

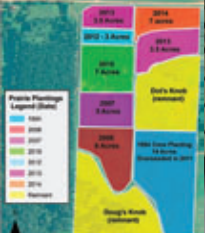
PRAIRIE SMOKE

NACHUSA GRASSLANDS *Annual Stewardship Report for 2016*



Celebrating . . .

30 Years OF CONSERVATION



Dear Friends,

Nachusa Grasslands is 30 years old! In this issue, we invite you to enjoy our history, and celebrate a vision many of you made a reality through your "Churchillian" patience, sweat, toil and money. We celebrate the landscape we have assembled, the habitats we have restored, and the rare plants and animals that now thrive. We have much work to do; building and restoring a landscape is not the effort of three decades, but three times three decades. We thank you for your continued support.



© FERRAN SALAT

Bill Kleiman and Cody Considine

- Bill Kleiman
PRESERVE MANAGER
- Cody Considine
RESTORATION ECOLOGIST and
PRAIRIE SMOKE EDITOR
- Dee Hudson
PRAIRIE SMOKE EDITOR and
GRAPHIC DESIGNER
- Jay Stacy
PRAIRIE SMOKE EDITOR

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SAVE THE DATE

September 16, 2017

28th Annual Autumn on the Prairie Celebration

The First Steward

Mike Adolph

BY DEE HUDSON

When visitors gaze over Nachusa's "Main Unit," they can imagine a similar prairie vista greeted the Native Americans and early settlers. The picturesque panorama includes a rolling landscape, rimmed by woodlands, and filled with hundreds of native species and pockets of wild plum thickets. As this scene unfolds, it is hard to believe that only 30 years ago this prairie was riddled with invasive weeds, bushes and trees. Returning the Main Unit's degraded habitat back to a healthy state is due, in large part, to the hard restoration work and persistent stewardship by Mike Adolph.

Mike, a retired history teacher, was first introduced to Nachusa after a meeting with the staff from the Illinois Nature Conservancy; he was invited to visit the newly acquired property. Mike quickly joined forces with a group of volunteers; without a director, these folks united to restore the habitat in Nachusa's beginning years. Mike recalls the early days: "My first work at Nachusa was one afternoon in '89, destroying multiflora roses that were more than six feet tall, and would take three people joining hands to surround." Since his first acquaintance, Mike has become Nachusa's longest-serving volunteer, restoring prairie since 1989!

In the '90s Mike worked primarily with Ed Pleskovitch and Bob Shone. Mike says, "When work began on the invasives in the remnant pastures, our chief targets were multiflora rose, black cherry and honeysuckle. It's no exaggeration to state that more than 10,000 roses have been removed from the unit." Other early-project volunteers Mike recalls were Mike Crowe, Kevin Kaltenbach, Gene



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Ron Ingraham, Bob Shone, and Mike Adolph



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Mike Adolph

St. Louis, and Sally and Max Baumgardner.

In the summer of 1991, Mike assisted Ann Haverstock with bird surveys and had the

opportunity to enjoy the antics of an endangered bird. Mike remembers, "We went into the soybean field just west of Noname Knob, trying to get a closer look at fledgling upland sandpipers scurrying in the rows, their parents watching from the big rocks at the end of the knob. After 1997 we haven't had any upland sandpipers at Nachusa. Our successes include getting Henslows' sparrows to nest, and getting sedge wrens back."



© GENE ST. LOUIS

Ann Haverstock

Mike reminisces about Ann Haverstock conducting the bird surveys, "To watch her do this was exciting, gratifying, and — I almost never say this word — amazing; identification was almost all done by ear."

As a founding volunteer and supporter of Nachusa Grasslands, Mike has seen and been an active part of the preserve transformation. Originally only a small group of dedicated individuals tackled all the restoration; the preserve provided only loppers, a few backpack sprayers and some shovels. Fast forward 30 years to a large group of volunteers organized by two supporting and encouraging staff members; the preserve work is fully supplied with the resources and tools to perform state-of-the-art restoration. Thank you Mike Adolph! Your examples of hard work and dedication are inspiring to all current and future volunteers at Nachusa Grasslands. Lead us into the next 30 years!



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In 2000, Mike helped build the new Headquarters Barn

1970s

The whistling call of an upland sandpiper caught the attention of prairie enthusiasts Dot & Doug Wade and Tim Keller.



"UPLANDLAND SANDPIPER" BY ANDY REAGO & CHRISSY MCCLARREN, FLICKR, CC BY 2.0

1970s

Ecologists of the Illinois Natural Area Inventory carefully described and mapped several Nachusa remnants.

1986

Nachusa Grasslands Begins

On August 26, 1986, the Conservancy purchased **130 acres**.



1987

First workday, first prairie planting, first fire

Conducted by TNC and volunteers.

1988

Ron Panzer

Conducts the first insect survey. Regal fritillary identified.



1989

Jay Meiners Wetland Unit donated by his family. **80 acres**

1990

Sally and Max Baumgardner donated a conservation easement. **30 acres**

1990

First Autumn on the Prairie

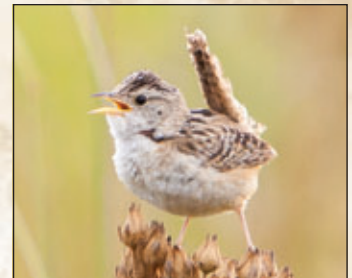
Celebrate the Prairie State
Autumn on the Prairie
at Nachusa Grasslands
 October 13, 1990
 1 - 5 p.m.

Enjoy an afternoon of entertainment and education. Walking tours, story telling, artwork, scientific studies in progress and much more.

Tent displays

Ron Panzer - Rare butterfly and insect survey of Nachusa
 John Spangler - Area history
 Dr. Bo Dzaidyk - Native plant studies
 Thelma Dahlberg - Native Indian lore

Free admission.
 For more information contact:
 Deb Osmer (815) 288-2170 or Hazel Reuter (815) 857-3623



© DEE HUDSON

1993

Ann Haverstock conducts first bird survey.

1993

Nachusa Grasslands has grown to total **726 acres**.



© CHARLES LARRY

1970

1986

1989

1990

1993

1996

Nachusa Grasslands

Events and people that shaped the past 30 years

ALL PHOTOS BY THE NATURE CONSERVANCY UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED

1986

October 2, 1986. George Fell and John Santucci, Ralph Burnett and Steve Packard buy tracts totalling 267 acres at an auction.



Ralph Burnett



1989

First Prairie Smoke
Hazel Reuter, editor.



1989

First Summer Interns

Jennifer Summer and Chris Bronny

1993

Heinkel Units acquired. **330 acres**



1993

Bill Kleiman was hired as the first full-time manager.



1996

Eastern prairie fringed orchid reintroduced.

1996

First pumper unit and Nomex fire suit for controlled burns.



1999

Hook Larsen Unit acquired. **140 acres**



© DEE HUDSON

2000
New Headquarters Barn completed.



2000
Thelma Carpenter Prairie acquired. **65 acres**

2001
Tellabs tract purchased. **200 acres**

2002
Hotchkiss Prairie acquired. **40 acres**

2007
Bennett Woods acquired. **35 acres**

2008
Volunteer stewards established the Friends of Nachusa Grasslands.



2008
Cody Considine hired as the restoration ecologist.



2014
October 3rd at 11:30 pm, 30 bison were introduced to Nachusa.

2015
South bison unit opened. 1500 acres to roam.



2015
Acquired Senger-Williams tract **200 acres**

2015
One of the largest eastern prairie fringed orchid populations in the state ~425 plants.



© DEE HUDSON

2015
Nachusa dedicates 1,000 acres as a registered Nature Preserve of the IL Nature Preserve Commission.



2000

2004

2008

2010

2015

2016



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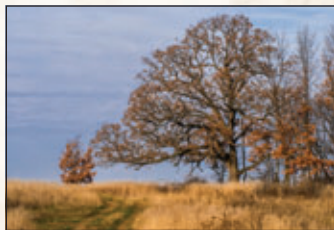
2004
Nachusa purchases **1,300 acres** and doubles in size! The acquisition becomes Clear Creek Knolls and the Holland Unit.

2006
Simpson tract acquired. **195 acres**



2007
Nachusa featured in the *The Nature Conservancy* national magazine.

2010
Orland tract acquired. **355 acres**

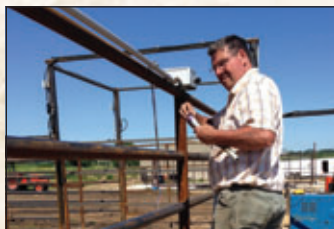


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2011
100th prairie planting.

2012
First crew to harvest 4,000 pounds of seed by hand.

2013-2014
500 acres were fenced and a state-of-the-art corral was built to prepare for bison.



2015, April
First bison calf born.



© CHARLES LARRY



© KIRK HALLOWELL

2015
First bison roundup



© CHARLES LARRY

2016
New visitor center ground-breaking.

2016
The 122nd planting. **103 acres**



© RYAN BLACKBURN

2016
Nachusa Grasslands totals **4,100 acres**



© DAN THOMPSON

Nachusa in 1990

Nachusa Grasslands

The Gestation and Birth . . .

BY STEVE PACKARD

The phenomenon now called Nachusa Grasslands began in 1986 as a new approach to conservation. At that time The Nature Conservancy (TNC) was hard at work buying up areas identified by the Illinois Natural Areas Inventory (INAI). The INAI was a major initiative to find all of the state's surviving high-quality ecosystems. Remnant INAI areas were precious but small. No black soil prairie of enough quality to meet the Inventory's standards (Grade A or B) was big enough for a single pair of prairie birds to nest, nor even large enough to conserve most prairie insect species.

At the time I was science and stewardship director for the IL chapter of TNC, and I found myself asking, "Is it good enough to conserve only areas too small for most animals? Don't we need more? To truly conserve plant communities, shouldn't we try for some preserves large enough to conserve the rare animals too?" Paul Dye, our assistant director, was asking the same questions, so we suggested a statewide meeting of conservation scientists and decision-makers to consider the possibility of adding "Large Grade C Areas" to our conservation goals.

At the time, most "natural areas folks" thought of restoration as something inferior. The arguments at that meeting were fierce, including some table pounding. But in the end, there was a clear consensus that "Large Grade C's" were indeed a sensible addition to our conservation agenda.

The next question was, "Where do we find them?" At that time, I'd never heard of the beat-up old grasslands along Lowden Road in Lee and Ogle Counties. They had no name. But State Botanist John Schwegman finally offered the thought that the stream that emptied into the INAI area called Nachusa Marsh had a long string of little quality wetlands along it, and nearby there were a number of endangered species populations in a matrix of old prairie pastures.

Paul and I went to work, back in the office, trying to line up funding, internal support, and mapping the potentials. TNC's real estate wiz, Ralph Burnett, went to work trying to buy some of the little endangered species sites. Then, as internal TNC support was building, suddenly Ralph heard that the whole area was about to be sold at an auction for a housing development. Streets on proposed plat maps had names like "Compass Plant Lane" and "Pussy Toes Place."

In an impressive scramble, board member John Santucci fronted the funds, and, just as the auction was about to start, Ralph bought the whole proposed subdivision. It was the first chunk of what was to become Nachusa Grasslands. I don't think I'd even seen it yet, just maps, aerials, and INAI data sheets.

We needed a name, but didn't want a narrow one. Most sites are named Something Prairie or Something Marsh. We liked "Nachusa" (the name of the township, and a Native American name for early settler John Dixon, who everyone liked). For the second part of the name we went with "Grasslands" because the area originally was many types of grasslands (upland prairie, prairie wetlands, savanna, and/or barrens). All those grassland types are now very rare, and it was to restore them that we bought the land and dedicated ourselves.

The first time I remember walking around Nachusa was with Professor Robert Betz, the Prairie Prophet, who was a major source of inspiration for so many projects and people. I found out belatedly that Betz knew the site from years earlier when he teamed up with Doug and Dot Wade and Tim Keller to do an influential experiment. Wade thought the grazed pastures there might have substantial prairie surviving, if only the cattle could be removed. This crew somehow leased what's now called Schafer Knob for a few years and fenced it, to see what would come up. Indeed, a rich variety of rare plants soon were big enough to identify.

On his revisit to the new Nachusa Grasslands, Betz was thrilled with the size of the place, somewhat horrified by how undiverse the little bluestem pastures now looked, and full of ideas he hoped would help. He recommended broadcasting seed of missing conservative species, especially on "edges" between vegetation patches. We looked hard for the endangered woolly milkweed, which had appeared in his



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Steve Packard

fence experiment. We did find the endangered prairie bush clover and fame flower. To all our amazement, toward the back corner of the piece we'd just bought, we found a large population of the endangered kittentails. We suspected that a lot more discoveries awaited us . . . and certainly a lot of hard work.

Restoration Warriors

30 Years of Seasonal Crews

BY CODY CONSIDINE

The young people pictured on this page are some of the 125 or so who have staffed Nachusa's seasonal crews since the mid-1990's. They arrive every spring, raw recruits fresh from universities, heads filled with knowledge, hands eager to renew the Illinois landscape. When their tour of duty ends in the fall, each year's crew will leave their mark on Nachusa Grasslands.

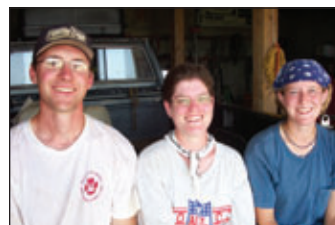
This was the first opportunity these young men and women have had to put their academic knowledge into practice. Sweat, callused hands, long days in the hot prairie, and morning dew-soaked clothing were now the norm as the crew traversed across the preserve in their quest to remove invasive species and collect prairie seed. Most



operated chainsaws to eradicate brush and trees, while some built the Headquarters Barn; others built the bison fence. As their season unfolded, their minds sharpened, their muscles hardened, and their waistlines slimmed.

They all quickly learned to identify the forbs, grasses, and sedges of the native prairie as well as the associated soils beneath. They participated in floristic and animal inventories and cutting-edge scientific experiments. While managing weeds and collecting seeds, they learned the breeding songs of birds, and in recent years, the ways of bison. Each worker hand-harvested hundreds of pounds of seed from hundreds of species of plants, then processed, mixed and planted this bounty into a former corn field. In this way, an agricultural landscape is transformed into the large prairie expanses that are Nachusa Grasslands.

These dedicated hard workers leave Nachusa with a sparkle in their eyes and a swagger in their step, knowing they have completed the finest basic course in prairie restoration



available on the planet. The season spent at Nachusa is an experience that most will never forget.

Take a moment to smile back at the young faces pictured here. Salute them and wish them well. It is they who have reshaped Nachusa into the beautiful place that it is.

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Striving for Excellence

Crew Plants 100+ Acres

BY KALEB BAKER

This 2016 crew worked hard, and it shows! We planted 103 acres at about 60 pounds an acre with 156 species, including a few species that had not been collected previously. Although this year was memorable, we are mindful that our success was made possible by the rich and diverse plantings of previous crews and volunteer stewards; the volume of seed available grows exponentially with each new planting. The natural evolution and innovation of our practices have enabled us to break the triple-digit acreage barrier without sacrificing diversity and planting rate, i.e. pounds/acre. Of the 6,000 pounds planted, 2,200 pounds (mostly conservative asters, along with old field, Missouri and showy goldenrods, rough blazing star, roundheaded bush clover, and little blue stem) were collected using the combine. This led to one of the many challenges of a high-acreage planting: mixing the seed.

Here again, mechanization helped. By using the skid steer to churn the mixture, we saved not only time but also our backs. We also planted some small monoculture plots within the planting to help future crews collect more seed. Being more efficient with our time will become more crucial as Nachusa continues to expand; otherwise, weed control will become problematic and unsustainable.

I think we are making huge strides in the right direction. In 2017 we will use the mapping software, Arc Collector, to record species locations, helping future crews find these seed sources quicker. It will also map invasive weed patches so we target them again the following year. We also plan to move crew seed processing operations to the 201 barn where we will have a larger hammer mill and drier. This new space will make our efforts more efficient and provide more room in the Headquarters Barn for stewards. These innovations will not only help the crew; they will free up our mill for volunteer stewards and restorationists from other projects who use our facilities.

Nachusa's innovative spirit is part of what has made us the gem that we are. Our love for the prairie pushes us onward as we strive for excellence. Utilizing both mechanized methods and more meticulous practices, we will maintain high-quality areas and effectively manage large swaths of land.



© DEE HUDSON



© RICHARD KING

Blanding's Turtles

Abundance, movements, and habitat use at Nachusa Grasslands

BY RICHARD KING

The Blanding's Turtle, *Emydoidea blandingii*, is an Illinois state endangered species, with distribution limited to the northern third of the state. Its conservation and management are made challenging by a long lifespan (sexual maturity is not reached until 15-17 years of age) and use of large expanses of both wetland and upland habitat. Records of Blanding's Turtles at Nachusa Grasslands are sparse, with just seven encounters between 1990 and 2008. To better characterize the status of Blanding's Turtles at Nachusa Grasslands, T. Anton and D. Mauger began annual monitoring in 2014, and R. King initiated radio telemetry work in 2016.

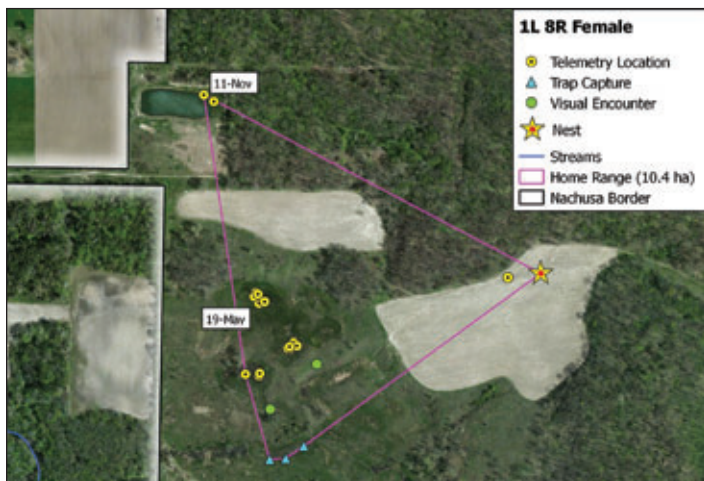
Since 2014, nine adult Blanding's Turtles (6 females, 3 males) have been found at Nachusa Grasslands, and radio telemetry has demonstrated that they use wetland and upland habitats associated with the Franklin Creek corridor.

Two females were tracked to their nesting locations, which consisted of sparsely vegetated sandy soil habitats. Nests were protected from raccoons and other predators, and hatchlings (n = a total of 11 from both sites) emerged in late August and early September. Aside from these hatchlings, no juvenile Blanding's Turtles have been encountered at Nachusa Grasslands, suggesting that recruitment may be low.

Wildlife species often suffer and recover from serious trauma. Among Blanding's Turtles at Nachusa Grasslands, one female was found to be missing her right hind leg. This appears not to have affected her ability to move, but may interfere with nesting behavior, as females use their hind legs to excavate nest cavities.



© RICHARD KING



A second female was first encountered in 2014 with a fleshy protuberance on her neck. Examination by Dr. M. Allender, a University of Illinois veterinarian conducting Ornate Box Turtle research at Nachusa Grasslands, revealed that a portion of her tongue was exposed through an unhealed cut. Dr. J. Nevis, from Willowbrook Wildlife Center, cleaned and sutured the wound, and, after six days of observation, she was released back at Nachusa Grasslands. Subsequent observations suggest this intervention was successful.

Continued monitoring and radio telemetry will provide more detailed information on Blanding's Turtle habitat use and nest site selection and will allow additional nests to be protected.

Bison Report

Who's your daddy?

BY CODY CONSIDINE

One of the many challenges associated with bison management is figuring out how many bulls to have in the herd. We are striving for a herd structure that would be



© CHARLES LARRY

similar to wild populations, where the bull-to-cow ratio is around 1:1. Nachusa's herd is not a production herd where one bull has the opportunity to breed the majority of cows without competition. We want competition to simulate "wild" conditions where the strong and fittest are able to pass on their genes.

Howard Fox

Volunteer Extraordinaire — 1916–2016

Remembering Howard...

Bill Kleiman

NACHUSA GRASSLANDS PROJECT DIRECTOR

Howard undertook projects for many people, but perhaps his hardest volunteer building project was our Headquarters Barn. I will not forget how Howard was "the key" as we dismantled, moved and rebuilt this barn. He worked four days a week with us for 15 months. He had a deep carpentry skill set, which we needed. Although he was 84 at the time, I was inspired and impressed with his good energy and fun attitude. Howard would encourage us to take a break, but then after 15 or 20 minutes he would stand up and say, "The barn won't build itself." Another phrase we often heard him say was, "We are not building a piano." I really enjoyed working with Howard.

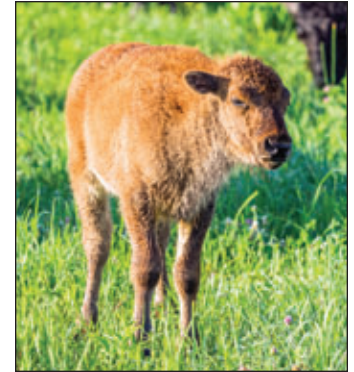
Remembering Howard...

Michael Hansen

UW ARBORETUM LAND MANAGER

Howard sure was a great guy. I learned a lot about carpentry from him during that project, and he was always upbeat and positive. I remember him picking up a chainsaw

We pulled tail hairs on every calf during the 2016 roundup for parentage analysis. The hair samples were sent to Dr. Jim Derr's DNA Technologies Core Laboratory at Texas A&M. Their lab developed a parentage assay based on 11-15 nuclear microsatellite markers (Validation of 15 microsatellites for parentage testing in North American bison, *Bison bison* and domestic cattle. *Animal Genetics* 31:360-366).



© CHARLES LARRY

Results indicated that one particular robust 8-year-old bull outcompeted and fought off the competition to sire 11 out of the 17 calves. The remaining older bulls (two 5-year-olds and one 8-year-old) all sired two calves each.

The low guttural roars, horns clashing, muscles flexing, as bulls contest the privilege to breed — this is all part of nature's plan to ensure that the strongest and fittest pass on their genes.

CURRENT HERD

Total Bison	86
Bulls.....	34
Cows.....	52
2016 Calves.....	17



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and lopping off the end of one of the main beams, cutting it to size in one attempt. Not bad for a gentleman of 84! I also remember the timber frame crew, all 60 years younger than Howard, frequently being impressed by what he could do. I also recall all the nice dinners we shared at his house, which he built himself from trees grown on his land. Then there was his "signature," as he always inserted a piece of poison ivy wood into something he had a hand in building, whether it was a little birdhouse or our barn. I could go on and on! Personally, I'd be happy to live a life half as good as his.

Prairie Sedges

BY LINDA CURTIS

The grasslands of the Midwest could be named “grassedgeland” since about a quarter or more of the grassy plants are sedges.

Nachusa Grasslands has 47 collected and dried *Carex* species in their on-site herbarium. More species will be added to the inventory when Linda Curtis, a “Carexpert” of the genus *Carex*, sleuths through the layers of prairie growth.

The earliest *Carex* bloom in April with tiny stamens shedding dust-size pollen that wafts in the breezes. Honeybees do not visit *Carex*, as they have no petals for landing pads and no nectaries as sweet bait. But pollination happens when gravity brings the tiny dust to the stigmas outstretched from the female’s sac-like envelopes known as perigynia. Inside, seed-like achenes safely grow, confined for a month or so until their true identify is revealed by shape and design. Botanists identify fully-grown *Carex* by

recognizing the line patterns on the perigynia and shapes of the single achene within.

Linda says the design is the fingerprint of the species, so she has constructed charts of the sacs like a forensic database. And since *Carex* is known for its variability, many sacs must be observed to find the most frequent shape and consistent design. Linda’s favorite word is “hmm,” because *Carex* identification is so tricky.

Linda and husband Jim, a GPS photographer, will return to Nachusa Grasslands again in 2017 to fingercomb clumps of grass-like leaves to look for the culms with seed heads. Jim photographs the plants for the infield gps, and Linda photographs with a macro lens for close-ups of the seed heads. Plants are taken back to Linda’s digital lab for micro-imaging the small diagnostic parts. Lastly, the plants are pressed and dried and sent to the herbaria for future studies. To learn more, go to www.curtistothethird.com.



© LINDA CURTIS



© LINDA CURTIS

Left: A *Carex molesta* seed head has a few round spikes, each with dozens of perigynia. Right: Line patterns on the perigynia are like a “fingerprint” for the sedge species. (*Carex molesta*)



© JOHN MORGAN CURTIS

Linda and Jim Curtis

2016 Restoration Technicians

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Fall crew: Shanon Hankin, Sara Vaughn, Phil Nagorny, Kaleb Baker, Katie McBride, Jess Flinginger



Summer crew: Phil Nagorny, Colton Johnson, Kaleb Baker, Katie McBride, Jess Flinginger, Brandon Anderson

Friends of Nachusa Grasslands

BY BERNIE BUCHHOLZ

Since 2008 the Friends have pursued their goals with the same dogged and enthusiastic determination required for a successful prairie restoration. Just like planting a prairie, great results are gradually becoming clear.

Stewardship

Volunteers are the heart and soul of restoration at Nachusa. That's why we are increasing our recruitment efforts. We are using "table tents," a new poster, and social media to welcome new volunteers. As a result, Saturday Workdays are showing increased participation from enthusiastic volunteers.

We welcome you as a new volunteer, and offer an informal — yet highly effective — mentoring culture to help you get started.

Preparing for a Secure Future

Friends of Nachusa Grasslands is funding endowments that will permanently support restoration at Nachusa and provide for its long-term protection. Our goal is to endow \$3 million, with annual distributions going primarily toward Nachusa's operations. We are thrilled to report that the endowments now exceed one third of our goal.

Science Grants

To encourage science at Nachusa, Friends awards grants to qualified candidates conducting research significant to habitat restoration and management practices. In October, Friends sponsored its second science symposium, with presentations by our grant recipients to an enthusiastic crowd. To accommodate more attendees, we are moving the 2017 symposium to the Nachusa Headquarters Barn.

Thanks to a challenge grant and the generous support of individual donors, we are dramatically increasing our grants in 2017 to \$32,000, divided in varying amounts among 12 researchers. Their work will focus on bison, Blanding's turtles, bees, butterflies, grassland birds and more topics.

Support the Friends

Interested in keeping Nachusa Grasslands flourishing? Want to make a difference in the world? We welcome your participation and support! Consider volunteering, supporting us financially through donations, or becoming a "Heritage Hero" by including Friends of Nachusa Grasslands in your estate plan. To learn more, please visit nachusagrasslands.org.



© DEE HUDSON

PRAIRIE POTLUCK: Music welcomed guests to the 30th Anniversary Homecoming event.



© DEE HUDSON

SCIENCE GRANTS: Nicholas Barber, PhD. documents the insects at Nachusa.



© TIM NGO

STEWARDSHIP: Saturday workday volunteers remove non-native trees.

Save the Dates!

June 17 Prairie Potluck

July 29 Friends Annual Meeting

Oct. 21 Friends Science Symposium

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FRIENDS OF
NACHUSA
GRASSLANDS



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Sally Baumgardner

Prairie Visionary — 1937–2016

BY SUSAN KLEIMAN & KIRK HALLOWELL

Sally Baumgardner brought energy, purpose, and wisdom to the vision of restoration in Illinois. The vast community of students, educators and fellow naturalists that she touched throughout her life sadly regret her passing on November 19, 2016.

In a 2011 interview, Sally shared that her commitment to nature began as a child when she and her friends would spend their time hiking, exploring, and finding things to do outdoors, regardless of the weather. While she originally pursued a degree and career in business, Sally focused on her love of nature by returning to the University of Cincinnati at age 48 to study biology and other sciences. When she and her husband, Max, moved to Illinois, Sally volunteered at a wildlife rehabilitation project and served as a seasonal staff member at the Morton Arboretum.



In the early 1990s, Sally and Max decided to look for a property that would be suitable for releasing rehabilitated animals and eventually found a 35-acre plot adjacent to Nachusa Grasslands. This would become “Rolling Thunder Prairie” and the focus of Sally’s commitment to restoration and education.

Sally often impressed us with her concern and tireless enthusiasm for educating others about nature and prairie restoration. She wrote for the local newspapers; she mentored kids and adults alike by having them out to her prairie to help in seed planting and weed removal; she said “yes” as often as she could to school, scout, 4-H, and church groups that wanted a field trip; and she shared Professor, her “teaching snake,” with as many people who would let her help them see the good a snake (and all living things) can do.

Sally frequently came to the Headquarters Barn to spend the lunch hour with the other stewards and would have articles to share. She occasionally had special gifts for individuals such as a chocolate bar for a birthday, a puzzle for a child, or a plate full of muffins, brownies or cookies as a thank you to the summer crew for helping with a particularly bad patch of weeds.

We are thankful for our time with Sally and celebrate her inspiration.



Land Stewardship

BY MARK JORDAN

The post-glacial native landscape of north central Illinois was predominately prairie, savanna and oak forest. With the advent of large-scale agriculture, wildfire suppression and the invasion of exotic species, native ecosystems were degraded or eliminated. Where once hundreds of types of plants coexisted, species numbers have declined. Invasive plants outcompete the indigenous vegetation.

Two units of Nachusa Grasslands are now managed by new stewards: Didier Woods Unit by Paul Say and Hook Larson Unit by Joe Richardson. Both stewards are currently working to suppress the growth of invasive species such as non-native shrub honeysuckle, followed by overseeding and planting to increase the native plant diversity.

Paul Say moved to Sterling in 1996 with his family. He earned an Engineering degree from the University of Illinois and works in Dixon. He has been a steward for one year. Before taking on his stewardship role, Paul was a regular at the Saturday volunteer workdays. He says, "My favorite part of the workdays was learning to identify native plants. The ability to recognize individual plants deepened my enjoyment of the landscape."



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Paul Say

Aerial photographs taken in 1939 showed the Didier Woods area to be a mixture of equal parts oak savanna and woodlands. Today the savanna is gone, and while trees dominate the area, few of the trees are native oaks. Paul



© PAUL SAY

Didier Woods in Spring

explained, "More sunlight needs to reach the ground to encourage oak regeneration and plant diversity." Paul has been busy eliminating honeysuckle and has already done some overseeding. He states, "My next priority will be applying basal bark herbicide to the shade-loving cherries/mulberries/elms and opening up the

understory and lower canopy, and then finding a variety of seed-collecting locations for woodland plants." Paul's dedication, quiet determination, and work ethic are always welcome on workdays.

Joe Richardson became acquainted with Nachusa Grasslands by attending Autumn on the Prairie several times in the 1990s. Joe retired in February of 2016 after nine years of teaching, 20 years working in the auto parts field and nearly 10 years as an employee of Crest Foods. Following retirement, he began coming to the grasslands regularly. Joe said, "Bill Kleiman noticed my interest and one day he said he had something to show me. He took me out to Hook Larson Prairie and told me the background of Mr. Larson and the acquisition of the unit. Afterward, he asked me if I wanted to become a steward of the west end of that unit. Obviously, I said yes."



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Joe Richardson

Besides being a steward, Joe has recently become a Master Naturalist through the University of Illinois Extension. Joe also volunteers for Nachusa's Saturday workdays and works with other stewards during the week. His long-term goal for his unit is to restore the degraded areas and increase the diversity of the plant populations. Like many of the stewards, Joe likes to take pictures and sometimes gets distracted by the bison, plants and insects. Joe speaks of the allure of Nachusa Grasslands, "What I really like about working here is the solitude. If it gets too hot to work on a summer afternoon, I will just sit and listen to the sounds of the insects and birds or often, the sounds of silence, and enjoy the beauty of the prairie in bloom."

As stewards, Paul Say and Joe Richardson have taken on the responsibility of transforming Hook Larson and Didier Woods into healthier and more diverse natural communities. They will work hard alone and with others to bring back the oaks, the tall grasses, the meadowlarks and the woodpeckers. They, along with other stewards



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Birdsfoot violet in Hook Larson

and volunteers, are bringing a new future to a landscape. And in the process they will learn to identify plants and take a few pictures.

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