
GHF NEWS



Grassland Heritage Foundation Newsletter

March 2010

Part Two of our discussion on prairie establishment and management is coming up soon. GHF board member, Groundhogs coordinator, and president of Norman Ecological Consulting, Frank Norman will once again lead the presentation.

Managing Your Virgin Tallgrass Prairie or Hay Meadow March 24, 2010 7:00 pm at the Lawrence Public Library

Learn the various methods required to manage your tallgrass prairie whether it is in good condition or being overrun by woody vegetation and sericea lespedeza. Topics to be addressed will include tree and shrub removal, herbiciding invasive plants, prescribed burning, and seeding. A handout will be provided that outlines the presentation and provides sources for prairie management publications, potential funding sources, and firms that supply prairie seeds and perform prairie management.

Pre-registration is requested. Contact Rachel at grasslandheritage@gmail.com.



The session on prairie establishment was well attended

R Myslivy

Prairie Maintenance Workers Wanted -- You Can Help!

Our Groundhogs group, led by Frank Norman, continue to work on our own Snyder Prairie, Mayetta, Kansas, just north of Topeka. We generally meet the third Saturday of each month, but spring is our busiest time and extra days are planned. Saturday, March 20 will be our regularly scheduled day with preparation for the spring burn, including mowing fire breaks.

Burn dates are planned for March 27th and April 3rd at 9:30am, weather permitting. Since burning depends on weather conditions, you will need to let Frank know if you're interested in participating and he will email and let those interested know whether the burn is on.

Remember, for any burn, you should wear natural fiber clothing, leather boots, gloves, long pants without frays, a hat, and water you can carry.

Contact Frank Norman at 785-691-9748 or fjnorman@sunflower.com to get on the contact list and be informed of work day activities.

Mark your Calendars for Prairie Appreciation Day, Saturday, May 22nd

Grassland Heritage is planning a day to get out and enjoy Snyder Prairie, see the beauty of the property, and learn what tasks are needed to keep the prairie in the best shape we can. We're planning some exploration of the site and a variety of work projects. We're especially hoping to welcome members of the Kansas Native Plant Society. Plan on 9:00am to 4:00pm with lunch provided. Contact Frank Norman at 785-691-9748 or fjnorman@sunflower.com to let him know your interest. Check the May News or the web site for more details as plans are made.

History & Environmental Fair April 15 Kansas Museum of History, Topeka

GHF has been invited to bring our "booth" to this event for students in grades 4 to 6. We could really use some help staffing from 9am to 3pm. Please let Angie Babbit know if you can attend. angie.babbit@gmail.com or 785-840-9934

Lawrence Earth Day Festival April 17, 2010

Join GHF as we participate in the Lawrence Earth Day Festival April 17, 2010. This year is the 40th Anniversary of Earth Day. The day begins with a parade at 11:00am starting at Buford Watson Park. The parade will travel down Massachusetts Street towards South Park. The festival continues during the day at South Park. Contact Angie Babbit angie.babbit@gmail.com 785-840-9934 if you'd like to help by walking in the parade or working with our display table at the park.

Message from the President

As GHF begins a new year, there are many people who continue to work tirelessly toward our mission to preserve prairies through acquisition and maintenance of native grasslands, and public advocacy and education about the value and importance of prairies.

We especially appreciate the recognition of these efforts with the generous donation of \$500 by Westar Energy Foundation of Topeka, Kansas. Brad Loveless, Westar's Green Team leader, chose GHF to receive this donation, citing the work GHF does with the Snyder Prairie and our consistently great newsletter, edited and assembled by Sue Holcomb.

Frank Norman, GHF's "Groundhogs" leader has shown uncommon commitment to the efforts to maintain the native prairie at Snyder and to restore other areas that have been invaded by red cedars, bush honeysuckle and sericea lespedeza. He organizes a work day at Snyder each month – look elsewhere in this newsletter for details on how to participate in the next session. Frank has also presented a workshop on prairie restoration and another will be given later in March on prairie management as part of GHF's education and outreach efforts.

At our annual meeting, which had nearly 100% attendance of all board members, Frank, on behalf of GHF's management committee, gave details of a management plan to ensure that eventually the native prairies at Snyder will be ready for haying and invasive species will be brought under control. We thank our management committee: Frank Norman, Craig Freeman and Mike Campbell who assembled these recommendations.

If you made a contribution to GHF recently, you will have received a "window cling" with our new logo. Many thanks to David Lange for the great design.

I especially appreciate the terrific team of board members who are working on updating our website: Amy Carlson, Andrea Repinsky, Angie Babbit, and our Outreach and Education Coordinator, Rachel Myslivy. Although I have some computer skills, this team is incredibly knowledgeable and efficient at what would be an insurmountable task for me.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank Rachel for her dedicated service and work for GHF this past year. Sadly for us, her hours at her other position have been greatly expanded so that she will not be able to continue working for GHF. Rachel has been a very effective voice and presence for GHF and we appreciate everything she has been able to accomplish in the short time she's been with us. As someone else said, and I thoroughly agree, "She is such a nice person."

And, of course, GHF is very appreciative for all those who continue to provide financial support through your donations. Without your investment in our programs and projects, GHF's work would not happen.

Joyce Wolf

Grassland Heritage Foundation

The Grassland Heritage Foundation is a non-profit 501(c)3 membership organization dedicated to prairie preservation and education.

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Ann Simpson

Volunteers needed for summer programs

Make a Splash! Read! That's the theme of this year's summer reading program at the Lawrence Public Library. GHF volunteers are working with the new Children's Program coordinator, Kim Fletcher, to get GHF on the Library's program calendar. Wouldn't you like to take part in this creative and fun educational experience for children? We need volunteers to help out at the outdoor events, which usually run 3-4 hours. We try to schedule two or three during the summer. Anyone who loves children, regardless of your knowledge of the prairie, is welcome to join us. Are you an expert when it comes to water issues? We could really use your help designing a Prairie education program to go along with the reading program theme. **Contact Angie Babbit** at 785-840-9934 or angie.babbit@gmail.com if you are interested in helping out!

Monarch Watch Spring Open House and Plant Fundraiser

Saturday, May 8, 2010 8:00am to 3:00pm

You are cordially invited to join us for our annual Spring Open House and Plant Fundraiser at Foley Hall on West Campus of the University of Kansas. We've averaged 500-1000 visitors at these Open House events and we expect a good turnout for our next event as well. Nearly 4,000 butterfly plants (both annuals and perennials) including seedlings of several milkweed species, will be available (modest contributions are suggested). Directions to Monarch Watch and a list of plants that will be available is provided at <http://www.monarchwatch.org/openhouse/>.

The monarchs that went to space were returned to KU on March 4. Check out all the details at monarchwatch.org/space/

Plant the prairie! Kansas City WildLands Ecological Restoration Workday

Saturday, May 8, 2010 9:00 AM-Noon

Come help us plant wildflower seedlings grown from locally harvested seeds on three of Kansas City's beautiful remnant natural communities. Ernie Miller Park, Olathe, Kansas, Rocky Point Glades, Swope Park, Missouri, Jerry Smith Park prairie, south Kansas City, Missouri. To register for a site or for more information, call Linda Lehrbaum at 816-561-1061, ext. 116 or e-mail linda@bridgingthegap.org. *GHF is a member/partner in KC Wildlands.*



Little Bluestem for State Grass of Kansas

The Kansas Native Plant Society is promoting Little Bluestem (*Schizachyrium scoparium*) to be named by the Kansas State Legislature as the State Grass of Kansas. State symbols are a great way to teach students about Kansas. During recent debate in the Kansas House, an alternative grass was proposed. Valerie Wright commented to a KNPS discussion about why Little bluestem is the best choice. Thanks for her permission to include her remarks. Check out kansasnativeplantsociety.org for updates and how to help.

First of all, it is not about the kind of grass. The important thing is to have an icon that represents the prairies of Kansas. That is what the students were looking for. Little Bluestem is a compromise species. Not the western dominant grass (Buffalo Grass), not the eastern dominant grass (Big Bluestem), but one that is relatively abundant everywhere.

If we want the eastern and urban populations to understand the prairie and be proud to have a state grass in their garden, Buffalo grass won't do. It grows in the east but is soon overcome with weeds and other species that out compete it under higher rainfall conditions. People complain that it has to be weeded if used in the lawn and soon they replace it with something else. In schoolyards, where it is likely to be somewhat neglected, the administration and custodial staff will have it removed. It does best in the dry climate of the west. I have a small patch of Buffalo Grass as my lawn in Manhattan. I weed it all summer to keep it looking decent. Other than use as lawn turf, Buffalo grass doesn't have the horticultural appeal.

Little Blue has more appeal for horticultural displays (but of course, not for lawns). One of our KNPS members tells of a recent plant sale where several species of grasses in small pots were sold. The only one that sold out completely at \$10 a pot was Little Blue. When choosing an icon, it should be something that has some positive effect on the human psyche.

Buffalo grass is high in protein and therefore the favorite of cattle and bison. It keeps its nutritional value into the winter. That's why the bison herds migrated west for winter grazing. It is an important species for western ranchers. But cattle graze well on many kinds of grasses. Ranchers in west central Kansas are utilizing more Little Bluestem. Ranchers in the Flint Hills beef up their cattle on both Big and Little Blue. Why should ranchers in the west insist on a grass that doesn't persist well throughout the state? The opposite argument can be made for Big Bluestem. It is occasionally found in the west, but not as an important, dominant species.

Having said all that, the main point is still that it is not about the kind of grass but that we have a grass as a state icon. Why are these legislators wasting tax payers money by spending time arguing about what kind of grass? The point is that for no cost every child in Kansas can be educated about grasslands and the importance of the cattle industry. That should mean more to them and the future of their way of life.

Valerie Wright, Ph.D., Environmental Educator/Naturalist Konza Prairie Biological Station

Westar Energy Donates to Community Organizations

Brad Loveless, coordinator for Westar Energy's Green Team, Director for Biology and Conservation Programs, graciously designated to GHF the \$500 that was rewarded in honor of his 100 volunteer hours in the community. We appreciate this contribution to our efforts in preserving prairies. The check was presented at a luncheon in February.

Pictured from left: Bill Moore (Westar Energy CEO & President), Brad Loveless, Frank Norman (GHF Groundhog leader) and Melvin Depperschmidt (Westar employee and GHF volunteer).



Mark your Calendar!

Saturday, April 17: Lawrence, Kansas Earth Day Parade and Festival

Saturday, April 17 & 24: MO Prairie Foundation Native Plant Sale at Kansas City Missouri City Market, 7am to 1pm

Tuesday, May 11: GHF Board of Governors meeting 7pm Contact Joyce Wolf rjjawolf@sunflower.com

Saturday, May 22: GHF Prairie Appreciation Day at Snyder Prairie See page 1.

Friday, June 4 to Sunday, June 5: Iowa Prairie Network's 34th Loess Hills Prairie Seminar, Monona Co. Iowa

Sunday, June 20: Fourth Biennial Coblentz Prairie Foray, 1pm. West of Lawrence with Kansas Native Plant Society

Thursday, Jun 24th: 8th Annual Grant-Bradbury Prairie Jaunt 6:30pm-dark Topeka, KS with KNPS

Sue Holcomb is planning walks at the Prairie Center in Olathe for some of her neighbors as the weather permits and the flowering begins. There will be one in April in the west side woods and then later in May out on the prairie. She'll send out emails when she sets the dates. If you're interested email her at sholc@comcast.net and asked to be put on the contact list for Prairie Center walks.

The Tallgrass Prairie Spring-Burn Paradigm

Editor's note: I asked board members to write about the recent publicity on the conflict between annual burning in the Flint Hills and the air quality issues in the Kansas City area. These are the responses I received. Thanks to those who participated.

Recent discussions of possible burning restrictions in the Flint Hills due to concern about air quality could challenge the dominant prairie management paradigm in force for the past 150 years. Tallgrass prairie is a fire-adapted ecosystem. In eastern Kansas, fire suppression allows the spread of woody species at the expense of herbaceous ones. Fire also plays critical roles in cycling of nutrient, and in regulating the structure and dynamics of plant and animal population. Its importance as an essential management tool is indisputable. However, the practice of using annual spring burns to manage prairies in the eastern Great Plains does not approximate the historic frequency or timing of fires. The tradition of spring burning developed to maximize production of palatable vegetation for livestock, to minimize threats to humans in the landscape, and because of alleged adverse effects of fall and winter fires on prairie vegetation. There are many unanswered questions about the long-term effects of fire frequency and timing on tallgrass prairie. We do know that annual burning negatively impacts various native species, and some studies are challenging beliefs that fall or winter burns are detrimental to plant species composition and forage production – at least on ungraded prairie. More research is needed, but adjusting the frequency and timing of burns may be essential if we hope to maintain this ecologically and economically important ecosystem in the human-dominated landscape. Craig Freeman

If you have never lived in a town that is down wind from thousands of acres of range land burning, it may be difficult to understand complaints of air quality. The problems associated with the smoke and soot that overtake small towns in the Flint Hills are not trivial. I lived in Emporia, Kansas (the "front porch to the Flint Hills") for eleven years, and during burns, the smoke would hover over the town for weeks at a time. The fallout from the fires would come from miles around, with long strands of soot falling on cars and buildings. Spring cleaning included washing the gray off of my pale yellow bungalow. Charred remnants of the Flint Hills were ON my front porch. More importantly, during range land burns, asthmatics and allergy sufferers deal with respiratory stress and frequent use of necessary medication, if they have it. Even non-asthmatics have difficulty breathing during these times. A friend of mine who had moved to Emporia from New York listed air quality during spring burns as one reason she wanted to leave.

I have a lot of questions and no quick answers. Can we find a solution to the problem that is prairie friendly? Can we find one that is range land friendly? Is it necessary to burn the Flint Hills so extensively each year? Do the benefits of current management practices outweigh the negative effects of intensive yearly burning? Do the air quality impacts outweigh the sovereignty of the land owner? Should the land owner's management practices be determined by bureaucrats? If legislation were passed, who

would enforce burn restrictions on the vast expanse of the Flint Hills?
Angie Babbitt

I wonder if Flint Hills ranchers would mind if I stopped paying my trash bill and just dumped all my garbage at their house every few months. I could save a lot of money that way. I recently replaced all four tires on my car and had to pay a disposal fee each. It would have been cheaper to toss them out alongside the road somewhere in Linn or Chase County. I wonder if that would have bothered the local ranchers? Municipalities across the state have been hard hit by the economic situation. I bet cities in the Flint Hills could trim expenses by not treating their wastewater anymore and just dumping raw sewage into the area's rivers. Do you think the ranchers would mind? Mostly, however, I just wonder why ranchers think they are entitled to dump their filth into the laps of others. Mike Campbell

The following remarks were submitted anonymously. I have started referring to the ranchers "prairies" as native grass pastures as they are not prairies, considering the lack of species diversity, especially desirable forbs. As I go around the Flint Hills I am increasingly alarmed at how little prairie is left. It is mostly a big native grass pasture and even that is threatened by overgrazing. The main threat to the prairie's health is not a 3 year burn cycle (as discussed in the KC Star). It is annual burning along with early intensive grazing. As for air pollution, a 3 year burn cycle would reduce the smoke load by 2/3 immediately. With annual burning and intensive grazing there is in many cases very little biomass left to get a good burn. An every third year cycle would provide a better burn to control invasive woody species. There is also the detrimental effect of burning on fauna. Annual burning of everything is eliminating a number of bird and butterfly species. I know a ranch out here that has gone to a 3 year burn cycle with significant beneficial effects on the health of the prairie. Burning is part of maintaining a healthy prairie, but not burning everything annually. It should not be an all or nothing case, that is, all burning or no burning. This is an opportunity to advocate for an improved burning regimen.

This is the kind of contrast you see commonly in the Flint Hills along fence lines with grazing to the right in this case.



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We depend on your memberships!

If the date above your label is more than a year ago, or you've never given, please help us by sending your donation today. *Send to* Grassland Heritage Foundation, PO Box 394, Shawnee Mission, KS 66201.

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Rachel Snyder Scholarship Fund

Designate my donation for the Prairie Preservation Fund

Welcome new members Al & Linda Storms, Ted Abel, Paul & Barbara Gottesburen, Brad & Ellen Guess, Margaret Rose, Blake & Tina Mayberry, and Teresa Mandevill.

Thank you to returning members since the last newsletter: Helen Alexander, Michael Babbit, Robert G. Barnhardt, Jr., Lee Boyd, Richard A. Brune, Dr Francis E. Cuppage, Ronald Daly, Melvin Depperschmidt, Jane Drury/R Amos, Herb & Pat Duncan, Betty Lou Epstein, Nikki Guillot, Sandy Hazlett, Mark Larson, John & Valerie Roper, Karl & Lois Schletzbaum, and John & Patricia Solbach.

Special Gifts

Deborah Borek and David (DC) Jenkins in honor of Dr. Gary Tegtmeier's retirement from the Community Blood Center of Greater Kansas City

Westar Energy Foundation in honor of 100 community volunteer hours by Brad Loveless

Lawrence Give Back Program---Be sure to sign up for a card and designate GHF!

Thank you!

Craig Freeman for hosting the February and March board meetings

All the board members who brought goodies to eat to the annual meeting

Kevin Bachkora for his accounting services

The Jerry Taylor & Nancy Bryant Foundation without whom we could not have had all our outreach programs

David Lange for designing our new window decal & Scott Holcomb of Southpaw Promotions for getting us a great deal on printing

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I was out at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve yesterday hiking on the newly opened backcountry trails. They use a three year patch burn system. I could not help but notice that everywhere I walked, and I walked for four hours, the grass was mostly at least knee deep and some places thigh deep and thickly sodded. I did not see any woody invaders at all and no stems of broomweed, ironweed, or rigid goldenrod. For the for the middle three hours of my walk I did not see an single fence just rolling grass covered hills and valleys as far as I could see with almost no trees. It is a wonderful place to experience what it was like before roads and settlement. It would be a nice excursion for GHF.

From the Flint Hills

I have a tendency to look for the middle ground. I know we need to burn prairies or they won't be prairies for long. Although, I've seen patches that have been mowed and they seem okay. As a resident of Johnson County Kansas, I know that most of our air problems come the cars we can't seem to live without. Perhaps we could all park our cars for a week or two to cut back emissions when it's time for burning. Since that has as much chance of happening as a three year burn cycle, we need to be looking at compromises.

Sue Holcomb

We abuse the land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect. Aldo Leopold

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GHF Board of Governors Annual Meeting February 2010

Members taking a break, from left, Gary Tegtmeier, Rex Powell, Angie Babbit, Frank Norman, Steve Holcomb, Brad Guess and Chip Taylor.

Below: Board members that didn't have to hurry off before we got a photo taken, from left: Steve Holcomb, Angie Babbit, Andrea Repinsky, Sue Holcomb, Frank Norman, Rex Powell, Gary Tegtmeier, Joyce Wolf and Craig Freeman

The remaining board members are Mike Campbell, Amy Carlson, Glenn Fell, Craig Freeman, Tom Hammer, Jeff Hansen, and Doug Martin.



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