



Published by the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve Docent Program

Distributed to Volunteers and Supporters of the Oklahoma Chapter of The Nature Conservancy

### NATURE CONSERVANCY NEWS RELEASE

—Jay Pruett

JANUARY 28, 2005, TULSA, OKLAHOMA: Michael A. Fuhr is the new state director for *The Nature Conservancy* in Oklahoma, the non-profit conservation organization announced today. As State Director, Fuhr will lead all aspects of the conservation group's efforts in the state, including land protection, science, and philanthropy. His first tasks include developing a five-year conservation plan for the Conservancy's work in Oklahoma. He manages a staff of 22.



*Mike Fuhr – new State Director for  
The Nature Conservancy of Oklahoma*

“Michael brings a wealth of experience to our

team,” said Rob McKim, Central U.S. Regional Director for The Nature Conservancy. “His insight will be very valuable as we continue to balance economic opportunities with the protection of natural resources.”

Fuhr comes to Oklahoma after seven years with The Nature Conservancy's Arkansas Chapter, where he served most recently as Director of Aquatic Conservation. His experience ranges across all facets of land conservation and protection work, including leadership of aquatic conservation and project management, strategic planning, fund raising and partner relationships. In Arkansas, Fuhr led efforts to develop a conservation assessment designed to protect the native plants and animals within the Ouachita Mountains Ecoregion. He also spearheaded the Chapter's conservation efforts to conserve Ozark rivers.

“I'm very excited about developing or expanding existing programs that address critical threats to Oklahoma's unique ecosystems, such as our extensive grasslands and our diverse river and karst systems,” said Fuhr. “I'm very interested in working collaboratively with our partners to ensure future generations will be able to enjoy Oklahoma's rich natural resources.”

Prior to the Conservancy, Fuhr worked with the Missouri Department of Conservation and the Illinois Natural History Survey. He holds B.S. and M.S. degrees in Biology from the University of Illinois.

“With Mike’s work, our chapter is recognized throughout Arkansas for solid aquatic conservation accomplishments and vision,” said Scott Simon, state director of The Nature Conservancy in Arkansas. “Mike is known for his good humor, strong scientific background and collaborative approach. He will be a great asset to Oklahoma.”

### **No MORE DOCENT DISCOUNTS**

—John Fisher

In case you haven’t noticed in the updated Gift Shop procedures, we no longer give any discounts for merchandise.

After looking at the problems of maintaining an up-to-date eligibility list, the potential to upset members who aren’t on the list, not to mention the difficulty of figuring 10-percent of \$1.25, Harvey has decided to stop the discounts. For what it’s worth; the original Docent Council voted many years ago not to offer discounts since that wasn’t why we volunteered and discounts reduced the funds the gift shop provided to the Preserve.

### **THE DOCENT NEWS: BACK ISSUES**

—Andrew Donovan-Shead

As promised at the Winter Docent Meeting, a set of back issues of *The Docent News* is available

in the Visitors’ Center. You will find them in two green, zippered, ring binders, contents of which date from the first issue published by Kim Hagan. Issues that were delivered in electronic format are reprinted in color.

### **VOLUNTEER POSITIONS OPEN**

—Dennis Bires

Many thanks to Deana Brewster, who has agreed to succeed Monica Murray as organizer of the Docent Recognition Dinner. Monica will be a tough act to follow, but we have every confidence in Deana, who will have ample moral support from her husband Dennis.

Thanks also to Don Bruner, who has for several years ably organized our Docent Reorientation program. Everyone who attended Reorientation on March 5 experienced a most informative and enjoyable event. Don will now pass that torch on to another able organizer, who has yet to step forward. Nominations are being accepted, particularly self-nominations.

Other positions that are available are New Docent Recruiting for Tulsa, and New Docent Recruiting for Pawhuska. These positions involve hosting one recruiting meeting in late winter, as well as handling advance publicity and possibly follow-up communications with prospective docents. David Turner has produced a terrific recruiting Power Point presentation, which will be available for all recruiting meetings.



*American hazel (hazelnut),  
Corylus Americana,  
by George Pierson at the Nickel Preserve.*

We also need a new Schedule Coordinator, to help docents without computers sign up for shifts, and to send out gentle reminders to all of us when a gap in the schedule looms, particularly on busy holiday weekends.

Finally, we need a down-and-dirty sort of

person to be Work Day Coordinator, to schedule Prairie Road Crew days, oilfield cleanup days, and trail maintenance projects. This position sometimes includes directing non-docent volunteers and their leaders, particularly scout troops engaged in service projects.



*Nickel Preserve First Elk,  
by John Fisher.*

Becoming a volunteer leader is a simple process. There is no interview, no physical exam, no reference check. Just contact Program Coordinator Dennis Bires at [dennisbires@lycos.com](mailto:dennisbires@lycos.com), or 918-341-3908.

#### **NICKEL PRESERVE FLORA**

—George Pierson

I am planning to visit the Nickel Preserve every couple of weeks this year and photograph any flowering plants that I find, for display in the newsletter. Herein these pictures are the most recent. Things are starting to pop out all over. Dog tooth violet and bloodroot are typically the first things to bloom in the Ozarks.

#### **JUNE BUTTERFLY COUNTS**

—John Fisher

Once again it's time to start planning for the

annual butterfly count at your favorite Nature Conservancy Preserve.



*Acmon Blue, Plebejus acmon,  
 Four Canyon Preserve, 18 Aug 2004,  
 by John Fisher.*

We've added a new count this year at the Four Canyon Preserve, The Nature Conservancy's first preserve in western Oklahoma. This should be an especially interesting count since this preserve features a number of butterfly species not found on the preserves in the eastern part of the state. Some of the western specialties found at Four Canyon are the Acmon Blue, Fulvia Checker-spot, Red Satyr, Uncas Skipper, and the Dotted Roadside-Skipper. We surveyed butterflies at the Preserve four times last year and found something new every time so it's a good possibility this count could turn up another preserve or county record. If you're interested in participating in the Four

Canyon count please let me know.



*Dotted Roadside-Skipper, Amblyscirtes eos,  
 Four Canyon Preserve, 18 Aug 2004,  
 by John Fisher.*

- Pontotoc Ridge Preserve  
 Date: June 11<sup>th</sup>  
 Time: 10:00 AM  
 Where: Preserve Headquarters  
 Contact: Walter Gerard 918-747-4771
- Keystone Ancient Forest Preserve  
 Date: June 14<sup>th</sup>  
 Time: 9:00 AM  
 Where: Convenience store parking lot at  
 209<sup>th</sup> W Ave exit from US 412  
 Contact: John Fisher  
 918-245-8662 [jfisher@tnc.org](mailto:jfisher@tnc.org)
- Four Canyon Preserve  
 Date: June 18<sup>th</sup>  
 Time: 10:00 AM  
 Where: Preserve entrance 13 mi. west of

Vici on Hwy 51 & 8 mi. south  
Contact: John Fisher  
918-245-8662 [jfisher@tnc.org](mailto:jfisher@tnc.org)



*Dotted Skipper, Hesperia attalus,  
Four Canyon Preserve, 18 Aug 2004,  
by John Fisher.*

- J. T. Nickel Family Wildlife & Nature Preserve  
Date: June 25<sup>th</sup>  
Time: 9:30 AM  
Where: Preserve Headquarters in Sawmill Hollow  
Contact: Walter Gerard 918-747-4771
- Tallgrass Prairie Preserve  
Date: July 2<sup>nd</sup>  
Time: 9:30 AM  
Where: Preserve Visitors' Center

Contact: Walter Gerard 918-747-4771



*Eastern Comma, Polygonia comma,  
Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, 21 Aug 2004,  
by John Fisher.*

#### WEB ADDRESS SHORTCUT

—Dennis Bires

Our Webmaster, George Pierson, has created a shortcut web address that goes directly to the Docent Page on the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve web-site. It is: [www.oklanature.com/prod/docents.html](http://www.oklanature.com/prod/docents.html).

Thanks George!



*Nickel Preserve Elk,  
by John Fisher*

## TALLGRASS PRAIRIE PRESERVE NEWS

—Bob Hamilton

- The first bison calves should start arriving in late March. Keep your eyes open!
- A dozen burns are planned for the preserve this spring that will total about 10,000 acres. We got off to a roaring start on March 3 when a single unit of 8,300 acres was burned: about 1,000 on the preserve and the rest on the adjacent Bass Ranch.
- A new roof was installed on the Gift Shop last month by a local contractor. This should put an end to the drips on the checkout counter on rainy days. The old roof tin was “recycled” as siding on the old shoeing barn next door.
- I attended the annual *Society for Range Management* meeting in Ft. Worth, TX last month along with 1,500 other “rangy” folks. One of the most interesting and highly attended symposium was on the threats facing our Great Plains grasslands. Issues discussed were fragmentation from industrial wind farms, fences and power lines, and the role of heterogeneity in maintaining biodiversity (patch burning, that is).

## DOCENT EVENTS CALENDER

—[www.oklanature.com/prod/docents.html](http://www.oklanature.com/prod/docents.html)

- New Docent Training: Saturday, April 9, and Saturday, 16 April 2005 from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. each day. Located at the Ecological Research Station, near Preserve Headquarters.
- Please bring your lunch. New Docents must attend both days of training, then serve an “apprentice shift” on a day of their choice with an experienced docent.
- Spring Oilfield Cleanup: Saturday, April 16<sup>th</sup>, 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Meet at headquarters. Bring your own lunch. Spring Oilfield Cleanup coincides with the second day of New Docent Training, so hopefully the new folks will get to see just how down and dirty we can get, and how much good we can do for the landscape. We’ll break for lunch at the same time as the new class, so we’ll have an opportunity to chat with them and congratulate them on getting involved.
  - Prairie Road Crew, Cookout, and Hike. Saturday, May 14<sup>th</sup>, from 10:00 a.m. to about 4:30 p.m. We’ll do a quick cleanup of the county roads from 10:00 until noon, then break for a cookout near Preserve Headquarters. At 1:00, we’ll drive to the southeast corner of the Preserve for a hike along Wild Hog Creek, an area of dramatic topography. Bring hiking shoes because the area is rugged with no trail.
  - Bird Identification Workshop. Saturday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, at 10:00 a.m. Jim Thayer will lead a bird identification workshop at the Tallgrass Prairie. It is directed at beginners, so no background is necessary. Experienced naturalists will enjoy it as well. We will meet at the Visitors Center at 10:00 a.m. Bring binoculars and guidebooks if you have them. If you plan to attend, please call

Jim Thayer at 918-494-3784 or the Pawhuska office 918-287-4803 so that Jim can prepare for the turnout.

- Butterfly Identification Workshop. Saturday, June 18<sup>th</sup>, at 10:00 a.m. Jim Thayer will lead a butterfly identification workshop at the Tallgrass Prairie. It is directed at beginners, so no background is necessary. Experienced naturalists will enjoy it as well. We will meet at the Visitors Center at 10:00 a.m. Bring binoculars and guidebooks if you have them. If you plan to attend, please call Jim Thayer at 918-494-3784 or the Pawhuska office 918-287-4803 so that Jim can prepare for the turnout.

### **RAPTORS AT THE TALLGRASS PRAIRIE PRESERVE**

—Neil Garrison

I attended the returning docent reorientation session at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve on Saturday, March 5th. I couldn't stay past lunch, so I got in my truck and headed west toward Foraker. There was a huge plume of smoke on the western horizon. At first, I thought that it must be quite a ways west of me, but when I got up to the western boundary of the Preserve, I crested a hill and immediately found blackened and smoldering ground next to the roadway, where I saw a few patches here and there of lingering flames. Just a little ways west of me, a six-foot tall wall of orange flames danced across the prairie. Wow! What a sight!

The fire was a prescribed burn. Preserve

personnel were there with the fire trucks. Everything was under control. In fact, the fire crew were having a lunch break.

One of the other things that I saw above that fire was a couple of rough-legged hawks making circles high in the sky next to the smoke plume. They were probably taking advantage of the column of rising hot air, and they were undoubtedly on the search for scampering prey displaced by the flames.

All in all, I was kind of glad that I did not remain at the Research Station and eat a picnic lunch. I would have missed the show.

Bald Eagles—As a general rule, I go up to the Preserve something like once a month to do some work as a docent. I attempted to get my wife to also become a docent too, but no dice. However, I kept after her and suggested that maybe she would like to come up with me just one time. I gave her a list of the upcoming dates and invited her to pick one. December was what she picked. December!

“But, honey, don't you realize that is one of the foulest weather months of the year?”

Well, we made our December trip up to the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve on that December day and as I had expected the weather was just awful. The rain poured down in buckets. Fortunately, quite a few bison were standing right next to the road as we drove into the Preserve, and although they looked somewhat downtrodden and miserable, at least we got to see some of the

“signature” species.

And then, just west of the Preserve on the Foraker road, we drove right up to the base of huge cottonwood tree. There, perched in the top of the tree, was a mature bald eagle. WOOOOOOOOHHOOOOOOO! What a treat! Because of the foul weather, the eagle was in no big rush to launch himself into flight. He let us drive right up to him, which was unexpected behavior to see from an adult and experienced bald eagle.

What with the bison and the eagle, it was another beautiful day in paradise. I will always remember that trip to the Tallgrass Prairie.

Do Bald Eagles eat fish? As most of you probably know already, bald eagles are fish-eaters. The best place to search for bald eagles are around the major rivers and reservoirs. Have you ever wondered, then, why bald eagles are seen with some regularity in the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve where surface water is scarce. You would think that a fish-eater like the bald eagle would go elsewhere.

Jim Lish, an Oklahoma State University graduate student did a study of Oklahoma’s eagles. He discovered that a sub-population of bald eagles lives in Osage County that have been there since historic times where they have always subsisted on bison and cattle carrion. It is unusual to think of bald eagles as “companion species” for the Preserve bison herd, but it has always been that

way since the earliest of times.

### **DOCENT REORIENTATION**

—Andrew Donovan-Shead

On Saturday, 5 March 2005, for the first time, we held the annual Docent Reorientation at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve Research Station. It was a gorgeous spring day on the prairie, uplifting to the spirit. About forty-two returning docents filled the double lecture room that is part of the attractive new building.



Don Bruner opened the meeting with introductions around the room. Don acknowledged that he hoped this re-orientation would be the last one he organizes; we recognized his long service. Don introduced Harvey Payne as the next speaker.



Harvey delivered an encomium on the Docents and the Docent Program. He said that all the comments he receives from people who visit the

prairie are positive. He said that the core work performed by the The Nature Conservancy on the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve is largely invisible; the most visible aspects of the preserve to the public are the roads, the bison, and the docents at the Visitors' Center. Visitors' impressions are governed by the appearance of the approach roads, and interactions with the docents. To that end, the Adopt-a-Mile trash-pickup program is important work. That such a program is necessary is an unfortunate indictment of our society at large.



Harvey continued, talking about the history of the Preserve, its present condition, and its future. He said that the annual cost of managing the 39,000 acres of the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve is approximately \$700,000. Success of the Preserve is due to strong team-work from the top of The Nature Conservancy down to the volunteer docents. Beginning with the first purchase of 29,000 acres in 1989, Henry Little, a retired investment banker who worked at the National Office, built a solid foundation for the enterprise by allocating 20-percent of the acquisition cost to stewardship and 25-percent to the operating

endowment.



In 1989, the Oklahoma State Chapter of The Nature Conservancy was three years old and The Tallgrass Prairie Preserve was a new concept that was part of the One Conservancy approach to conservation. Financial operation of the Preserve has been in the black for almost all of its life.



Bob Hamilton did the original design of the Preserve. Through the years since its inception, the Preserve has developed as a result of the science controls applied to its management. Nothing is static; the best science is a process of continuous development based on continuous learning. Harvey said that the ongoing plan is to close the gaps in Preserve design. Part of that plan is to acquire property within the Preserve that will

make it whole, and to work with neighboring ranchers to help them become more compatible with the scientific objectives of the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve.



The principal scientific goal of the Preserve is to gain control of the entire watershed, which is important because it is necessary to control the inputs to the ecological system. For example, sheep grazing would be a serious problem because sheep carry diseases that are fatal to bison. Also, property development adjacent to the prairie would have serious adverse effects. Obviously, The Nature Conservancy cannot own everything, so what the Conservancy does is to acquire property and then resell it with deed restrictions favorable to its long term scientific objectives. However, deed restrictions can be overturned by *eminent domain*, which means that the government can make compulsory purchase of land and reallocate it for public use. Eminent domain is written into the constitution, but the extent of its power seems to hinge on current interpretation of the terms *public use* and *public benefit*,

interpretation that is being put to the test now before the Supreme Court.



Harvey explained that the Adopt-a-Bison program, though very successful to the Preserve, has been discontinued because The Nature Conservancy is concerned about the potential problems with adverse publicity. As we all know, news organizations tend to concentrate more on failure than success. It is a decision passed down from the national office, driven mainly by problems with anthropomorphism of animals. Harvey commended Dave Dolcater who started the program and John Fisher who continued its success.



Another aspect of managing the Tallgrass

Prairie Preserve is the need to be prepared for the unexpected. Harvey reported that Jenk Jones recently made a gift of \$100,000 to the Preserve. A portion of these funds have been allocated to give the bunkhouse a new roof, an expensive job since it requires each of the pantiles to be removed and replaced; remaining moneys will be allocated to additional patch-burn studies, new cattle guards, and acquisition of new scales that will enable staff to measure the weight of each bison — accurate weights are important when the Preserve sells culled animals. Jenk Jones made another gift of \$25,000 to the Preserve that will be used to provide the Research Station with broadband Internet access via satellite and new laboratory equipment. When you next see Jenk, please make a point of thanking him for his family's generosity.



Community support of the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve is important too. Harvey said that the Pawhuska Chamber of Commerce is planning to construct an arch across Kihakah Street embossed

with the sobriquet: *Gateway to the Tallgrass Prairie*. Included in the design will be a life-size bronze of Ben Johnson. Harvey said that Preserve relationship with the local community is good. We noted that the fortunes of Pawhuska have improved during the last ten to fifteen years if the evidence of reconstruction and restoration in town is a good indicator.

On the question of education and outreach, Harvey said that it is not part of The Nature Conservancy's core mission, though, for the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, it has been devolved to the volunteer Docent Program because the inevitable costs of the program are outweighed by the benefits to the Preserve. We agreed that there is nothing to stop individual docents from performing education and outreach, as long as it is clearly understood it is unofficial and that The Nature Conservancy is held harmless. John Fisher reported that in the past education and outreach had consumed significant Conservancy resources that are better spent on science and conservation.

Harvey drew our attention to the building in which we sat and said that Research Station is a joint effort between The Nature Conservancy and the University of Tulsa. Almost all the funding was raised by the University. Harvey felt that the Station and the Preserve have the potential to become a very attractive facility to scientists from all over the world.

Harvey completed his talk by saying that the Preserve is now a self-sustaining operation, well

endowed by public and institutional gifts. It has a long-term scientific vision that will ensure its vitality into the future. He reiterated that the volunteer Docent Program is an active part of that future, such as road clean-up, picnic area maintenance, and hiking trail maintenance to name a few; most important are the public relations and interpretation of the Preserve provided by docents.



After the coffee-break, we sat down to listen to news from Science Director, Bob Hamilton.

Bob gave us a slide presentation entitled: *Management Past, Present and Future at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve*. He showed us a small-scale map of the central plain states with green areas indicating the remaining un-tilled prairie lands. In the next slide, Bob showed a map of the Greater Flint Hills of which the southern part extends from Kansas into the Preserve. Bob said that Cross-Timbers is the predominant ecoregion

in Oklahoma. Land management is focused on ecological threats their abatement and correction. In particular, industrial scale wind power is a real problem because it has unintended consequences unknown to most people.



Bob said that the managed area of the Preserve consists in 39,700 acres; another 6,000 acres is limited in its use by deed restriction. As of 2005, the bison herd is at 90-percent of its target size. Size of the herd will rise to a maximum number of 2,600 head on 23,000 acres; this represents a change from the original plan to graze bison on almost the entire preserve.



This reduction is caused by experimental

cattle treatments associated with the patch burning being conducted by Oklahoma State University on 11,000 acres. The objective of this research is to discover improved range management regimes that can be used in the commercial environment outside the Preserve.

Fire is applied to all of Tallgrass Prairie Preserve on a three-year randomly selected rotation. Random selection of burn patches is thought to more closely mimic nature than can be achieved with a fixed schedule. Between 1991 and 2004, Bob Hamilton and his crew have conducted 350 prescribed burns of 210,000 Preserve acres and assisted neighbors in burning 166,000 acres. Preserve staff are designated as a rural fire department; they use surplus military fire trucks provided by the State Forest Service, locally modified to suit the peculiar needs of the Preserve. Each three-year cycle burns 40-percent of the Preserve in spring, 20-percent in summer, and 40-percent in fall. This month, The Nature Conservancy is host to the Fire Learning Network seminar, which will be conducted at the Research Station. Burns are controlled by natural features of the terrain, roads, and the use of wet-line fire breaks.



Fire, as it is employed at the Preserve, induces a rotational grazing effect that attracts grazing

creatures, most notably the bison that provide ecological services to the prairie environment. Once on the brink of extinction, bison are now no longer in any danger. Bison are graminoid, meaning they eat grass and sedges almost exclusively. Up to 40-percent of their intake during the winter months is cool season grasses and sedges promoted by off-season burns.

Recent research at the Konza Prairie Preserve in Kansas has shown that ash from the passage of fire has no fertilizing effect on the soil. Soil temperature is the governing factor that promotes microbial activity resulting in nutrient exchange. Hunter Anderson, a student from Oklahoma State University, conducted some research on this topic at the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve a couple of years ago; see the back issues of the newsletter for a report.



Traditional range management razes the prairie at the same time every year everywhere, favoring some creatures at the expense of others by promoting a homogeneous landscape. The shifting landscape mosaic produced by the random patch-burn schedule seems to work well at promoting a diverse or heterogeneous landscape.

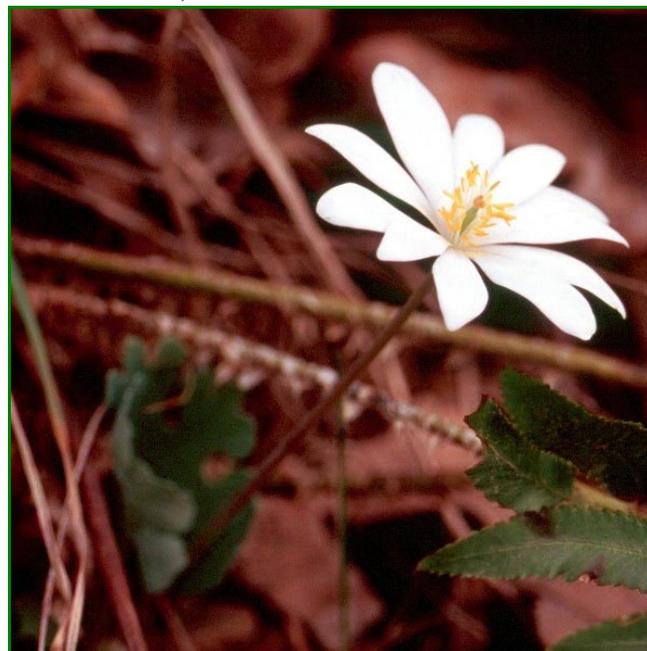
A good indication of Preserve management success can be found in the increasing numbers of

prairie chickens. Bird species variety is promoted by variety of habitat. Birds like specific biomass structure; Henslow's sparrow, for example, likes tall grass whereas the upland sandpiper likes short grass. Prairie chickens are very interesting because they need both short and long grasses; long grass in which to breed, and short grass in which to feed on the plentiful insect populations supported by the new-growth grasses. Not only that but also they need secure nesting sites in tall grass that are not too far from patches of new growth, otherwise the chicks die from exhaustion during the long journey to the feeding grounds. Clearly, prairie chickens have evolved to make the best use of the prairie ecosystem; their life-cycle is the embodiment of the tallgrass prairie environment.

Bob Hamilton, in answer to a question from the audience, said that patch burning is being adopted by state agencies, and by ranchers who are mostly interested in wildlife. Scientific research is the core conservation activity at the Preserve, including experimental research and outreach to ranchers in the Greater Flint Hills. Preserve science is also testing the range of prescribed burns to discover what works best: two-, four-, six-year cycles, etcetera.

Bob said that when the Preserve reaches its maximum number of bison, 600 head are expected to be culled each year for sale to institutions. Mad cow disease, *bovine spongiform encephalitis*, has aroused interest in source verification and in herds that are fed exclusively on grass; most cattle and

domestic bison are finished on grain in feedlots, so animals that can be verified as coming from the Preserve should command premium prices. Supplemental feeding of the herd occurs only during the annual roundup when a feed-truck and siren is used to lure the herd to the pens; this method of round-up is slower, but less stressful on all concerned, and much safer.



*Bloodroot—Sanguinaria Canadensis,*  
by George Pierson at the Nickel Preserve.

The herd is not culled on reproductive rate. We now fulfill the role of natural predators that are extinct on the prairie; each animal has ten good years before being removed. All of the herd is left to shift for itself; only animals that sustain unrecoverable injuries are put down.

The Nature Conservancy is concerned about the transformation of pastoral landscapes to

industrial uses. Wind farms are planned for the high spots of the Greater Flint Hills. Electric utility companies are required by law to buy a proportion of their power from renewable resources of power. Windmill generated electricity is considered to be a free lunch; unfortunately, there are some unintended consequences of siting 400-foot high generating towers. Grassland birds are repulsed by anything vertical. Research has discovered that prairie chickens refuse to nest within one kilometer of these towers. The Nature Conservancy is collaborating with utility companies to ensure that the generating towers are sited to the advantage of the natural environment.

Bob concluded his talk by reporting that this year 4,500 cattle will be grazing in the experimental areas of the Preserve.

Ann Whitehorn asked that all docents arrive at the Visitors' Center by 9:30 in the morning so that the gift shop can be open for business by 10 o'clock.

John Fisher delivered an overview of the docent program planned for the Keystone Ancient Forest Preserve. Send John an email asking for details if you are interested in participating.

John said that there is an electronic newsgroup available on Yahoo! Groups for exclusive use of all docents having a computer with connection to the Internet. Send John an email for details of this.

At this point in the proceedings, we took a break for lunch. As you can see from the pictures,

the weather was glorious and people were trying to smile at the photographer and eat at the same time. After lunch we went inside to hear what Jay Pruett, the State Science Director, had to say about the activities of The Nature Conservancy in Oklahoma.



Jay Pruett began his presentation with a report on the hiring of the new State Director, Michael Fuhr, who comes to us from The Nature Conservancy in Arkansas.

Jay said that Oklahoma is leading other states in its formulation of the Oklahoma State Conservation Plan, Wildlife Conservation Strategy. He said that a meeting will be held in Tulsa during the first week in April to discuss the implementation of this plan.

Jay is involved with the study that examines the effect wind-turbines have on birds such as whooping cranes and prairie chickens. Also, bats have been discovered flying into these wind-turbine towers; somehow the bats echolocation is

disrupted.

Fire crew certification of the staff will be conducted this year. The Nature Conservancy has received a grant from the Fish and Wildlife Service to purchase fire equipment for other preserves.

Public Service Company of Oklahoma has provided a grant of money for exclusive use on scientific research. In this case, twenty-one biological studies are planned to provide baseline biological information.

Jay said that since the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve is part of the southern edge of the Flint Hills, more coordination and cooperation is planned with the State of Kansas, which should be to the mutual benefit of all. Also, more outreach is planned to private landowners around all preserves in Oklahoma.

Jay acknowledged that the new Research Station will be a great asset to furthering the scientific enterprise.

Restoration of Sand Creek is planned. It is a multi-year project that will involve the Corps of Engineers returning the creek to its original form of prairie stream beds that are wider, shallower, and less eroded than it is the case at present. The Corps of Engineers is involved because it can be proved that their actions elsewhere have an adverse effect on the evolution of the creek. Sand Creek reservoir project at Bartlesville is also involved and being advised by Conservancy

scientists.



*White trout lily (dog tooth violet),  
Erythronium albidum,  
by George Pierson at the Nickel preserve.*

Pontotoc Ridge Preserve has completed its conservation project plan. A handicap trail is planned.

Keystone Ancient Forest Preserve will be treated with limited burns. Grant Gerondale with the City of Sand Springs is now responsible for the Preserve. A conservation plan is being developed.

At the Nickel Preserve, fire is being applied along with experimental thinning of trees. For the first time anywhere, free ranging elk will be introduced; it is a first for The Nature Conservancy too. Part of the project with elk will involve monitoring disease and poaching, as well as developing a counting plan. Each elk will be

equipped with a radio tracking collar.

In some parts, the Eastern Prairie Fringe Orchid is being re-introduced by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Jay has worked closely with George Pierson in a complete rework of the web-site. Go to address [www.oklanature.com/prod/docents.html](http://www.oklanature.com/prod/docents.html) to see what has been

accomplished.

The Nature Conservancy has more work to do in cave preserves. One new species has been discovered below ground.

Jay concluded his report and made way for George Pierson who showed exactly what has happened to the web-site.

***Tallgrass Prairie Docent Coordinators***

Program Coordinator	Dennis Bires	918-341-3908	dennisbires@lycos.com
Newsletter Editor	Andrew Donovan-Shead	918-688-7502	awd-s@cloistral.net
Docent Scheduler	Karen Harris	918-663-8306	kharris@hollandhall.org.com
New Docent Recruitment	Dennis Bires (Tulsa)	918-341-3908	dennisbires@lycos.com
	Betty Turner (Bartlesville)	918-333-7864	bbturner999@aol.com
Reorientation & Kick-off	Don Bruner	580-237-4199 Home 580-213-5327 Work	dbruner@groendyke.com
Docent Awards			
Nature Room	Doris Mayfield	918-743-6922	dmayfield@mindspring.com
Web Coordinator	George Pierson	918-744-0554	zglp01@cox.net

***The Nature Conservancy Coordinators***

Tulsa Office	State Director	Michael Fuhr	918-293-2929
	Director of Conservation	Jay Pruett	918-293-2917
	Director of Operations	Eileen Jobin	918-293-2920
Oklahoma City Office	Director of Philanthropy	Deirdre McArdle	918-293-2912
	Associate Director of Philanthropy	Keven Virgilio	405-858-8557
Tallgrass Prairie Preserve	Land Protection Specialist	Chris Hise	405-858-8557
	Preserve Director	Harvey Payne	918-287-4803
J.T. Nickel Family Nature & Wildlife Preserve	Director of Stewardship	Bob Hamilton	918-287-4803
	Preserve Director	Chris Wilson	918-456-7601
Pontotoc Ridge Preserve	Preserve Director	Jim Erwin	580-777-2224