

PRAIRIE SMOKE

ANNUAL STEWARDSHIP REPORT FOR 2010
ISSUE 48, SPRING 2011

NACHUSA GRASSLANDS CELEBRATES 25 YEARS OF CONSERVATION

Nachusa Reaches 3,000 Acres A Tale of 25 Years of Land Protection

By Bill Kleiman, Project Director

I remember Dot Wade telling me several times that she thought she might get the Conservancy to buy “just a few little prairie remnants here, and now look what we have done.”

On December 15, 2010, the Conservancy closed on the 355-acre Orland property. This wonderful rolling remnant prairie and oak savanna brings the preserve total to over 3,000 acres. Ralph Orland stated his

family’s interest “My parents, Drs. Frank and Phyllis, were naturalists who were tremendously proud of the land they preserved for over 50 years. The fact that the land will return to its natural beginnings will be their legacy.”

Nachusa is a quarter century old this year. We have protected 32 tracts during the last 25 years, from 10 acres to 1,000 acres. Each tract protected had stories to tell with deadlines to meet, funds to raise, and friends coming forth out of many walks of life. The accompanying map shows the tracts and the years of protection. Here are a few stories from this quarter century of effort.

2007 – Bennett Woods 35 acres

Several years before buying this tract our fire crew was gathered to burn the savanna adjacent to Dale Bennett’s oak woods. I had called Dale Bennett that morning and he stopped out with his little dog in the cab of his pickup, a fluffy poodle standing on his lap, poking its head out the window at our gathering of fire crew in yellow suits and helmets. We talked about fire and why we use fire to improve land health and he recalled how when he first bought the tract he could see all the way to the back of it. Over the years his woods filled in thick with invasive European honeysuckle shrubs and the oaks and hickories were not regenerating due to



Dot and Bill on Dot’s Knob in 1998



Dale Bennett and Muffy

the extensive shade produced by the weedy shrubs. He could sense the benefit of fire and noted that if we included his unit we would not have to burn on a steep side slope like we were about to do that day. A year later we took him up on his offer and burned that unit again with Dale’s property included, and it was easier. The fire top-killed nearly all the invasive honeysuckle. Several years later Dale and his wife, Mary, contacted us wanting to see their woods protected for posterity. He reserved the hunting rights for a few friends and family. Dale died in 2009 at the age of 76.

2006 – Simpson tract 195 acres

Maxine and Willard Simpson are a local farm family. Willard says he sold it to us “because we had kept it in conservation reserve for over 30 years and I did not want to see it torn up.” Maxine says “He got excited about it when he realized it had real prairie.”

2002 – Hotchkiss Prairie 40 acres

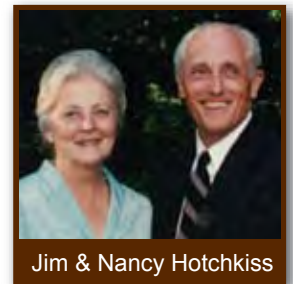
Nancy Hotchkiss donated 40 acres of her beloved farm to the preserve. Nancy and her late husband, Jim, had been involved with the Conservancy for decades. Nancy summed up why she donated this land:

“Watching in admiration as acreage around us bloomed with prairie flowers and grasses, we asked the Conservancy stewards to help plant a section of the farm in native species. It was a revelation how difficult it is to find seed from only a 50-mile radius. The Conservancy harvested some from their existing tracts, and the rest was purchased from local growers and harvesters. The volunteers gridded out the acreage and experimented with the best methods of reseeding. I like to joke that it would have been cheaper just to donate the land to the Conservancy than to pay for the precious scarce seeds to plant it. In the end, we did both.”

Lately, Nancy is fired up about the new Friends of Nachusa Grasslands and wants to sign up all of you as members.

2000 – Thelma Carpenter Prairie 65 acres

We purchased this important remnant prairie from Don and Nola Colwell. The Colwells have roots going back to settlement days and had long ago used the prairie for grazing cattle. Thelma Carpenter was a librarian for 32 years at the nearby Oregon Public Library. Thelma was a prairie enthusiast and had us in her estate plan. When she died, her donation was the largest by an individual to the Conservancy in Illinois. This is ironic because Thelma lived humbly enough to give folks a sense that she was not likely to be such a donor. We would like to show you a photo of Thelma, but no clear photo currently exists. Her legacy is the library she loved and our Thelma Carpenter Prairie.



Jim & Nancy Hotchkiss

1999 – Hook Larson Prairie 140 acres

Hook Larson drove in the corporate circle of Ingersoll Industries; he was their chauffeur. For his retirement, he dreamed of fishing and hunting and telling stories. Instead he came down with Lou Gehrig's disease and died within a few years. As his health spiraled down, he was looking for a way to protect wildlife habitat and our friend Jeff Meiners pointed him towards Nachusa. From his donation we protected this fine 140-acre tract with some of the best remnant prairie on the preserve.



Hook Larson in the middle next to Thelma Dahlberg.

1993 – Heinkel Units 330 acres

Clarence Heinkel loved rural landscapes and nature. He grew up on an Iowa farm. He gave the Conservancy a 30-acre tract of land in the Chicago suburbs which he told us to sell so we could buy 330 acres at Nachusa. Clarence was introduced to the Conservancy by Ralph Burnett of our Conservancy land protection staff. Those early years of land protection success were under Ralph's leadership.



Clarence Heinkel & Ralph Burnett

Also in 1993, chapter trustee John Santucci led a review of the project which produced an affirming report and the first full-time manager of the project, yours truly.

1990 – Baumgardner 30 acres

Sally and Max Baumgardner donated an easement on 30 acres of their land and Sally has been working on it ever since to restore several sandy knobs and a sedge meadow. Max has been a leader in historic building preservation in the area.

1989 – Jay Meiners Wetlands 80 acres

Jay Meiners loved the outdoors and in business loved to work. His work was building a dry foods business that continues today with the next generation of Meiners. His son Jeff summarizes the family's donation: "When our dad, Jay Meiners, passed away in 1988, we felt that a dedicated tract of land to be set aside as a wetlands area would be an appropriate way to memorialize Jay, who was an avid outdoorsman. At the time, the Nature Conservancy was in the early stages of preserving the Nachusa Grasslands and we felt that they would be the perfect stewards for managing this memorial. Together we found

and purchased an eighty acre piece of property that met our needs as well as the Nature Conservancy's needs and twenty plus years later this property stands as a very fitting memorial to a dear family member."

1986 – Project begins with 400 acres

Several years before we started in 1986, three local citizens, Doug and Dot Wade and Tim Keller, drummed up support to save what they could of the remnant habitats at Nachusa. They promoted saving these lands to all sorts of groups. About this time Steve Packard and Paul Dye of the Conservancy organized a state-wide meeting in central Illinois that concluded that some larger scale but degraded sites, hopefully dotted with good quality remnants, would be an additional priority for Illinois conservation. This all came together in 1986 when the new director, Al Pyott, and the Illinois Board of Trustees for The Nature Conservancy authorized staff to start Nachusa Grasslands. To attempt to restore a part of the landscape was a bold and unprecedented conservation project. Some felt it would be a waste of money, a distraction from protecting small remnant prairies. Volunteers were to make this vision happen. From a developer with a vision of five- and ten-acre house lots, the Conservancy purchased 400 acres. Some of this acreage was bought an hour before a land auction was to begin. The first year of Nachusa Grasslands was very exciting.

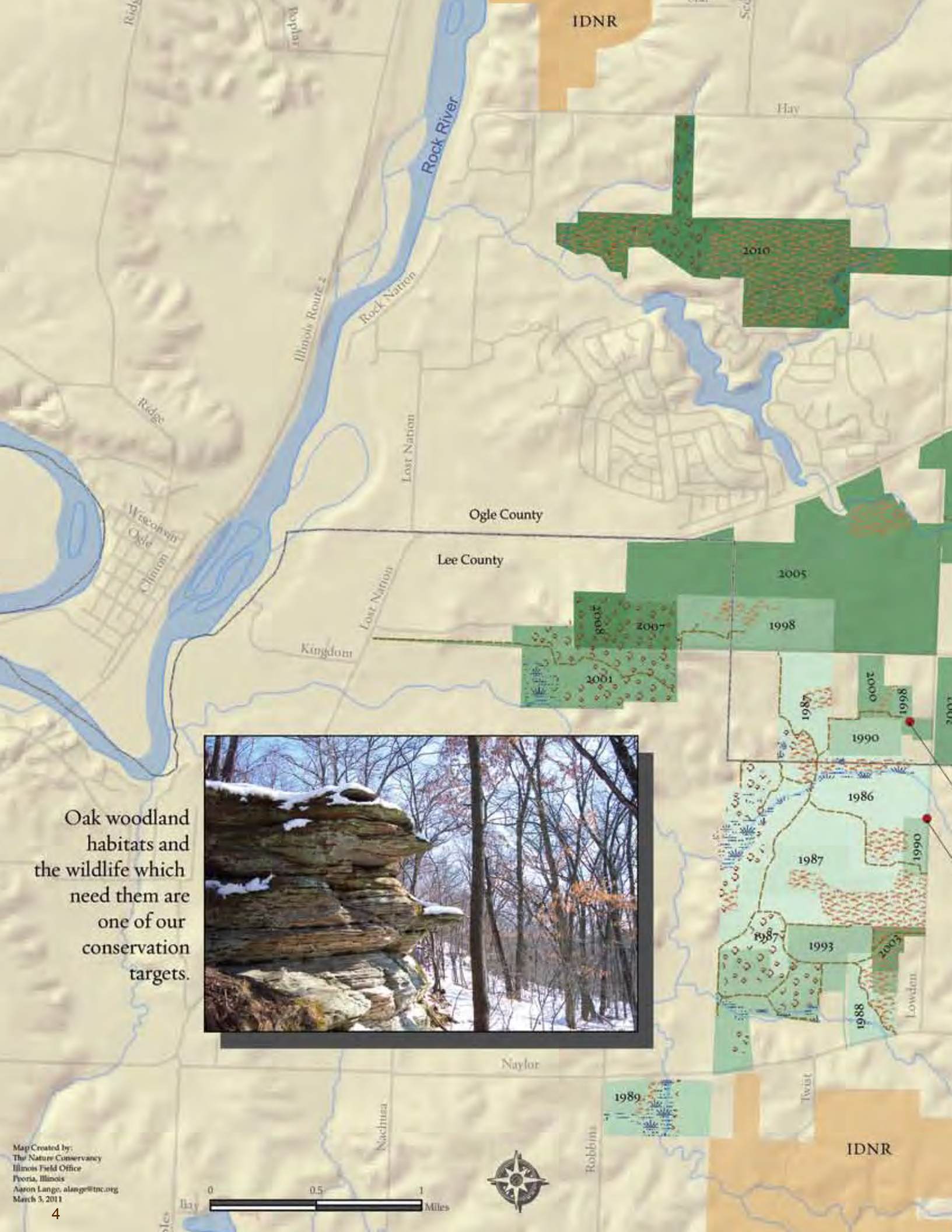
For my part, my years here have been a fulfilling experience. I have seen many generous acts from people of all walks of life. Annually, volunteers give thousands of hours to care for the land. Their detailed prairie and woodland restorations are considered some of the best examples the U.S. has to offer in habitat restoration. From small financial gifts to very large ones, donors have given their wealth, friendship, and encouragement. We have created a community of people who want to see this project succeed. Those of you who know this work realize the next 25 years will require as much effort as the first 25 years. We need more volunteers, donors, and Friends. We need you. Contact us and offer support.



Jay Meiners



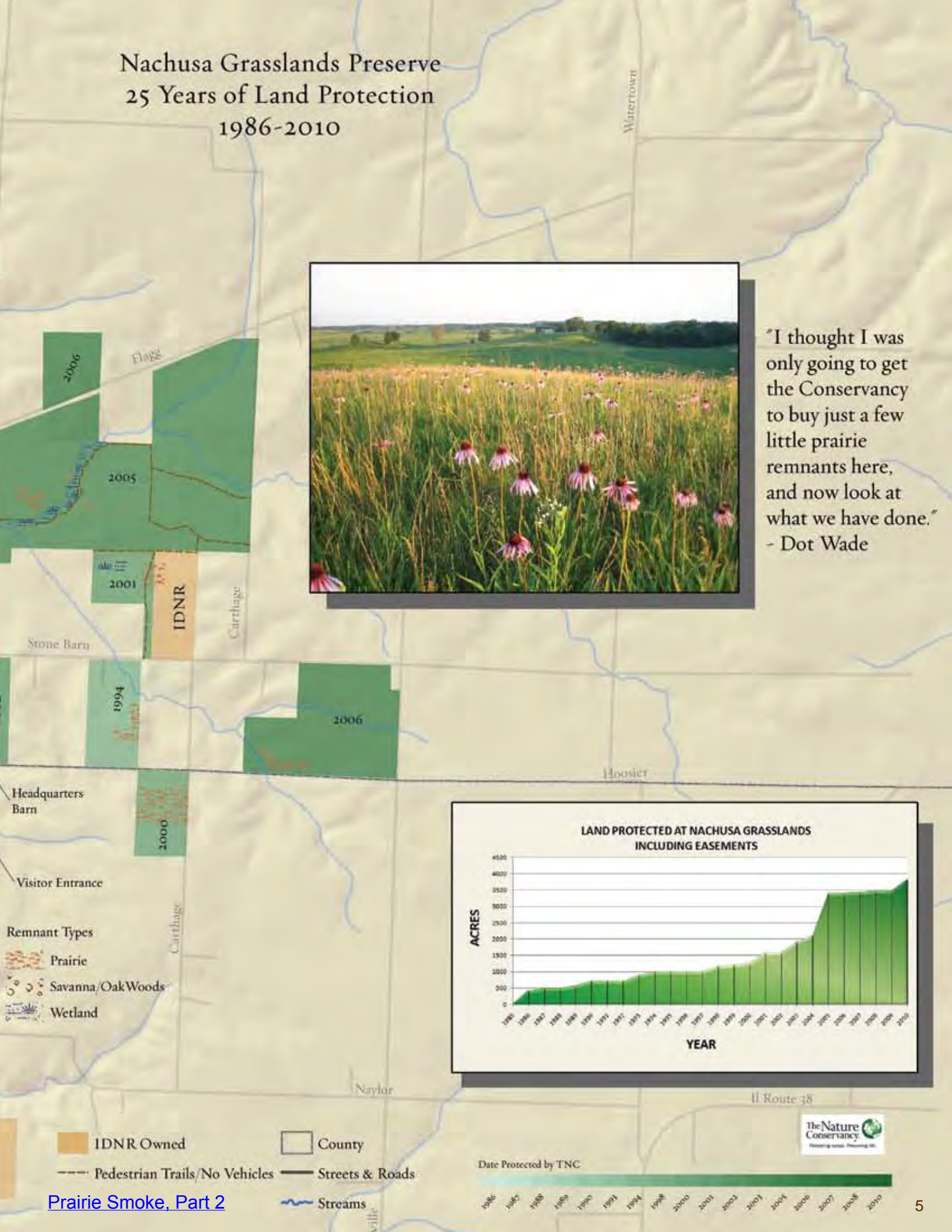
May 26, 1987 – Dot Wade, Tim Keller and Steve Packard looking over Nachusa



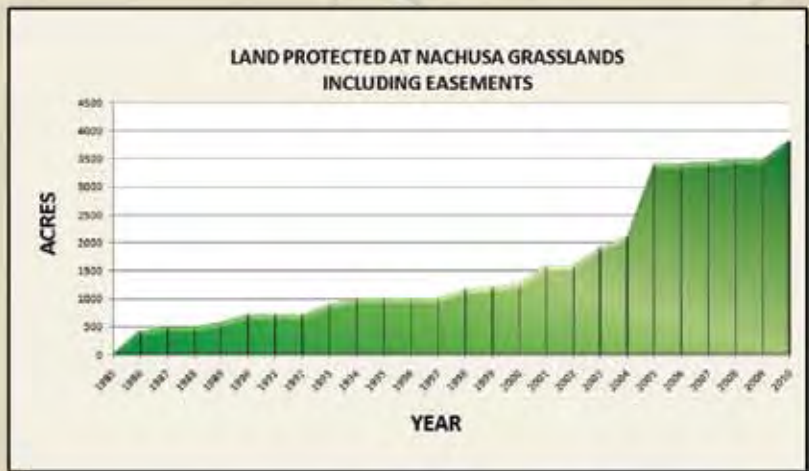
Oak woodland habitats and the wildlife which need them are one of our conservation targets.



Nachusa Grasslands Preserve 25 Years of Land Protection 1986-2010



"I thought I was only going to get the Conservancy to buy just a few little prairie remnants here, and now look at what we have done."
- Dot Wade



Friends of Nachusa Grasslands Advancing on Goals

By Bernie Bucholz

Since 1986 hundreds of Nachusa volunteers have invested thousands of hours and considerable treasure protecting remnants and planting prairie. The Friends of Nachusa Grasslands, our nonprofit 501(3)c, is now acting for the long-term protection of these amazing achievements.

Funding the Nachusa Grasslands Stewardship Endowment is a top priority of the group. The Endowment will eventually provide part of the annual financial support for Nachusa operations, thereby reducing the fundraising burden on The Nature Conservancy that manages the Endowment. Members and supporters have already generously donated over \$26,000 to the Endowment, an outstanding start by any measure.

In another major step, the Board of Directors has approved a policy and procedures for awarding annual grants for scientific research conducted at Nachusa. Project outcomes will provide practical answers to restoration challenges and further establish Nachusa as a national center for prairie science. Members will staff the Selection Committee and may award up to \$1,000 to qualified researchers in 2011. See the Friends' website for application information.

This year Nachusa Grasslands will celebrate its 25th Anniversary. In recognition of this milestone, Friends will sponsor a talk, hike, and lunch on June 11, led by the premier prairie advocate and restorationist, Stephen Packard. Packard, who worked for TNC when the project was established, will consider what's been accomplished, identify challenges for the next 25 years, and share some of the more colorful unwritten history of its founding. We'll also recognize some of the hundreds of people who have given so much to Nachusa Grasslands over the years.

Friends will celebrate again with our 3rd annual Prairie Potluck on June 25th. All are invited to enjoy food, music, and prairie tours. Look for more anniversary events on our website or the Friends of Nachusa Grasslands Facebook page.

The Friends of Nachusa Grasslands welcomes new members and supporters throughout the year. There is much to do, whether on the prairie or in keeping the organization moving forward. Let us know your interests, and we'll find a place for you.

Join the Friends!



Tour through Big Woods during the 2nd Annual Friends Prairie Potluck

Photo by Ron Cress



The 2nd Annual Friends Meeting

Photo by Ron Cress

Website: www.NachusaGrasslands.org

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/pages/Friends-of-Nachusa-Grasslands/122691964432289

E-mail: NachusaGrasslands@gmail.com

**25th Nachusa Grasslands Celebration:
June 11, 2011**

3rd Annual Prairie Potluck: June 25, 2011

Annual Meeting: July 16, 2011

101 Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchids

By Kevin Rohling

The name of the Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid (EPFO) itself instills in the reader a sense of beauty.



101 Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchids found blooming in Prairie Potholes last June

Personally, I had never heard of the plant until coming to Nachusa Grasslands to work as a seasonal employee for the 2010 season, but those of you familiar with Nachusa may be familiar with this enchanting, delicate flower. As a seasonal, tasked with monitoring the orchids alongside Bill and other seasonals, I quickly learned about the orchid's natural history and the hopes for its recovery at Nachusa.

The EPFO is listed as a federally threatened species and listed in the State of Illinois as endangered. Nachusa is contributing to the recovery of the orchid, and has worked tirelessly for years to achieve a robust population of the species. It has required much patience.

In the paraphrased words of Bill Kleiman, Nachusa received a small quantity of powdery seed in 1996. The seed was mixed with sand and flung into wet areas that would support the growth of the plant. After eight years, one or two plants were found in a restored wetland that was formerly a cornfield. Many years of nursing the small population along, hand-pollinating the plants with a toothpick, has paid-off, and 101 plants



Kim Schmidt spoon launching some of the 2010's orchid seed harvest in Prairie Potholes
Photo by Heather Baker.

were counted this year in one population. With so many orchids, Nachusa's efforts to reestablish healthy populations of the EPFO have expanded.

This year, each individual plant was counted and recorded, along with data on the number of individual leaves and individual flowers, and level of herbivory. Deer have been known to selectively consume the valuable EPFOs at other sites, but not yet at Nachusa, so a barbed-wire fence was constructed around the main population in case Bambi got any ideas. Later, we returned again and again to monitor the maturing seedpods of the orchids. Finally, a portion of the seedpods were collected and dispersed by hand to areas of the preserve deemed appropriate for the growth of the orchids.

I feel very fortunate to have played a small role in the ongoing monumental effort to reestablish and recover this stunningly beautiful and rare species. Again in Bill's words, "We hope to one day have thousands of these orchids." I can't wait to see them.

Jay Stacy: Volunteer for 2010

The Nature Conservancy in Illinois named Nachusa Grasslands volunteer Jay Stacy as its 2010 Volunteer of the Year at a December ceremony in Chicago. Having volunteered at Nachusa for 16 years, Jay has demonstrated sincere commitment to the site through helping lead knowledgeable, inspiring tours, training stewards, and serving as a steward himself.

Congratulations, Jay, and thank you for your 16 years of indelible service!



Jay hand planting his "step in" mix on his new 11 acre planting last November.
Photo by Heather Baker.

Serenity

By Dwight Heckert

Webster defines serenity as being the quality or state of being serene, undisturbed, and calm. Many synonyms can be used for serenity—calmness, hush, peace, placidity, quiet, tranquility.

Most, if not all of us, who have volunteered and worked at Nachusa have felt the **serenity** of this place. Whether it has been when we watched a Red Tailed Hawk circling over Doug's Knob, or watched the sand boil in the Fen, or found a new plant for the Herbarium, or enjoyed a whole hillside of coneflowers at Dot's Knob, or walked in the Big Woods on a snowy day, or watched a bumble bee exiting a closed Gentian, or watched the deer running in



Nachusa autumn sunrise by Robert Shaw

the woods at Tellabs, or smelled the new prairie grass after a spring rain.

I will never forget the day after 9/11 when I went up to Doug's Knob and sat in my

folding chair and looked over the prairie. It was such a serene view. It made me forget all of the turmoil that was going on in our world at that time. What a wonderful way to calm the mind.

In the words of Adlai E. Stevenson, "Your days are short here; this is the last of your springs. And now in the **serenity** and quiet of this lovely place, touch the depths of truth, feel the hem of Heaven. You will go away with old, good friends. And don't forget when you leave why you came."

I'm sure that we all have observed and felt the beauty and serenity of Nachusa at one time or another. Remember that feeling and keep it with you, always.



Views at Nachusa offer a glimpse of what the land looked like before settlement
Photo by Heather Baker.

Gene Miller 1928 – 2010 A Remembrance

By Jay Stacy

Gene Miller, a long-time volunteer and dear friend of Nachusa Grasslands, died on August 20, 2010, at the age of 82. His wife of 51 years, Lucille, died a few months later on December 21st. Gene was a University of Illinois graduate and a retired teacher. He and Lucille had three sons and a daughter, and three grandchildren.

In the early days of Nachusa we noticed that many would-be volunteers shied away due to fears about their lack of botanical knowledge. To inspire confidence, à la the Wizard of Oz, Gene, Sally Baumgardner, and I decided to award "prairie doctorates" up front to anyone who would join in. We brought our reference books to the field, wore small magnifying lenses on strings around our necks, and began addressing one another as "Dr." It caught on, and we've had lots of fun with it ever since. "Dr." Miller was the first to wear this eminent title, and he did his very best to live up to it – spending evening hours (after a long day's work at the Grasslands)

in his armchair at home, reworking his notes and trying to learn the scientific name of every component of the native prairie! At age 75! Priceless, indeed! Gene did anything we asked him to do, from stacking logs on winter burn piles and shouldering herbicide backpacks on hot July sweeps back and forth across the Main Unit to helping out with floristic assessments and collecting thimblefuls of seed from rare spring ephemerals on his hands and knees. He was a fatherly counselor to the younger workers, and a wise colleague and confidante to those of us who were older. There's not one of us who knew him who will ever forget his friendly, engaging laugh and the warm twinkle in his eye.

On a sunny late summer morning, after a beautiful funeral mass celebrated by his middle son, a Catholic priest, we buried Gene in a little hillside cemetery west of Oregon, IL. The local American Legion post turned out to fire a three round volley in honor of his military service. Afterwards, back at the preserve as we gathered together on the headquarters barn lawn to reminisce, a male Blanding's Turtle (almost never seen) came out of the grass, flashed his golden throat, and romped around the parking lot in plain view of all, by way of paying his respects! We salute you too Gene, for all you did, and for sharing yourself with us for so many years.



Gene Miller 1928-2010

What's a Unit Steward?

By John Schmadke

It's cold. The sky is gray. Our boots are wet from standing in the snow all day. What are we doing here? Why are we putting in this work when this unit belongs to some other Nachusa steward?

Finally, we say to ourselves that it's time to quit. A hot shower and some ibuprofen are what we need after a day of chainsawing. We don't need to work any more today because, after all:

"It's not our unit."

That's how things began at the start of this winter when Jay Stacy and I began yet another season of tree clearing. Last year we decided to clean up the forest edge at Gobbler Ridge along the border of his new planting in the Clear Creek Unit. It began simply as a way to neaten the edge along the prairie but soon developed into an all-out effort to rid the ridge of undesirable trees because there were scores of beautiful burr and black oaks we thought needed protecting.

As we got into this, John Heneghan and Dave Crites took possession of the entire creek area behind the ridge. Technically, it was their unit but they, being gentlemen, agreed that we could work on the slope while they worked the bottom.

As we moved in to finish the slope this year, Jay and I agreed that we would not work too hard. This project was nearly done, and why should a couple of old guys like us work hard. **"It's not our unit,"** we agreed; we will take it easy.

We finished Gobbler Ridge sooner than expected. Seeing an opportunity staring him in the eye, Bill Kleiman asked us to move over to Orland where he had a perfect spot for us to continue our restoration effort.



Beautiful open grown 200+ year white oak commonly found throughout Orland

Despite a bumpy two-track, a herd of wild cows, and snow and ice, we began to clear box elders, cherries, and buckthorns around a horseshoe

bend in the creek at Orland. Bernie Buchholz and Kevin Kaltenbach pitched in as well.

Jay and I even agreed that we will pick some seed to help restore the area, but we continue to remind each other – as well as those who have been pitching in to help – not to work too hard or too fast.

Don't forget, **"It's not our unit."**

Here's Why You Might Want to Get Involved at Nachusa Grasslands

By Ron Cress

What do a banker, teacher, musician, haberdasher, factory employee, reporter, manufacturer, insurance broker, investment manager, carpenter, psychologist, delivery person, state employee all have in common?

They're ALL volunteers at Nachusa Grasslands! They all love contributing to the restoration of this amazing Illinois prairie because it takes a host of different skills to make this effort so successful. Let's look at just some of these skills.

Teaching: If you're a science or ecology teacher, Nachusa can serve as a *living laboratory*. If you teach elementary or middle school students, a field trip here can spark a life-long interest in the disciplines vital to preserving nature. **We can use your help.**

Mechanical: We have a variety of trucks, tractors, atvs, small engines, and other miscellaneous equipment that need your skills to maintain and fix. **We can use your help.**

Still or Video Photography: Pictures truly are worth a thousand words and we need to graphically document both what we have now and what the stages of restoration look like. **We can use your help.**

Carpentry: Nachusa has houses and barns and sheds that need care. So, pack your tools – or use ours. **We can use your help.**

Writing: We have documents such as this annual newsletter and a variety of articles and updates that need to be written and edited. Do you have reporting or writing skills? **We can use your help.**

Tour Leading: Throughout the year, Nachusa plays host to school and college groups, professional organizations, and many others. If you enjoy leading groups and want to learn about the history of Nachusa and what our prairie restoration is about, **we can use your help.**

Got the picture? It takes a host of people with a great variety of skills to make Nachusa Grasslands a success. If you'd like to be one of those people, please contact us either by phone or via our Friends of Nachusa Grasslands' web site www.nachusagrasslands.org.

We look forward to seeing you on the prairie.



Howard Fox and Gene Miller building the visitor's entrance kiosk

The Nachusa Grasslands Seasonal Crew Program

By Kimberly Schmidt

With a permanent paid staff of only two, restoring and managing the 3,100-acre preserve can be daunting. A hard working seasonal crew and dedicated volunteers greatly contribute to Nachusa Grasslands' exemplary success story.

The seasonal land steward crew program was initiated to lighten the load of existing staff and volunteers in order to increase the amount of prairie being restored and managed. The program has come a long way from its initial start in 1989. Today, the preserve hires five Restoration Technicians and a college intern or two. Also, this year Nachusa plans to initiate a high school level program for local students.

While the crew's efforts are obviously beneficial to fulfilling the goals of the preserve, the crew also benefits. The arrangement allows young professionals to gain first-hand experience with land management and restoration methods.

Some Comments of the 2010 Seasonal Crew

"Nachusa has opened me up to many possibilities in the world of conservation." – Brian Dugan

"The level of camaraderie among the stewards, volunteers, and managers was the highest I've ever seen anywhere. It was truly an honor to work among the volunteer stewards, who are so hard working and knowledgeable." – Kevin Rohling

"Seeing how well the project works, I felt a new sense of hope for the conservation world and the work that I will do in the future." – Tanya Wallin

"The autonomy and lack of bureaucracy at Nachusa made the work more rewarding and the conservation field more appealing." – Jackie Wagner



Kevin Rohling collecting stiff aster
Photo by Heather Baker.

Seed Harvest & Planting Report

Crew's Harvest

Hand: 3,467lbs*
Machine: 2,400lbs*

Volunteers' Harvest

2,448lbs*

Harvest Grand Total for 2010: **8,315lbs***
Harvest Amounts include over 200 species

New Plantings

Crew: 50 acres
Volunteer Stewards: 21.3 acres*
Total: **71.3 acres***

Enhanced plantings (overseed)

Crew: 39 acres
Volunteer Stewards: 114 acres
Total: **153 acres**

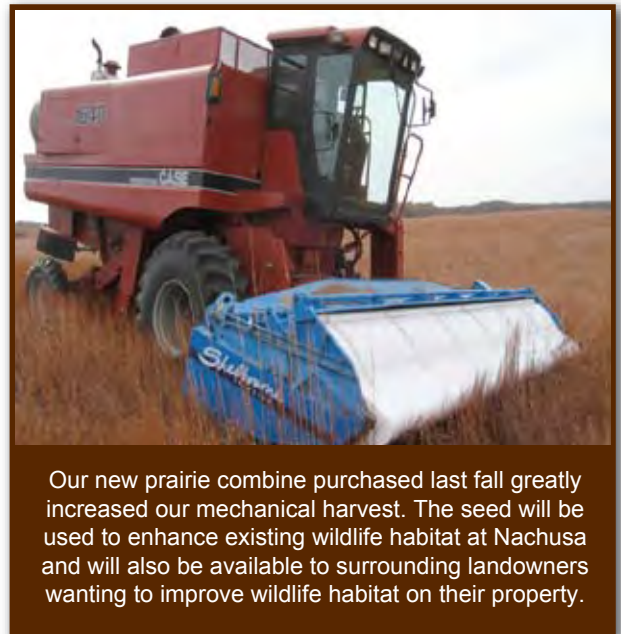
We donated 750 lbs of seed to the Friends of Franklin Creek Natural Area that planted 15 acres of new prairie.

Acres seeded in 2010: 239 acres

*Nachusa Grasslands Record

Seed Harvest Thank You

Once again, we would like to especially thank Damian Considine for all his time and effort helping the Nachusa crew and volunteers harvest seed throughout the region. Also, Greg Wahl and the Natural Land Institute deserve special recognition for giving us permission to collect seed from their prairie remnants. **Thank YOU!**



Our new prairie combine purchased last fall greatly increased our mechanical harvest. The seed will be used to enhance existing wildlife habitat at Nachusa and will also be available to surrounding landowners wanting to improve wildlife habitat on their property.

Al's and Mary's Reflections on Nachusa Grasslands

By Al and Mary Meier

We've been volunteering at Nachusa Grasslands since 2002 and are stewards of the Dot and Doug Wade Prairie. We started out by attending work days on occasional Saturday mornings, eventually became co-stewards of Big Woods with Hank and Becky Hartman, and took on stewardship of the Dot and Doug unit in 2004. The Dot and Doug Wade Unit has several high quality prairie remnants, restorations, and agricultural areas yet to be restored.

What brings us back to the project year after year?

Al: I look forward to arriving at the Barn early in the morning, making a cup of coffee, and preparing for my day on the prairie.

Mary: I like picking seeds of all shapes and sizes. Some, like hairy hawkweed and thimbleweed, involve hand stripping little puffballs from stems and barely filling a sandwich bag after several hours. With other species, like wild quinine and coneflower, we use snips to cut off the large seed heads and can fill a 5-gallon bucket in minutes.

Al: I can combine my love of hiking outdoors with my commitment to conservation by wandering around the preserve, scouting and harvesting various plant species.

Mary: Last year, our daughters, sons-in-law, grandchildren, and several other relatives visited Nachusa. I have especially fond memories of teaching my grandson and grandnephew how to "zip" ripe sideoats grama seeds from their stems.

Al: From early May through mid-November 2010, we collected 425 pounds of seed from 134 species on our own and with the help of the crew and other volunteers. It was a lot of work, but very rewarding.

Mary: Showing Nachusa to guests and new volunteers is fun. We try to explain the project's history and goals and engage people in meaningful activities when we lead tours or work days.

Al: When I first started volunteering at Nachusa nine years ago, I knew nothing about prairie species or restoration techniques. Many stewards and staff members have shared their knowledge and expertise with me, and each year I gain a better understanding of our project.

Mary: I like processing seeds in the Barn, running them through the hammer mill and storing them in barrels until we sow them in the fall.

Al: Even weeding can be gratifying when I survey an area free of invasives after a long day of cutting and clearing.

Mary: I sometimes sit on a rock on the side of a knob and watch the wind ripple through the little blue stem – a precious moment of tranquility carved out of my overly busy life.

Al: I feel satisfied after completing a planting. In 2010, we restored 6.6 acres of former cornfield, adding to our previous 13 acres of plantings from 2006 and 2007.

Mary: I like serving as the secretary of Friends of Nachusa Grasslands – my main responsibilities are maintaining membership and supporter records and acknowledging donations.

Al: Helping with prescribed burns in the spring and fall is a unique experience for me. The extensive training provided by The Nature Conservancy at Nachusa Grasslands has prepared me well for this challenging task.

Mary: Autumn on the Prairie in late September is always a marvelous day – I have been the Educational Exhibits chair for several years, and Al and I also led a tour of our unit for about 20 people.

Al: I enjoy running a chain saw in the cold weather – a terrific form of strenuous exercise.

Mary: Winter is one of my favorite seasons at Nachusa, because I get to build bonfires and burn brush and fallen trees when snow covers the ground.

Al: After a day on the prairie, dinner with other stewards and staff members is a great way to relax and unwind. The friendships we have developed at Nachusa are a major part of our social life.

Mary: I like having something interesting to talk about with Al in addition to what's happening at our jobs or with our families.

Mary and Al: We both appreciate working with a great group of stewards, crewmembers, and other volunteers. Their enthusiasm, dedication, and expertise inspire us. Join us!



Al and Mary in their 2007 planting which was planted with over 130 species.

Native Americans at Nachusa Grasslands

By Mary Viereg

“Have there been any Native American artifacts found at Nachusa?” The simple answer is “no”, but it doesn’t address the curiosity people have about Native Americans who once experienced the Nachusa landscape.

According to the Illinois State Museum, Paleo-Indians were in the Nachusa area as early as 10,000-12,000 years ago. Sites distinguished by characteristic stone spear points and scrapers are located along both the Rock and Green Rivers. With a climate cooler than today, the area was covered first with coniferous forest and then with a thick deciduous forest of oak, elm, ash, and hickory. These first nomadic humans in the area might have seen mastodons, long-horned bison, muskox, and caribou.

The Archaic period (10,000-3000 years ago) was a time of incredible change. The climate warmed and prairies developed. The mega-mammals of the Archaic were replaced by our more familiar Illinois fauna. The hunter/gatherers now had new tools and began to live in river valley villages where by the end of the period, they were also cultivating native plants. Domesticated dogs played a role in hunting. Burial ceremonies including mound building began late during this time period. Several Archaic sites have been identified along the Rock River where trade goods from the Atlantic seaboard, the Gulf of Mexico, and Lake Superior have been found.



Chief Shabbona

Native Americans during the Woodland period (3000-1250 years ago) started developing characteristic pottery and cultivating more varieties of native plants and later corn, beans, and squash. The bow and arrow greatly increased the efficiency of hunting, and trading networks expanded. Someday we might find artifacts at Nachusa from this time period because by the end of it, these folks were not only establishing settlements along the Rock River but also in other parts of Illinois along some tributary streams like

Franklin Creek and even on upland locations. The Albany Mounds in Whiteside County were built about 2200 to 1700 years ago and predate the Cahokia and Dickson Mounds of the Mississippian period.

Very few sites from the Mississippian period (1100-550 years ago) are found in our part of the state, although there are many south, west, and east of Nachusa. This was the time of temple mounds and a complex, far-reaching trade network. It was followed by a period where there seems to have been very little habitation in northern

Illinois. This coincides with the “Little Ice Age” during which the winters were significantly colder and wetter shortening the growing season. Bison and elk became more common. People archaeologists call the Oneota arrived from the northwest during this Late Prehistoric Period (700 – 300 years ago) but left signs of their presence at only a couple of sites along the Rock River.

The Historic period began about 400 years ago with the arrival of the Europeans. By the mid-1600s, eastern tribes with European firearms had put tremendous pressure on the tribes of the upper Midwest. Perhaps 20,000 refugees of several Algonquin tribes (Ottawa, Fox, Sauk, Pottawatomie, Kickapoo, Chippewa, and others) first moved west and north from their traditional homes and then south into northern Illinois. For example, the Kickapoo moved out of Michigan around the southern end of Lake Michigan and by 1680 were living on the middle Rock River. By 1729, they were centered along the Lower Rock and then continued to move south and back east again.

The Potawatomes who in 1600 were living in the northern third of Michigan’s Lower Peninsula moved into northern Wisconsin and lived there until 1687 when the Iroquois were driven back to New York. They then moved south in bands. The Prairie Band was living along the Rock River and throughout much of northern and central Illinois by the 1770s.

Just prior to non-native settlement of the Nachusa area in the 1820s, the Rock River served as the very loose dividing line between the Winnebagoes to the west and the Potawatomes to the east (south to the Illinois River). John Dixon was named “Nachusa” meaning “long white hair” when he was adopted into the Winnebago tribe sometime after 1830. Most of the Potawatome lived along the Rock River in semi-permanent villages during the summer, larger camps during the winter, and scattered small group camps during the spring and fall.

So, why haven’t we found any Native American artifacts at Nachusa? It’s probably because it’s not close enough to the Rock River. Native Americans undoubtedly hunted and gathered food across the Nachusa landscape for thousands of years, but their settlements were primarily along rivers. Keep your eyes open, though. You never know what you might find.



Native American Artifacts found along the Rock River near Nachusa Grasslands

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Prairie Smoke

Annual Stewardship Report for 2010

Issue 48, March 2011

All photos taken by the Conservancy unless
otherwise noted.

Cover photo by Heather Baker

Editor: Cody Considine

Calendar of Events and Workdays 2011-2012

March – Brush and Fire Season

- 5 Gobbler Ridge - Jay
- 12 Tellabs Savanna - West Unit
- 19 Annual Fire Refresher for Nachusa Crew
- 26 East Heinkel Savanna

April – Brush and Fire Season

- 2 Harold Walkup Prairie
- 9 Hamill-Winter Prairie
- 16 Big Woods
- 23 Tellabs Savanna - West Unit
- 30 Dot & Doug Wade Prairie

May – Weed Season

- 7 The Fen
- 14 Big Woods
- 21 Hook Larson Prairie
- 28 Dot & Doug Wade Prairie

June – Weed and Seed Season

- 4 Fame Flower Knob
- 11 Hook Larson Prairie
- 25th Anniversary Talk & Hike with Stephen Packard
- 18 Dot & Doug Wade Prairie
- 25 Tellabs West Unit
- 3rd Annual Friends Prairie Potluck

July – Weeds and Seeds

- 2 The Fen Prairie
- 9 Big Woods
- 16 Dot & Doug Wade Prairie
- 23 Fame Flower Knob
- 30 Rolling Thunder Prairie

August – Seeds

- 6 Tellabs West Unit
- 13 West Heinkel Savanna
- 20 Rolling Thunder Prairie
- 27 Dot & Doug Wade Prairie

September – Seeds

- 3 Fame Flower Knob
- 10 Big Woods
- 17 **22nd Annual Autumn on The Prairie Celebration**
10 A.M. to 5 P.M. Wild walks, different expert leaders, hikes leaving every 20 minutes all day, children's tent, food, and music.
- 24 Dot & Doug Wade Prairie

October – Seeds

- 1 Big Woods
- 8 Fame Flower Knob
- 15 Hamill-Winter Prairie
- 22 Dot & Doug Wade Prairie
- 29 Rolling Thunder Prairie

November – Brush, Planting, and Fire Season

- 5 Fame Flower Knob
- 12 P.M 2011 Seed Harvest Celebration Potluck
- 2 P.M Preserve Tour by Bill Kleiman
- 12 West Heinkel Prairie
- 19 Dot & Doug Wade Prairie
- 26 Gobbler Bottoms

December – Brush and Planting Season

- 3 East Heinkel Savanna
- 10 The Fen
- 17 Big Woods
- 24 Christmas Eve
- 31 Gobbler Bottoms

January 2012 – Brush Season

- 7 The Fen
- 14 Tellabs West Unit
- 21 8 Oaks
- 28 Gobbler Bottoms

February 2012 – Brush Season

- 4 East Heinkel Savanna
- 11 Bennett Woods
- 18 Kitten Tail Unit
- 25 Gobbler Bottoms

March 2012 – Brush and Fire Season

- 3 Dot & Doug Wade Prairie
- 10 Bennett Woods
- 17 Big Woods
- 24 Fame Flower
- 31 Tellabs West Unit



September 17, 2011
22nd Annual Autumn on the Prairie Celebration
Photo by Dixon Telegraph.

The Nature Conservancy

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