

December Docent News

Happy Holidays!!!

Greetings from the Oklahoma TNC Staff to you and yours. Things are busy as always here. 1996 is the Tenth Anniversary of the Oklahoma State Chapter and Field Office. 1996 will be a banner year for The Conservancy. More information will be available about events in upcoming Docent Newsletters.

DOCENT COUNCIL MEETING - Nine docents attended our first Docent Council (I should say ten, but the tenth couldn't get into the locked building and was unable to get our attention on the second floor!) I think that this group has a very high energy level and will guide the Docent program to an especially successful year! Council members and their responsibilities follow:

Activities Coordinators - Iris McPherson, Carolyn Mathews and
Marilyn Fugate

Training Coordinators - Dick Baker and Jo Brooks

Workday Coordinators - Faye Andrews and Jan Holsomback

Scheduling Coordinator - Linda Meistrell

Gift Shop Manager - Sue Wheeler

Gift Shop Bookkeeper - Kathy Detwiler

Visitation Records - George Meyers

Pawhuska Liaison - Stu Marshall

Historians - Al and Liz Medley

Speakers Bureau Coordinator - Tom Clark

Newsletter/Communications Coordinator - Nyla Woody

Clerical Coordinator - Anne Johnson

DOCENT RECRUITMENT - The new year brings new docents and we need your help. You are the best referral for new docents. Do you have friends who are interested in the time you spend at the Prairie, and in The Nature Conservancy? If so, please recommend them for the docent program. We will send them a letter and give them the opportunity to participate in training during April. Also, if any civic groups you belong to, or know of, might be interested in a program geared toward Prairie Docent recruitment, please let me know! (Mary McIntyre, 585-1117)

We are considering holding some informational coffees in the following communities: Ponca City, Pawhuska, Bartlesville and Tulsa. If you would like to help host one of these coffees and visit with potential docents, please contact me. The plan is to show a Tallgrass Video and provide information as well as one-on-one contact with interested persons. These will be held during February, and may be held both weekdays or Saturday morning/afternoons. We will need lots of assistance with these, so please volunteer to help!

The new docents will complete training April 27. They will be available for duty on the prairie with veteran docents on May 1. Our minimum goal for number of new docents is 40.

DOCENT REORIENTATION - Mark your calendars for March 9, 1996. That date has been set for the annual Docent Reorientation. This meeting will be held in Pawhuska, site to be announced, and at The Preserve. Plan on spending the entire day refreshing your memory and learning some new information. We will be discussing some changes to the program (including bunkhouse tours!) More will be announced about this later. Bring your calendar and be prepared to sign up for shifts. We will officially begin our season on the Preserve on March 15. We will begin with docents staffing the Preserve on Wednesdays, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. Our goal is to expand this coverage in June to SEVEN days a week, from 10 am to 4 pm. This goal will only be met with your help! We need your time recommitment so start thinking about it now!

1996 WORKDAYS - You may have noticed that March 9 is the second Saturday, which is traditionally the workday on the preserve. Because this reorientation has been set for that date, the first workday for 1996 will be held on March 16. In April, we will switch back to the Second Saturday for the remaining workdays.

"Prairie Happenings"

News from Harvey Payne, Director, Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, and
Bob Hamilton, Director of Science and Stewardship, Tallgrass Prairie Preserve

BISON CORRAL - Harvey reports that the cowboys are continuing their work on the bison corral, although painting has been put on hold due to cold weather. Half of the crew is putting sliding pin latches on the gates, and also expanding the pen on the north side (more painting in the spring!) They are also placing a roof over the squeeze tub and the shoot area. Bob adds that they have completed the semi-truck load-out alley and the loading dock, and spread gravel in the big pen. Other crew members are building more temporary fence (6-7 strand barbed wire fencing about six feet high) in the bison unit (for the next addition). This totals about five miles of fence. Winter projects will include maintenance for about 90 miles of fence!

NOTE: These cowboys proved their flexibility and determination when they joined TNC Oklahoma Field Office staff members at Twin Cave Preserve on Dec. 12 and spent several hours underground in the cave! They were willing participants, but seemed VERY glad to see the trees and the sky after their underground adventure! (They weren't the only ones!)

BURNING - On Nov. 29, 235 acres at the north end of the bison unit were burned. Two burns were done on Dec. 15, 210 acres on the southeast corner of the bison unit and about two acres around the bison corrals to reduce fire hazard from welding.

SPRING PROJECTS - In addition to the everlasting painting, spring projects will include taking up more of the old interior fencing, finished fencing for the bison area expansion, fence maintenance and spring burns.

BISON - The bison are currently scattered about their area in small groups of 20 to 40 animals. Most are in groups of ten to fifteen, and the bulls are in separate "bachelor" herds. According to Harvey, they look great and have nice "woolly" coats. They are really fat as there hasn't been much severe weather and food has been plentiful. The young animals are frisky on cool mornings, Bob reports. Harvey notes that we are expecting about 150 calves to be born in the spring. Last year, 122 were born, and the first calving was on March 13.

RESEARCH - Bob notes that data gathered from 1995 research projects is being analyzed. We hope to have interesting facts from these projects soon, and will keep you informed.

TU RESEARCH - Tulsa University researchers are working with TNC staff to determine the extent of the salinization of the soil in the old oil and gas areas located throughout the Preserve. (Use of salt water in drilling operations has caused salt accumulations in well areas.) The extent of the salinization problem, and the identity of the chemicals which are polluting the soil in these areas are being determined. The chemicals result in denuding of the landscape, and the inevitable erosion which follows lack of vegetation. A remedial plan is expected in early '96.

ON THE PRAIRIE - Healthy deer and coyote populations on the prairie are reported, and a bobcat has been seen regularly around the stucco/Barnard house. Many birds have been seen flying south, and the winter raptors are now in residence. These include short-eared and screech owls, bald eagles and many hawks (northern harriers, rough-legged and Swainson's). Harvey reports seeing more eagles this year than in previous years, and has spotted an occasional golden or juvenile bald eagle. The plants are all dormant.

PRAIRIE VISITATION - George Meyers has provided information about visitation during the fall months. In September, 992 visitors registered; in October, 1588 registered; and in November 770 registered. These visitors bring our cumulative count of registered visitors during 1995 to 12,272, up about 1800 from the count in 1994 at this same time.

Other interesting facts from George's information - 220 of those November visitors were from states other than Oklahoma, with 33 of them from other countries (Indonesia and England specifically, two large tour groups).

FINALLY, another round of thank you's to all of you who have made 1995 such a successful year for the Oklahoma Chapter. We appreciate your time and dedication. I hope that you are enjoying the holiday season, and send best wishes for the coming New Year!

Mary McIntyre