

The Nature Conservancy

TALLGRASS PRAIRIE

Docent Newsletter - - - -



September 1996

**MARK YOUR CALENDAR NOW! OCTOBER 12
IS DOCENT APPRECIATION DAY, Get your reservations in.**

This N That - Mary McIntyre, Education and Outreach Coordinator

Autumn in Oklahoma is my favorite time of year. I'm looking forward to spending time getting back to nature as summer greens change to autumn reds and golds. This beautiful time is also when many of our prettiest prairie plants are blooming. There's an opportunity coming up to learn more about them. Read on in your newsletter for news from Dick Baker, training coordinator.

Fall is also our time to provide you with a special evening of fun in appreciation for the time you have devoted to our Preserve work. Remember that October 12 is the date!! The place is Pawhuska - at The Prairie Flower in the Mercantile Building on north Kihkah. The time is 6:30 p.m.! Hope to see you there. More information and RSVP instructions follow.....

A super thanks to all of you for your scheduling efforts. You have done a great job of plugging yourself in for the fall months and Connie and I greatly appreciate it! (Connie Roberts is our new secretary/receptionist. Many of you have talked with her on the phone. Connie is assisting me with the docent scheduling, and will be maintaining a new database which tracks your volunteer hours!) We will continue with this method of scheduling through The Nature Conservancy office. Thanks so much for participating in this new method and making it a success!! We have managed to staff the Preserve Gift Shop every day the entire summer, with only one or two exceptions!

Any docent who is interested in taking a more active docent role by assisting TNC as a volunteer in a specific area of the Docent Program is encouraged to sign up for a 1997 Docent Council position on the 1996 Program Evaluation, which will be distributed at the Docent Appreciation Dinner (and mailed to those who can't attend). This involvement extends to contributing some additional hours as an organizer. The council meets during the months of December, January and February for planning purposes. A special event for council members only is planned each year to honor their involvement.

Two new positions will be added to the Docent Council this year, including Recruitment Coordinator (to help plan and conduct new docent recruitment events in February). Two or more people can serve as co-coordinators in many of the positions. Think this over and plan to participate!

Hope to see you this fall at the Prairie~ Mary

Training Update - Dick Baker, Volunteer Training Coordinator

Field Guide Training - Several of you have expressed interest in being a field guide at The Tallgrass Prairie Preserve. A team has been selected to participate in partial training at Oxley Nature Center, and to help design our own program for The Preserve. This is an exciting opportunity to expand your docent knowledge and involvement. Our initial group will be training more of you to work in this area during the 1997 season. You can indicate your interest in this program on your 1996 Docent Program Evaluation, which will be distributed at the Docent Appreciation Dinner, and through the mail for those who cannot attend.

Fall Wildflower Identification Day - Come up to the Preserve on Saturday, Sept. 28 and learn the identities of some of those lovely autumn plants you've been wondering about. The group will be led by Bob Hamilton and/or Sandy. Meet at the headquarters building at 9:30 a.m. - we'll be finished by 11:30. Please RSVP your intent to attend this special training session by calling the office, 918 585-1117 by SEPTEMBER 26.

VOLUNTEER(S) NEEDED: Bob Hamilton has requested volunteer(s) to mount plant specimens collected by Dr. Michael Palmer (OSU) at The Preserve. While researching plant species, he collected specimens for our use and display. These specimens currently occupy boxes at the Barnard or stucco house, and need to be properly glued onto herbarium paper with the accompanying labels. If you enjoy giving great attention to detail, and are interested in working on this project, please contact Mary at the Tulsa Field Office, 585-1117, for more information.

News from the Preserve

from Bob Hamilton, Director of Science and Stewardship

The Bison can generally be found in one to three large herds this time of year. They are grazing spring 96 and fall 95 burn areas, located in the NW, NE, SE and South parts of the bison unit. Adult coats are sleek and black, and most calves have molted from orange to a dark brown. This is the active "rut" season, so the bulls are being quite attentive to the cows.

Early August rains have produced a lot of new growth on the preserve, although the heat has prevented many plants from flowering. The late summer flower season will start in September. On August 17, lightning set a wild fire in the far northeast corner of the Preserve. This fire burned 10-15 acres until it was sprayed out by Bob and Sandy.

Currently Bob and Sandy are conducting the third year of vegetative sampling. The cowboys are working on the bison corrals now after building one-half mile of cattle fence in the Greeley pasture in just one week. All cattle are now off the property. The priming coat is almost completed on the bison corral! The next task will be to apply the top coat!

A special thanks from the Tallgrass Prairie staff for your efforts in staffing the Headquarters seven days a week!!! Thanks!!!!

*****FALL WORKDAYS ***** REMINDER!

With September comes the return of the workday at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve! Please come help us this fall! Workdays are an opportunity to work side by side with other volunteers who value the beauty of the Oklahoma prairie! Some are docents, but some are just concerned members or even non-members! A major emphasis of our workdays this fall will continue to be the painting of the bison corral. The base coat is one -- but we need to get a top coat on the primer in order for the pipe to remain rustfree. Bring your tube socks (it's kind of fun to paint with socks on your hands) and your grubby clothes. Other options for work will be available for those who really don't want to paint; jobs like trimming, touchups, fix-up projects. Get involved with fall workdays!!

Dates are: Sept. 14 Oct. 12 and Nov. 9!!! Be there!!!

Docent Appreciation Dinner - October 12 - Reservations Required!

- Iris McPherson, Volunteer Activities Coordinator

Plans are shaping up for a really fun Docent Appreciation event on Saturday, October 12. Hope you can attend. First, we'll meet at 6:30 p.m. at the Prairie Flower in the Mercantile Building, downtown Pawhuska, for a delightful dinner, to be served at 7 p.m. Presentations and special entertainment will follow! Please make your reservations by calling the office at 585-1117, no later than 5 p.m., Wednesday, October 2. Hope to see you there!

How I Came to Love the Prairie, by Dave Dolcater

Growing up in the short grass prairie country of the Nebraska Panhandle, southeastern Wyoming and northeastern Colorado, I developed an appreciation for the vast expanse of landscape that could be seen and felt from atop any of the rolling hills in the area. Mule deer and pronghorn antelope passing through always got my attention, as did the hawks, owls, meadowlarks, killdeers, horned larks, lark buntings, white-tailed and black-tailed jack rabbits, rattlesnakes, migrating waterfowl, and the occasional coyote (or coyote howl). Following are some of the specific items that make all prairies (whether the grasses are short, mixed, or tall) really special places for me:

• ***wide-open spaces--** there has always been something relaxing, mind-clearing and thought-enhancing about looking out over a prairie as far as the eye can see and imagining how it must have looked several hundred years earlier, prior to the time modern man made

his mark on the earth. Before there were roads, fences, utility lines, buildings and lights, just the unbroken universe of grass-covered hills and valleys strewn with wildflowers beneath that big sky.

***land forms**-- best seen in early morning or early evening when the shadows are long, the distant hills, buttes, mesas and valleys clearly express their relationship to the surrounding landscape.

*those fabulous **sunrises and sunsets**-- where better to see a sunrise or sunset in all directions, and from horizon to horizon, than on the prairie?

***weather**-- where you can see the clouds and storms for tens of miles in all directions, where you can get hands-on experience with the tremendous power of a thunderstorm. In the middle of a blizzard, it is easy to be in full agreement with the statement, "There's nothing between here and the North Pole, except two barbed-wire fences, and both of those are down."

wind-- nearly always making its presence felt on the prairie, and could a prairie exist if the maximum wind speed was less than ten miles an hour?

***grasses and wildflowers** -- those wonderful colors, textures, structures and aromas are a delight to behold, whether at close range or at a distance when the wind is stirring. What about their marvelous resiliency, tenacity and soil-enhancing qualities?

***wildlife** -- bison and all the other endemic fauna add to the endless fascination of the prairie experience.

***sounds**-- for a city dweller, the prairie sounds of crickets, bird songs, booming prairie chickens, coyote howls, grazing bison and the wind provide a welcome relief from the din of city traffic, emergency sirens, barking dogs, lawn mowers, etc.

***stars and constellations**-- a clear night on the prairie is spectacular. For those acquainted only with the night sky over a city, the view of the night sky over the prairie can be nearly overwhelming.

PRAIRIE VISITORS IN JULY: George reported 1362 visitors signed in, a significant drop from both 1995 and 1994. We wonder why. Those who came were complimentary, and often delighted.

EDITORIAL: The road in to the preserve was being oiled and new gravel laid over the oil when we were at the Prairie last week and what a neat improvement that is. Previously, I had felt that to pave the road might open the way for visitors who weren't really interested in the wellbeing of the prairie. I had voiced that concern to Frederick Drummond one day when he visited the Preserve. I was wrong. Remember the movie Field of Dreams? Made about 1979, I think. I read recently that fifty thousand visitors still come to that Iowa cornfield annually. I believe we need a paved road to make way for an increased base of Tallgrass Prairie Preserve appreciators. Nyla Bryan Woody

EDITORIAL: **A Tip of the Hat to Bill Rinehart!!**

We were finally able to find time to read all his *Across the Fence* articles and what a wealth of information and history those are. Thank you, Bill for a really great contribution! Nyla Bryan Woody