

Earthtones

Autumn 2011

Prairie Perspectives

Grasslands are one of the main biomes of the world. A biome is like a broader category of habitat. Grasslands can be found on several continents. Here, in central U.S. On the Pampas in South America. The Steppes in Russia. The savannahs in Africa. They can be either tropical or temperate.

Most of Europe, on the other hand, is temperate forest. As the dominating culture at that time and place, Europeans were stumped when first witnessing our prairie. Their own vocabulary lacking, they used a French word meaning "a meadow" (a great big meadow, as it was). Unnerved, settlers first moved into our woodland areas, then the savannah.

When there was no where else to go, they grudgingly moved out into the open. That act would be fortuitous for them as grasslands create the world's best soil. This natural resource also spelled their doom; worldwide, grasslands are the most endangered habitat with most of it (over 99%) plowed up for farming.

I find it interesting to see people clamor about saving the rainforest yet seldom a peep, and then usually just local, about grasslands. True, rainforests have the highest diversity and have a lot of potential. On the other hand, grasslands feed the world. Protecting what is left and learning from it will help us with soil conservation and formation. And help us continue to feed the world.

So, I wonder if we, as humans, are predisposed *not* to like the grassland? Sure, there are people out there who love the prairie, who expound on it, and are

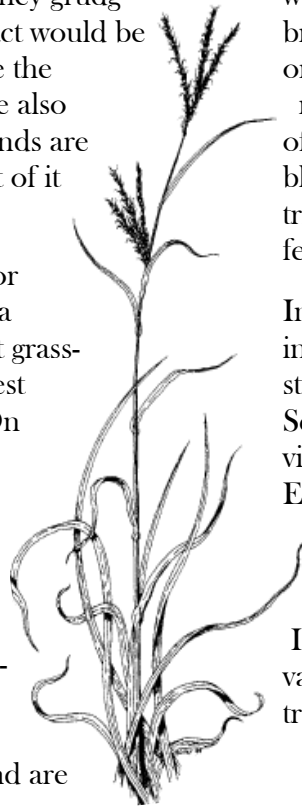
refreshed by its broad, open spaces. But I would bet that these are a minority, and most of us find our natural solitude within trees.

Perhaps it is the similarities to the open water. As one looks over a great expanse of prairie, the imagery (as shown in literature) has often been of a grassy sea. The wide open prairie has little to block the wind (much like water) and so the wind rushes forth, unheeded, creating wave-like movements on the grass heads. It would be easy to feel unprotected, vulnerable from storms, fire, and other calamities (much like on the water).

Yet, if one looks, and looks hard, the beauty and wonders of the prairie become available to us. The broadened horizons of green. The rainbow of colors throughout the summer brought forth by the many wildflowers (compared to the short season of woodland flowers). The deep smell of rich, black earth. The buzz of insects mingled with the trills of hidden birds. The explosion of sound and feathers of a flushed pheasant.

In Washington County, one may experience all that in more in one of our many county parks. Reconstructed prairies can be found at Marr Park, Schmitter Heritage Area (a great place for scenic views and a feel for pioneer Iowa), and parts of English River Wildlife Area. Remnants can be found along the Kewash Trail and Clemons Creek (which features both upland and lowland prairie). More information on these areas and Iowa's prairies can be found by visiting our conservation center where we will be proudly hosting a traveling prairie exhibit beginning October 15.

By Pamela Holz



Washington County Conservation Board

New Projects!!

A lot has been happening this summer with our county parks. Foster Pond, to the southeast, is in the process of reestablishing its fisheries. All we have to do is wait for the pond to refill and we can restock. The same will occur at Willow Pond, off the Kewash. The pond has just been rebuilt, complete with new fish habitat. The new dike at English River Wildlife Area has just been finished as well.

At Marr Park, we have also been busily improving the park. Electric and water hook ups are in for the new campground. As of this writing, the road has been plowed out and the staff have been busy laying down fabric and adding gravel. Soon, we will be redirecting the road. With luck and fortunate weather, the new sites should be available by next summer.

In addition, an Eagle Scout project prepped an area in the south end of the western pines for a playscape. A playscape is sort of like a playground, only using natural materials and materials that blend in with the surroundings. Current components include tree cookie stepping stones, log benches, and climbing logs. More elements will be added as plans and funds permit. Your input (or your children's) would be welcome during these planning stages.

Also in the works is a makeover of the Lab inside the Conservation Education Center. We will be transforming the room into a kid-friendly play/educational space. Kid-sized tables and chairs will allow young visitors the space to investigate, examine, and manipulate various kits on hand. This may include puzzles, natural wood blocks, hand lens and simple microscopes.

For more information on these projects, or ways you can help, contact the Conservation Center at 319/657-2400 or wccb@iowatelecom.net.

Thoughts on the Prairie

Nothing worth of note, it being entire prairie.
- Surveyor's Field Notes, 1855

Eternal prairie and grass, with occasional groups of trees. [Explorer John] Frémont prefers this to every other landscape. To me it is as if someone would prefer a book with blank pages to a good story.
- Charles Preuss, 1842

The prairie, in all its expressions, is a massive, subtle place, with a long history of contradiction and misunderstanding. But it is worth the effort at comprehension. - Wayne Fields, 1988

The first experience of the plains, like the first sail with a "cap" full of wind, is apt to be sickening. This once overcome, the nerves stiffen, the senses expand, and man begins to realize the magnificence of being.
- Richard Irving Dodge, 1877

We look at prairie and we see a great emptiness, a void that staggers the psyche and leaves much too much room for a mind to wander.
- Randy Winter, 1987

Then I discovered the prairie, and a slow healing began. - Stephen R. Jones, 2000

I was born on the prairies where the wind blew free and there was nothing to break the light of the sun. I was born where there were no enclosures.
- Geronimo



***Congratulations to Maintenance
Tech. Fritz Engel! Fritz and Jessica
Marsh of Illinois married this past
spring.***

Thanks to the Following

Day Camps

Cassandra Svatos	Linda Finke
Kay Hoyle	Addie Pacha
Aaron Carpenter	Janet Conrad
Margaret Ziegrowsky	Anna Holz
Krisi Prochaska	Andi Klein
Glenda Sulentic	David Yoder
Melissa Kauffman	



Other Volunteers and Donations

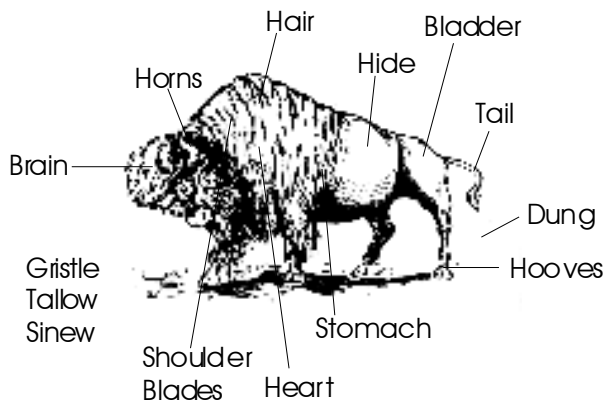
Rick and Phyllis: center landscaping

Where the Buffalo Roamed

We all know that the Native Americans on the Great Plains never wasted a part of the buffalo they hunted. In the past, they had to; it was their version of Walmart.

Can you match the part of the buffalo on the illustration with *one* of its uses listed below? Answers are on page 5.

1. Grounded up, used for diaper rash
2. Used to tan the hide
3. Rattles
4. Hoes
5. Bow strings
6. Whips
7. Pillows
8. Fire carriers
9. Outer lining used as bag
10. Tobacco pouch
11. Something for babies to teethe on
12. Container used for cooking
13. Sealing food into containers
14. Disguise to hunt more buffalo



Washington County Conservation Board

Office: 319/657-2400

Fax: 319/657-2500

E-mail: wccb@iowatelecom.net

Website:

co.washington.ia.us/departments/conservation

Members: Lyle Moen
Liz Kaufman
Craig Capps
Bill Nickell
Mike Davis

Staff: Steve Anderson, Exec. Director
Bob Bellmer, Park Ranger
Pamela Holz, Naturalist
Fritz Engel, Maint. Technician
Kathy Dolan, Center Coordinator

Washington County Conservation Board meetings are held the second Wednesday of each month at 4:30 p.m. at the Conservation Education Center. Visitors are welcome.

The WCCB is an Equal Opportunity Employer.

If you would like a copy of this newsletter in larger print, please contact our office.

This newsletter is printed on recycled paper.

Pumpkin Carving Contest

NEW THIS YEAR! As part of our annual Halloween Hike, we will also be having a contest to see who can carve the best pumpkin. Anyone can enter. Entries will be judged by the participants of the Halloween Hike and those with the most votes will receive prizes. Winners need not be present to win.

Contest Rules

1. Each individual may only enter one jack o' lantern each.
2. Entries must be carved, not painted. Staff will place them along the Hike's trail and light with candles.
3. All entries must be in good taste and rated G.
4. Age categories are as follows: 11 and under, 12–17, and adult.
5. Entries may be submitted at the Conservation Education Center on Friday, October 14 between 8 and 4:30 and Saturday, October 15 between 8 and 1:00 p.m.
6. Photos of entries may be used for publicity purposes.

If you wish to reclaim your pumpkin after the contest, you must pick it from the trail at 8:00 p.m. on October 15. All unclaimed pumpkins when the trail closes will be composted.



Answers to Page 3:

- | | | |
|--------------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. Dung | 2. Brain | 3. Hooves |
| 4. Shoulder blades | 5. Sinew | |
| 6. Tail | 7. Hair | 8. Horns |
| 9. Heart | 10. Bladder | 11. Gristle |
| 12. Bladder | 13. Tallow | 14. Hide |

Prairie Heritage on Display



Americans and millions of people around the world will sit down to a meal sometime today courtesy of the prairies that once covered much of Iowa. The Iowa Association of Naturalists and the Washington County Conservation Board invites visitors to experience the story of our prairie heritage through the exhibit

“Tallgrass Prairie – Past, Present and Future.” This traveling display will be hosted at Marr Park October 15 through December 4.

Hands-on displays and interactive components will engage visitors in learning about the prairie landscape and native plant species. “We want visitors to leave with a better understanding of the story of Iowa’s prairie heritage and to become aware of, enjoy and take action to enhance prairies in Iowa today,” noted Anita Fisher, a member of the exhibit design team. “Protected remnants in a pioneer cemetery, native prairie flowers in a garden, and strips of reconstructed prairies along our roadways – these are all ways Iowans are saving a part of our heritage as well as important habitat.”

The “Tallgrass Prairie” exhibit was produced by the Iowa Association of Naturalists with funds from the Resource Enhancement and Protection – Conservation Education Program (REAP – CEP), Living Roadway Trust Fund, Pheasants Forever, Iowa Trust for Local Conservation, the Tallgrass Prairie Center – UNI, and Truax Company. IAN members and their agencies, including the Washington CCB, also contributed to the project.

PRESORTED STANDARD
U.S. Postage
Paid
Permit No. 43
Keota, IA 52248

WASHINGTON COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD
2943 HIGHWAY 92
AINSWORTH, IA 52201

Return Service Requested

Center Winter Hours
Monday, Thursday & Friday
8:00 a.m.—4:30 p.m.

Saturday
8:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m.

Sunday
1:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.



Bring the whole family to our annual Halloween Hike for some fun and excitement. We will be discovering the animals of the prairie as we hike through Marr Park's very own prairie.

This year, you will begin as well as end at the Conservation Education Center. From the Center, you will be directed to the luminary-lit prairie trail where you will meet your challenges. Discover the importance of life underground as you crawl through tunnels. Learn about the importance of insect pollinators, but avoid the hungry spider. And much more! Along the way, vote on your favorite pumpkin for the pumpkin carving contest.

Halloween Hike: The Wild Prairie

Saturday, October 15

6:45 p.m.— 8:30 p.m.

Marr Park

After these adventures, you will finish at the Conservation Education Center where more fun awaits you. We will have crafts and refreshments. Plus, you'll be one of the first to view the traveling Prairie Exhibit opening that weekend!

Enter the trail anytime between 6:45 - 8:00 p.m. Center activities will continue till 8:30.

Volunteers are also needed for this event. Call if you would like to volunteer.

For more information, call 319/657-2400.

