



# THE DOCENT NEWS

Of The Tallgrass Prairie Preserve Docent Program



The Nature Conservancy

SAVING THE LAST GREAT PLACES ON EARTH

For the Volunteers and Supporters of the Oklahoma Chapter of The Nature Conservancy

FEBRUARY 2007

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## DOCENT WINTER MEETING

—Andrew Donovan-Shead

At 2:00 p.m. on Saturday, February 3rd, Dennis Bires convened the Docent Winter Meeting in Room 203 of John Rogers Hall at The University of Tulsa College of Law. Twenty-six docents attended the meeting.

David Turner talked about docent recruiting. He reported that new recruits are reluctant to put themselves on the schedule for apprenticeship with people they don't know. As a consequence, the last couple of years have produced fewer new docents than attended for initial training. David said that the new docent retention rate can be improved if returning docents would join the trainees for lunch on the training days. Please let David know if you can be a lunch-buddy to a new docent.

David said that new docent training is also an opportunity for established docents to refresh their memories. Those of you who are interested in attending this year's docent training as a refresher course, please let David know that you plan to attend; he needs to know so that he can provide enough course material.

Bartlesville docent recruiting was on Thursday, February 8, led by David & Betty Turner upstairs in the meeting room of the Public Library.

Tulsa docent recruiting is scheduled for Sunday, February 18 at 2:00 p.m. in the meeting room at the Hardesty Library, led by Barbara Bates.

Anita Springer will be leading the Pawhuska docent recruiting effort in the meeting room of the Public Library on Saturday, February 24 at 2:00 p.m.

Opening of the Visitors Center will be on Monday, March 5, so as to avoid some docents missing reorientation on March 3.

Meeting of the Prairie Road Crew is scheduled for Saturday, March 10 from 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. in the hope that the weather will be warmer than in late February.

New Docent Training is on Saturday, March 24 and March 31 from 9:00 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. at the Ecological Research Station. All docents are invited to an informal lunch on Saturday, March 31, at the picnic tables



outside the station. B.Y.O.L. (Bring Your Own Lunch).

The Oilfield Cleanup is scheduled in April on a date to be determined.

Prairie Road Crew, Cookout, and Hike is scheduled for Saturday, May 12 from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m.

Betty Turner provided a quiz in the form of docent surveys. The idea is to gather information that we can use to help improve docent retention, improve the docent reorientation and new docent training, improve the displays in the Visitors Center, and help avoid mistakes with cash and credit cards.

On docent recruiting, Dennis Bires said that we should invite prospective new do-



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cents to attend the afternoon session of the Docent Reorientation on March 3. Also a more aggressive Tulsa recruiting effort is planned. David said that about fifty-six docents kept the Visitors Center open in 2006. He said that we really need more persons active as docents.

In other business, we decided that there is no need to reestablish a Docent Council. We agreed to write a Mission Statement for the Docent Program. We agreed to keep the Visitors Center open on Mondays and Tuesdays in March and November. We talked about improvements in Docent Recognition and the desirability of docent shirts embroidered with a docent logo.

David and Dennis mentioned the possibility of a multimedia kiosk in the Visitors Center. Andrew Donovan-Shead thought it a good idea and volunteered to produce some demonstration content.

Iris McPherson has assumed responsibility for collating visitor data, once done by George Myers. In 2006 we received 4,020 visitors from fifty states, 2,309 from Oklahoma alone, and 248 visitors from forty-one foreign countries. Please be sure to ask visitors to sign the register.

We talked about publishing the Visitors Center revenues, but reminded ourselves that the newsletter is available on the Internet and shouldn't contain financial information. Dennis suggested that Iris report the revenues during docent meetings.

Dennis Bires closed the meeting shortly after 4:00 p.m.

## DOCENT REORIENTATION

—Anita Springer

Docent reorientation is scheduled for March 3, 2007, at the Research Center, 9:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. I want to thank Ann Whitehorn, in advance, for the morning refreshments she will provide us. Lunch is scheduled from 12 – 1 p.m. As usual, please bring your own lunch. We are hoping that the weather will cooperate and let us eat outdoors at the picnic tables. If not, we will have enough space inside to accommodate everyone. Our guest speaker, Dr. James P. Ronda, the H.G. Barnard Professor of Western American History at Tulsa University, is scheduled at 1 p.m. Professor Ronda is a leading authority on Native American History, the Lewis

and Clark Expedition, Washington Irving's western travels and many other aspects of the American West. Professor Ronda holds the H.G. Barnard chair at TU, named after Horace G. Barnard, one of the co-founders of the Chapman-Barnard Ranch.

Mike Fuhr, The Nature Conservancy State Director, will be with us, as well as the usual "suspects". I hope to see you there. If you know anyone you think would be interested in Professor Ronda's talk, feel free to invite them to our afternoon session. R.S.V.P. to 918-766-0388 or the Pawhuska office at 918-287-4803. We need a good count of attendees so that we will have enough handouts for everyone.

## 2006 VISITOR SUMMARY

—Iris McPherson

2006 Month	Number of Visitors per Weekday per Month							Total
	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	
April	52	45	75	57	78	170	109	586
May	127	129	78	55	66	186	169	810
June	74	80	87	73	114	135	66	629
July	149	105	91	66	69	133	96	709
August	29	24	60	29	42	99	27	310
September	128	63	47	35	45	163	124	605
October	78	75	30	73	93	173	97	619
Annual Total	637	521	468	388	507	1059	688	4268
Average	91	74	67	55	72	151	98	610

## MULTIMEDIA KIOSK

—Andrew Donovan-Shead

David & Betty Turner's idea for a Tallgrass Prairie Preserve interactive multimedia kiosk in the Visitors Center is good. In discussion with David we envision short video clips and graphic animations about aspects of the Tallgrass Prairie Preserve, at the most 60 to 90 seconds in length with the bulk being 5 to 10 seconds. The kiosk will run on consumer-grade hardware with a touch-screen interface.

Although there are a variety of software solutions, Adobe Reader seems to offer the easiest solution since it supports a kiosk operating mode and doesn't require programming expertise. Also, creating content is of first importance. Adobe Reader will let us refine the content before we invest money in hardware.

David & Betty are creating a list of topics that we can address one by one. I will create a small demonstration that you can see when we meet for reorientation.

Anyone interested in helping to produce



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content, should send me an email to participate.

## DOCENT RECRUITING SEASON

—Dennis Bires

All Tallgrass Prairie Docents are welcome to participate in the Tulsa Docent Recruiting Meeting this Sunday, February 18, at 2:00 p.m., at the Hardesty Regional Library, on 93rd Street, east of Memorial. The library is near the “last free exit” from Rt. 169 southbound, just before it becomes the Creek Nation Turnpike. Barbara Bates has planned an interesting brief program to introduce potential docents to our work. Please come and chat with our guests and make them feel welcome. And if you know or work with persons who might be interested in becoming docents, invite them to attend, and even offer them a ride.

Many thanks to Betty and David Turner for hosting an enjoyable and successful Bartlesville Recruiting Meeting on February 8 at the Bartlesville Library, and to Anita Springer for hosting the upcoming Pawhuska Recruiting Meeting at the Public Library on Linn Avenue next Saturday, February 24, at 2:00 p.m. Anita would be delighted for any interested docents to join her for that event. Needless to say, we owe a debt of gratitude to each of these public libraries for offering their community rooms free of charge.

Pat Jaynes has volunteered to post recruitment posters around Stillwater, an area of real potential for adding to our ranks. Thanks for taking the initiative, Pat.

At Harvey Payne’s suggestion, prospective docents will be invited to attend the afternoon session of Docent Reorientation on Saturday, March 3, at the Ecological Research Station at the Preserve. University of Tulsa History Professor James Ronda will be speaking at 1:00 p.m. Guests are welcome as well to bring a lunch and arrive at noon to join us for the lunch break. If you know a docent prospect, let him or her know about this unique opportunity to experience a most stimulating afternoon. And on March 3, reach out to any unfamiliar visitors at lunchtime and after the program.

Perhaps it is clear that we intend to assemble a substantial new docent class this spring. Every bit of assistance offered by every docent in this effort is most appreciated. Thank you in advance.

## BIOFUELS INITIATIVE

—Andrew Donovan-Shead

As you may have heard, there has been public unrest in Mexico due to the rising price of tortillas, due to shortages of corn caused by an expansion in ethanol biofuel distillation plants. Use of food crops for biofuels is somewhat problematic because it diverts prime agricultural land from food to biofuels production. Also, food production is a High Input Low Diversity (HILD) operation, a monoculture.

Dr. Michael Palmer has proposed a Low Input High Diversity (LIHD) biofuels initiative that is complementary to the HILD operations that, if successful, will improve the availability of biofuels and reduce the pressure on food supplies.

In a letter of support, Dr. Michael Anderson, Associate Professor of Plant & Soil Sciences at OSU, says that Dr. Palmer’s “biofuels initiative based on low input high diversity (LIHD) range land... will be complementary to those associated with the conventional agricultural model of biofuels production. I further believe that we need a diversity of approaches to solving the energy equation of our nation — reviewing a number of alternatives in order to derive the best conclusion.”

Dr. Anderson continues: “The basis of the proposal comes from an article in Science by Tilman et al. from the University of Minnesota concerning biomass production under a LIHD system. His conclusions, based on 9 years of field plot data are briefly that: 1) the high diversity grasslands bioenergy yield was 238% greater than the corn ethanol-monoculture system, 2) A positive byproduct of the research also indicated that there was a net increase in carbon dioxide sequestration to the soil which exceeded the carbon lost during combustion of above ground biomass during biofuel production, and 3) that the LIHD system can be used on agriculturally degraded land — land that could not support the conventional agricultural biofuel system — thus being somewhat complementary to current proposals.”

This is exciting because Oklahoma has abundant rangeland that is well suited to LIHD agriculture. Oklahoma has the potential for a biofuels energy boom similar in scope to the oil boom of late 19th and early 20th Centuries.



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## NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION

Deadline for submission of articles for inclusion in the newsletter is the 10th of each month. Publication date is on the 15th. All docents, Nature Conservancy staff, university scientists, and philosophers are welcome to submit articles and pictures about the various preserves in Oklahoma, but of course the

Tallgrass Prairie Preserve in particular.

## NEWSLETTER BACK ISSUES

Back issues of the Docent Newsletter, to October 2006, can be found in the two green zip-binders, stored in the Perspex rack by the file cabinet in the office of the Visitor's Center.

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