrest Drive, Apt. 6124  
DeKalb, Illinois 60015.

***Your support will be most appreciated!***

## Photo Collection



Hanging seed at the Stone Soup party



Some of the combined seed harvest



'Skidster' moving some of the recent snow

# Calendar

## March

- 5 Sat.-Jarrett Prairie Center-Workshop-Solving landscape problems using native plants \$33
- 6 Sunday, 10:30 am: Workday
- 12 9 am - Noon: VSN Butterfly Monitoring Workshop in Chicago
- 13 Sunday, 10:30 am: Prescribed Burn Workday/Training. Burn season planning, short training, burning with good weather
- 20 Sunday, 10:30 am: Workday
- 26 Sat., 9:30 am: Workday, Fence Removal Party. Goal: remove all internal fence in one day! Bring (?) leather gloves, bolt cutters, prybar, truck to haul fence. Potluck/Volunteer Gathering/Steering Committee Social at Max & Sally Baumgardner's 3pm

## April

- 2 Sat., 10:00 am: Annual Skunk Cabbage Tour Tim Keller, meet at entrance sign
- 9 Saturday, 9:30 am: Workday
- \*10 Sunday, 1 p.m.- 3 pm: FIELD Tour with Bill Kleiman-get a look at on-going restoration techniques & dilemmas
- 23 Saturday, 9:30 am: EARTHDAY PLANTING FEST. Bring a dish to share while we plant 50 acres of prairie
- 24 Sunday, 10:30 am: Workday
- 30 Saturday, 9:30 am: Rain Date for Planting Fest VSN Plant Monitoring Workshop in Chicago

## May

- 1 Deadline for articles for Prairie Smoke
- 7 Saturday, 9:30 am: Workday
- \*21 Saturday, 10:00 am - 1:00 pm: Plant identification field trip with Dennis Lubbs  
Limit: 12 participants
- 22 Sunday, 10:30 am: Workday
- 23 Prairie Smoke mailed
- 28 Saturday 9:30 am: Working group on Seed Harvest; meet at Sally Baumgardner's barn (1 mile North of entrance sign, 8986 Lowden). Discuss seed harvest calendar, search for early seeds to harvest

## June

- 4 Saturday, 9:30 am: Workday
- 5 Sunday, 10:30 am: Working group on Weed Control meets. Goal: strategize, hike, and attack some invasives. Meet at Yellow House, Nachusa Grasslands
- \*11 Sat., 10:00 am: Field trip-Meiners Wetlands & uplands w/Sally Baumgardner (456-2083)
- 18 Saturday, 9:30 am: Workday
- \*25 Saturday, 9:30 am: Bird Tour-Gill Moreland
- 26 Sunday, 10:30 am: Workday.
- \* *Registration required.*

## Wish list for Nachusa Grasslands:

- seed drill
- fax machine
- dolly (hand truck)
- camera
- four row disk
- leaf mulcher
- shop vacuum
- heavy or light duty utility trailer
- full size pickup truck cap
- old kitchen cabinets for the shop
- snowblower
- vented propane office heater
- ATV to pull seed stripper
- slide projector
- security alarm for barn
- shop vise
- hay rack
- 4 - 15" snow tires
- steel ramps
- agricultural combine

## Thanks to donors for:

- √-counter top - John Nicholson
- √-Computer & printer - Hall Healy & Jim Hotchkiss
- √-several pair leather gloves - Aggie Kleiman
- √-skid mover - Kleiman family for long term loan
- √-space heaters - John Nicholson
- √-scrap lumber - John Nicholson
- √-counter top - John Nicholson
- √-work bench - John Holbo (two benches!)

## Work projects that need you:

- overlay 1830's land survey notes of the area onto an aerial photo
- we will be starting a propagation garden at the Yellow House and are looking for people who might want to grow rare native plants in this garden or at your home.
- create several warning signs to post for prescribed burns
- build wooden box for our second 1940's seed stripper
- help maintain the mechanical equipment (tractor, skidster, pickup,...)
- build four simple easels to hold aerial photos
- build a wood rack for the pickup

**Wanted:** Households that could put up interns for a few months this summer.

**Burns** - Prescribed burns will occur throughout the year as weather permits. Call Bill Kleiman, 456-2340, to be on the phone tree or for more information. Dress for the weather. Leather work gloves recommended. Meet at the barn West of the Yellow House at 2055 Lowden Road.

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

**If your tour group is visiting the Grasslands**, please contact Ellen Baker, 1742 Reynolds Road, Franklin Grove, IL 61031 (815)4546-2283, with an estimate of the number of people in your group. 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-nearest restaurant is in Franklin Grove (approx. 6 miles).

<i>Editor-Publisher</i>	_____	<i>Earl Thomas</i>
<i>Associate Editor</i>	_____	<i>Dot Wade</i>
<i>Associate Editor</i>	_____	<i>Bill Kleiman</i>
<i>Associate Editor</i>	_____	<i>Sally Baumgardner</i>

Photo credit of Isabel Johnston - Gene St. Louis

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### From the Editor(s):

If you know something about Nachusa Grasslands, but no one else knows because you didn't share the information, then you are *GUILTY* of keeping secrets! Send me articles, photos, drawings, poems, cartoons, calendar dates (items of interest to the friends of Nachusa Grasslands). Articles on computer disk encouraged!



brings you **Prairie Smoke**, the Nachusa Grasslands Newsletter.  
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