



Grand Prairie Friends

2020 Annual Report



**GRAND
PRAIRIE
FRIENDS**

A NOTE FROM US



Dave Easter,
Board President

Despite the challenging times we are having, my belief in the mission of Grand Prairie Friends and our sister conservation organizations has deepened. Dianda and I regularly hike, with our favorite trail in Illinois being at Warbler Ridge Conservation Area. We enjoy seeing our friends at stewardship events such as seed collection at Loda Cemetery Prairie, although with masks we might not recognize them until we speak. Being in nature is truly refreshing and critical for us all.

The Grand Prairie Friends board remains very active. We are currently working on a new three year Strategic Plan replacing our current 2018-2020 plan. This will include a Strategic Conservation Plan outlining areas of acquisition focus, including: prairies, parcels along the Embarras River corridor, expansion of current properties, and active farmland for income. We closed on two parcels in December. One property on the north end of Warbler Ridge Conservation Area, which includes a garage for storing our equipment. Our second closing was on a beautiful river front parcel north of Lake Charleston, which includes a large bluff overlooking the river.

Our volunteer bat monitoring team have already spotted bats using the artificial bat habitat at Warbler Ridge Conservation Area this summer. We are building a strong reputation within the bat mitigation community and are working on future acquisition and restoration using this type of funding. Significant restoration work is planned on one of our upcoming acquisitions from a new mitigation partner.

We continue to grow both in property and in capability, both board and staff. We are looking forward to a great year going forward.



Sarah Livesay,
Executive Director

You did it! GPF members, donors, volunteers and supporters of GPF are unstoppable. Not even a pandemic slowed your support. You sold out the native plant sale, used social-distance strategies like our stewardship maps to attack invasive plants and added nine new members to GPF's Blazing Star Society. With a little creativity and your continued financial gifts, we are ending this year with healthier landscapes, a stronger Board infrastructure and of course, new land.

Partners did it! As we've said before, the land purchase is over fast but Land Eats! GPF must take full advantage to identify stewardship opportunities to continually feed and nurture these lands. This means keeping abreast and applying for a variety of grants and financial support to keep the tractors, chainsaws and loppers moving. This year we received support and services from more than (15) programs such as Natural Areas Acquisition Fund, Illinois Recreational Access Program, National Wild Turkey Federation, The Nature Conservancy and Natural Resources Conservation Service. We work hard to make your dollars stretch and fulfill this critical mission.

We ALL Did this Together! I want to thank the GPF Board of Directors for adjusting flexibly to conditions and supporting last-minute changes to the lineup this year. Next year will bring additional staff to this work, so be ready to share and recruit for us. I hope you enjoy reading the stories herein about GPF's COVID year. There were certainly days when Jeff and I felt like we should make a movie of our adventures—especially when all of the forest contractors were sleeping in tents!



Jeff Peyton,
Natural Areas
Manager

This has been a year to be particularly grateful for the kinds of places that Grand Prairie Friends protects and restores, possibly more than ever before. Natural areas like our prairies and forests are not just intrinsically valuable in their own right—though for me that value alone would be enough to justify the work we do. Neither are they simply valuable for what they contribute to the broader ecosystem, like wildlife habitat, stormwater and erosion control, feeding native pollinators, or providing seed for future restorations. Besides these functions, the places we protect provide benefits on a much more personal level.

Our sites might be a destination for a much-needed escape from the house, somewhere to stretch your legs on a vigorous hike or to just sit and take in the surroundings. When many of the places we might go for entertainment are unavailable, our natural areas are still open for a day of fishing in the river or birding in our woods and wetlands. While many schools are closed, every Grand Prairie Friends site is an outdoor classroom and laboratory. Even as in-person religious services are canceled, we do not lack for sacred places.

On a personal level, it is also a year for me to be grateful for the work that I have the privilege of doing for Grand Prairie Friends. While many people's work lives have been seriously upended this year, our operations have suffered only minor disruptions thanks largely to the efforts of our hardworking volunteers, interns, part-time staff, and most of all our members. Grand Prairie Friends, thank you for making all this possible!



Board & Full-time Staff

Front row (left to right):

Sarah Livesay (Executive Director)
Dave Easter (President)
Ed Wilhite (Treasurer)
Valerie Sivicek (Secretary)

Middle row:

Samantha Osborne
Jamie Ellis
Jeff Peyton (Natural Areas Manager)
Pam Leiter (Vice President)

Back row:

Craig Milling
Fred Delcomyn

ABOUT THE COVER

GPF partnered with GPF Board Member and Graphic Designer Samantha Osborne (Charleston), and a local metals artist Nick Taylor with Diligent Hands Metalworking (Charleston) to create a one of a kind entrance sign for Warbler Ridge Conservation Area! It was unveiled on September 26 during the Embarras Ridges addition event.

The design incorporates wetland birds, bats, trees, and grasses—and of course warblers—to represent the focus areas of our restoration on these special lands. It serves as the inspiration for the design of this Annual Report.



Jenny Hunt & Kristi Mercer,
Embarras Ridges Donors

WHAT HAPPENS TO THE LAND DURING A PANDEMIC?IT KEEPS GROWING!



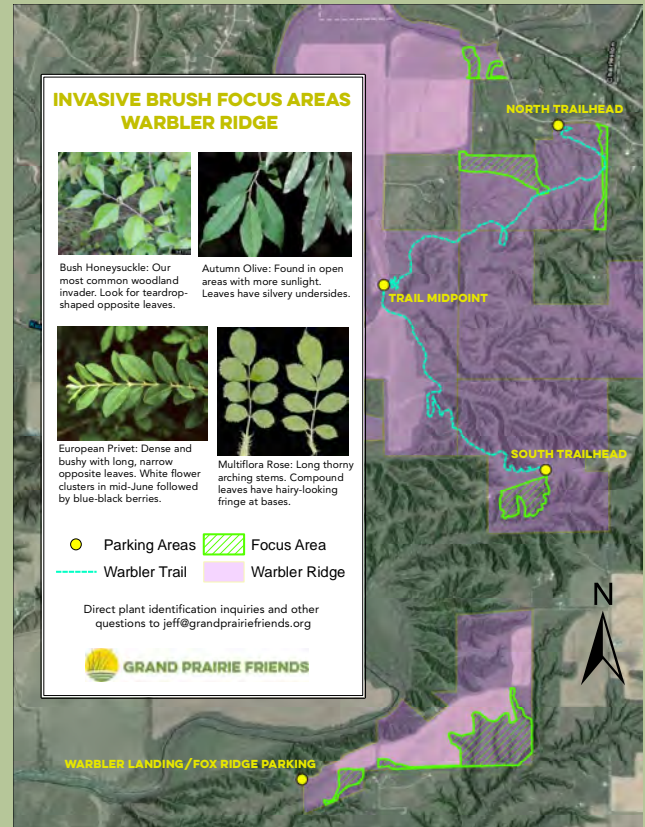
April: 23,000 trees arrived to be planted so staff, contractors and volunteers masked-up and socially distanced to get the roots in the ground! To avoid hotels and restaurants, contractors camped alongside the tree fields!



May: 6,000 native plants needed homes! Thanks to GPF's Communications Chair, Ryan Boske-Cox, who created the online sale, the generosity of Bill Bagby for loaning growing space, and hosts of volunteers that socially-distanced to plant and water.



YOU DID IT! More plants were sold in 2020 than any other GPF sale ever!



June: 1,000 acres of forests needed invasive plant help! We provided our volunteers with "on your own" maps to locate and remove "hot spot" trouble areas.



Stewardship days with masks

PRESERVE

59 NEW REASONS TO LOVE US!

3-ACRE addition to Embarras Ridges Land & Water Reserve

14-ACRE Warbler Crossing

42-ACRE Warbler Bluff

EMBARRAS RIDGES ADDITION

With private donations from Jenny Hunt & Kristi Mercer, along with gifts from Beverly & Dan Rauchfuss and an Anonymous donor, this 3-acre "front door" to Embarras Ridges will now protect the southern "entry" to the site.



DECEMBER 2020:

WELCOME TO WARBLER CROSSING & WARBLER BLUFF

WARBLER CROSSING

This site is situated as a connecting piece between Lake Charleston and the Warbler Ridge Conservation Area.

Located just over the historic Blakeman Bridge from Lake Charleston, the site sits at the north end to the existing 1,003-acre Warbler Ridge.

The Embarras River flows along the east side of the 14-acre property. Two buildings sit atop the floodplain which GPF will intermittently use for office and meeting spaces.

Funding for this purchase was made possible by grants from The Lumpkin Family Foundation and Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation.



We Own: **1,125 ACRES** We Manage: **1,208 ACRES**

WARBLER BLUFF

Sitting upriver from the existing Warbler Ridge location, Warbler Bluff offers a birds-eye view of the Embarras river, valleys and ravines below.

The picturesque view will be the site for a bat habitat restoration project specifically for the tri-colored, little brown and Indiana bats that are known to frequent this river corridor.

Funding for this purchase was made possible through funds from Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation and California Ridge Wind Energy.



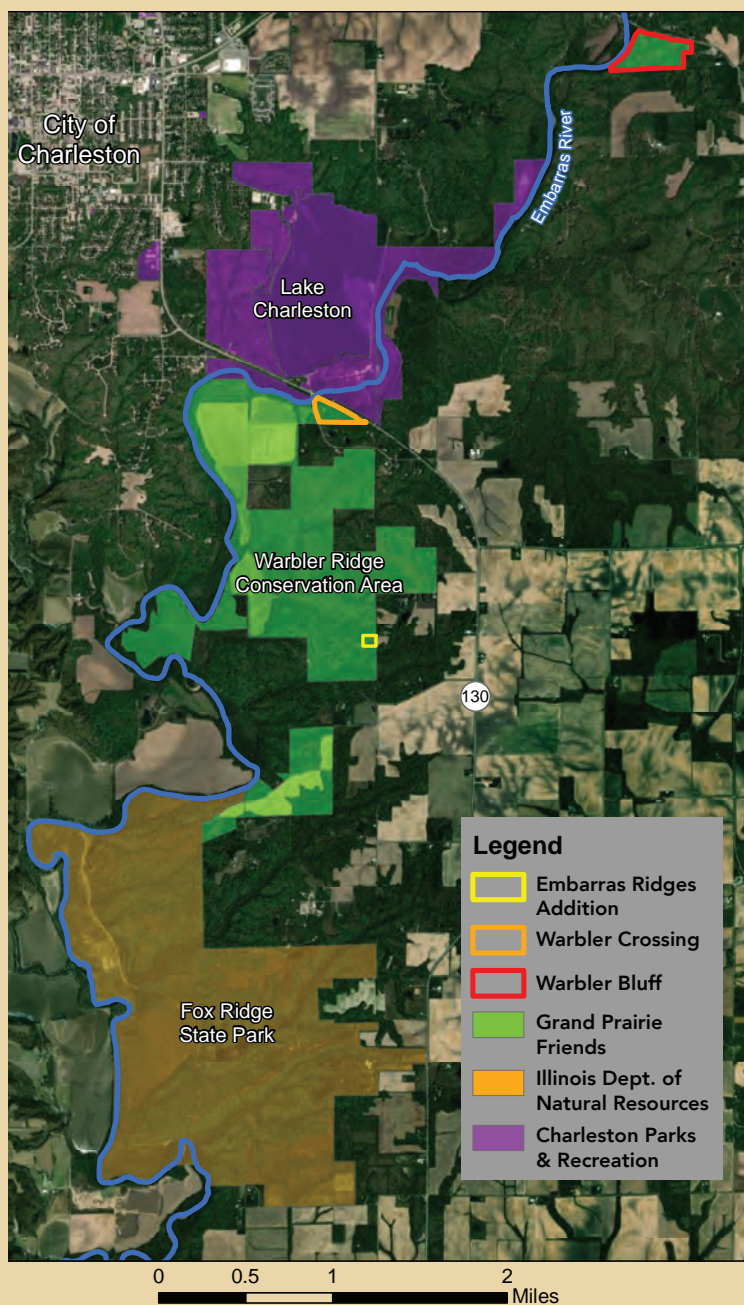
CONSERVATION CORRIDOR NOW SPANS OVER 3,900 ACRES!

- Lake Charleston & Woodyard Conservation Area (City of Charleston Parks & Rec)
- Warbler Ridge Conservation Area (GPF)
- Fox Ridge State Park (Illinois DNR)

13 RIVER MILES OF THE EMBARRAS RIVER IS NOW PROTECTED!

HELP US FEATHER THE NEST!

For the first time in history, GPF will have a physical office site. Please help us feather the Warbler "nest" by purchasing an item from our wish list at GrandPrairieFriends.org.



THE PRAIRIE MY GRANDMOTHER WALKED

This October, GPF received a generous donation; attached was a hand-written note which read,

*"Dear Grand Prairie Friends, I finally had the pleasure of walking the prairie that my grandmother walked in the 1870's, thank you for making this happen."
~ Shirley Meece (Loda)*

After chatting with Beckie Green, Loda Prairie Site Steward, it was revealed that Beckie had escorted Ms. Meece to the site after a trail had been mowed for an upcoming event.

At 85, Shirley took the opportunity to walk with Beckie down the now-walkable prairie and share memories of her Grandma, Johanna (Foehr) Kolling.

Grandma Johanna shared stories from her childhood with Shirley. In particular, she recalled running through the long, tall grass at Loda to get to school- and being chased by the "racer snakes" along the way. And the grand Memorial Day parades that would march from the church down to the Loda Cemetery.

We are honored to preserve these memories and heritage for Shirley, and so many others!



Shirley Meece



Shirley's Grandmother,
Johanna (Foehr) Kolling



SAVING A SPECIES ON OUR LAND

By Beckie Green, Loda Prairie Steward

Next year will be the 20th anniversary for the Grand Prairie Friends / U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) partnership to save the Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid.

For the first year of monitoring in 1991, Loda Cemetery Prairie Nature Preserve logged one individual orchid. With help from GPF volunteers, these numbers were sure to change.

As site steward at Loda, I gladly assumed the duty of orchid monitor, with help recently from volunteer Terri Davis and GPF staff & interns. Once an orchid emerges on the site, we notify FWS to immediately set the date for pollination.

In the natural world, the night flying hawkmoth (Sphinx) would pollinate the orchid. However, to help perpetuate this beautiful fragile flower, human intervention is needed.

On the big day, Cathy Pollack with FWS delivers the orchid pollen from other Illinois sites for us to use in pollination and assists us in collecting pollen from our site to use at other project sites.

A steady hand, good close up vision (and many toothpicks!) are required for the intricate placing of the tiny bit of pollen to the exact location on the orchid's anther.

Numbers vary each year, 2003 was a banner year at 23 plants! In 2020, we pollinated and cage-protected eleven orchids. Statewide, Illinois had a banner year of 2,287 reported orchids!

We were all so excited to participate in this exceptional activity as a team. I have hope that the orchids will continue to increase with each passing year.



GPF Intern Melina Pakey-Rodriguez hand-pollinating orchids.



Photo: Kim Roman

The Eastern Prairie Fringed Orchid may take up to 9 years to bloom from seed!



Beckie Green gave a talk recently about her beloved Loda Prairie Cemetery Nature Preserve.

PRESERVE

RESTORE



Thanks to the IDNR Natural Area's Acquisition Fund, Invasive Reed Canary Grass was treated at Bonnie's Prairie Nature Preserve.



Timber stand improvement to thin maple and give a better shot to our oak/ hickory forest occurred on 92-Acres of Warbler Woods North. Thank you National Wild Turkey Federation!



Tree #50,000 was planted in Warbler Ridge this year.



Fairchild Cemetery Savanna Nature Preserve was one of six prescribed burns this year.



51 new species of wetland grasses & forbs were seeded in Warbler Bottom's Midpoint Wetland.



Deer fences were installed to protect the 50,000 new tree seedlings.

Warbler residents that appreciate healthy habitat:



Common Five-lined Skink



Broad-headed Skink



Red-tailed Hawk

HEART OF A VOLUNTEER

RESTORE



"I have always enjoyed wandering around in the woods for the peacefulness. So why not help preserve and maintain the area for myself and others to enjoy."

~Tony Willenborg, Charleston



"When I first learned of GPF and their project at Warbler Ridge, I was quite intrigued. A real opportunity to volunteer for such a broad restoration project so close to home was irresistible! The leadership team has been amazingly receptive and the other

volunteers so committed. I believe I could not have found a better group to which I can volunteer my time."

~Wilson Montgomery, Casey



"I enjoy hiking the trails at Warbler Ridge, taking the next step to volunteer was a great way to give back to the Grand Prairie Friends.

Being a volunteer I have learned about invasive plants and how to remove them. It has been

very exciting to be part of the Bat Monitoring Project learning about bats and observing them emerge from the bat pods at Warbler Ridge."

~Marge Phelps, Charleston



"A few of the many reasons I volunteer for GPF is that I want these amazing natural areas to still exist 100 years from now, I get to spend time with a great bunch of people, and for the satisfaction removing invasive species to see our beautiful native species flourish."

~Laura Jacob, Champaign



Aiden Livesay constructed two boot brush stations to stop the spread of invasive seeds on the Warbler Trail.

Prescribed Burns: 100 hours

Communications: 100 hours

Citizen Science: 115 hours

Champions & Stewards:
347 hours

Workdays: 374 hours

Outreach Events,
Plant Sale, Rattlesnake
Master Run: 445 hours

**Your Hands Fill
Our Hearts!**

**You gave over 1,480
hours this year!
Thank you!**

PROMOTE



"Discovering Warbler Ridge has been a godsend for me during this time."

Wish I could give more — probably will later. Wonderful work!"

~Greg Bilbrey, Robinson (IL)

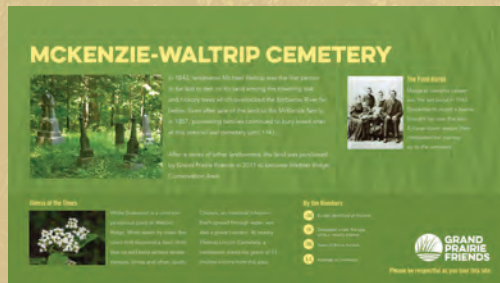
With COVID restrictions in place, nature was the retreat for many people including hundreds of new visitors to Warbler Ridge!

NEW SIGNS HELP YOU ENJOY YOUR VISIT!



In Spring 2020, we added new interpretive signs at Nance Woods (Shelby County) and at Burnett Land & Water Reserve (Champaign County).

We have openings for volunteer land stewards at both locations! For more info, contact Diane Wilhite at volunteer@grandprairiefriends.org.



Interpretive signage was added at both Loda Cemetery Prairie and Warbler Ridge Cemetery.

UPDATES JUST FOR YOU!

Updates to the well-loved Warbler trailhead areas made visits more accommodating and accessible.



Parking alongside tiny Daileyville Road was an issue during events and busy weekends. GPF received a grant from Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation to create a large gravel parking area.



GPF members hand-laid an observation patio under the new lean-to at the little red shack. Perfect for birding, resting or picnics.



The shack is ready for the next event with new windows, trellis, sky lights and other updates!

EXTRA, EXTRA, WE TEACH ALL ABOUT IT!

GPF appeared in print, radio, TV and social media this year to share the good work. GPF was even featured in the National Land Trust Alliance magazine! Visit our website for a collection of "News" and follow us on Facebook.



Hands-on learning with Wilson Montgomery at Stewardship Saturdays (First Sat of every month, 9am).

RESEARCH CORNER

By Eric Janssen, Research Coordinator

As a wetland scientist at the Illinois Natural History Survey, I'm interested in the research that is conducted on GPF lands. As a volunteer, I merge my skills and interests to help review, approve and report on research requests received by scientists. Requests for research include animals, plants, soil and beyond. Researchers from across the Midwest annually apply for permission, the furthest application in 2020 hailed from Pennsylvania. In many cases, I work with the IL Nature Preserve Commission when GPF has enrolled the property into the Nature Preserve or Land & Water Reserve program. In these ways, we ensure the integrity of the land is preserved and research is supported on these lands.

- 13 research projects on nine different GPF properties
- Prospect, Loda, and Pellsville most requested permits
- Soil microbes, moths, bees, snails and Barred Owls were all on the list for 2020



PROMOTE 

BAT-TY CITIZEN SCIENCE

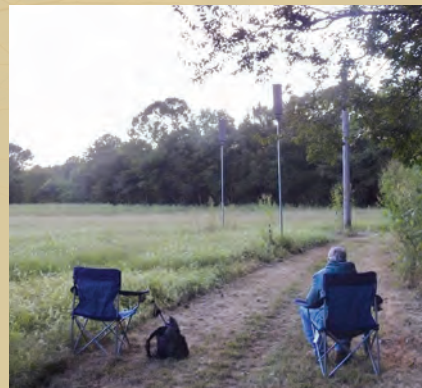
By Diane Wilhite, Volunteer Coordinator

In 2018, GPF began a bat habitat improvement project at Warbler Ridge to protect the endangered Indiana bat and threatened Northern Long-Eared bat. This project included tree plantings, pollinator foraging areas and the installation of two artificial bat habitats (each containing nine bat structures). Each year, GPF trains a team of dedicated bat monitors to conduct bat counts on various evenings and to see if the habitat restoration is working. We celebrated when as many as 121 bats were observed leaving a single roost in the South Pod one evening!

Nine volunteers work in pairs from May 21 until Sept 30 when the bats migrate south.

Many thanks to our volunteer bat monitors:

- Kathryn Bulver
- Pam Evans
- Kenton Macy
- Wilson Montgomery
- Jim Phelps
- Marge Phelps
- Hanna Schwanke
- Terry Smith
- Rich Wandling



BAT FACTS



Brandenbark housing (engineered bark wrapped on wood poles) was the preferred roost chosen by the bats



Bats move between roosts to better avoid predators



July and August highest level of activity with 175+ bats in the South Pod on a single night



Some species prefer to roost singly and the males will usually roost alone or in small groups



GIVING



When we were invited to become one of the Founding Members of the Blazing Star Society of Grand Prairie Friends, we were so excited and honored to do so.

No one jumps at the chance to give \$1,000 a year and not get something delivered by Amazon or a local jeweler. But we are getting so much more than that—



an opportunity to be a part of a living legacy that can't depreciate, wear out, or be put away in a drawer/closet somewhere to be discovered by your kids when you pass on.

A living legacy, a land trust, that grows and becomes more precious as we realize the value of being outside and "in" nature for all of its wonderful benefits to both our physical and mental health—especially now in these times of COVID-19 and climate change.

*Topper and Carol Steinman,
Blazing Star Society
Ambassadors
(2019 Founding Class)*

Members:

-  Anonymous
-  Dave & Karen Andsager
-  Clark & Irene Bullard
-  Beth Chato
-  Nancy Coutant
-  Fred & Nancy Delcomyn
-  Dave & Dianda Easter
-  Thomas Fehrmann
-  Robert Fiedler
-  Sandy & Joe Finnerty
-  Beverly & Dan Foote
-  Eric & Jane Freyfogle
-  Janet & Hugh Gallivan
-  Wendy Garrison & Richard Raspet
-  Ryan & Renee Guynn
-  Summer & Stephen Hennessy
-  Stan Herrin
-  Susan & Lew Hopkins
-  Phil Hult
-  Jenny Hunt & Kristi Mercer
-  Shirley Hunt
-  Gary & Dixie Jackson
-  Karen & Pat Kane
-  Keith Kohanzo
-  Pam Leiter
-  Sarah & Jeff Livesay
-  Ben & Chiara Lumpkin
-  Kenton & Dorothy Macy
-  David & Chris Main
-  John & Diane Marlin
-  Robert McKim
-  Shirley Meece
-  Don Meier
-  Craig Milling & Carla Cáceres
-  Dirk Mol & Jerry Wray
-  Sharon Monday & Jack Paxton
-  Elizabeth & Milton Otto
-  Susan Post & Michael Jeffords
-  Thomas & Beverly Rauchfuss
-  Trent Shepard
-  Mary Kay Solecki & John Taft
-  Peg Steffensen
-  Carol & Topper Steinman
-  Cynthia Swanson
-  Gloria Valenti
-  Michael Walker & Kristina Gunsalus
-  Ed & Diane Wilhite

 Indicates Founding Member

Our Blazing Star Society includes members who make an annual commitment of \$1,000 to Grand Prairie Friends.

Membership includes special events, communications and outings scheduled exclusively for this team of supporters as they work together to forward the mission of GPF.

Join this team!
Contact Carol or
Topper for more information: steinman@shout.net.



BLAZING STAR SOCIETY
GRAND PRAIRIE FRIENDS

THANK YOU!

GIVING



GRANTS



Illinois Clean Energy
community foundation



RATTLESNAKE MASTER RUN

- Prospect Bank
- Serra Ventures
- Taylor Studios
- Birkey's
- Minuteman Press
- Meijer
- Mack's Twin City Recycling
- Iroquois Federal Savings & Loan
- Illinois Native Plant Society – Forest Glen

MATERIALS/SERVICES



Tribby Excavating, Inc.

Standerfer Construction, Mattoon

“WHEN NATURE CALLS”

Monthly Porta-Potty Sponsors

- Central Illinois Hikers Club
- Fresh Cut Lawn Care
- Jason & Adrienne Beers
- Jill Miller & Donna Lawson
- Lara & Rick Danzl
- Rankin Land Surveying



YOU CAN HELP!

Shop for GPF! Visit GrandPrairieFriends.org and access our Amazon (desks, chairs, cleaning supplies) and Forestry Suppliers Wish List—you can purchase and ship items straight to us.

Use our new automatic recurring donation option from your bank account and stop worrying! We can set it up for monthly or annual gifts in any amount that you wish.

Porta-Potty Sponsorship! Join the list of “When Nature Calls” monthly sponsors for \$100 and your name will be famously recognized on signage!

Perpetual Giving—have you left GPF in your estate plans? Please let us know now—this helps us plan and allows us to say Thank YOU!

Owe You Something? Friends owe you a favor or payback? Have them donate to GPF in your honor instead!

Retirement accounts (IRAs) can be set up with GPF as a benefactor for your automatic gifts! Many members use this as an easy way to donate without worry.

Time and Talent! Trail monitoring? Counting bats? Technology, video, construction, real estate or baking? No matter your skill, we have a volunteer job for you!

AUTOMATIC GIFTS & MEMBERSHIPS

Never forget again! GPF now offers automatic withdrawal direct from your checking/savings or IRA accounts. Simply email Treasurer Ed Wilhite and we will set you up: dianeed@sbcglobal.net.

CARES ACT DONATION CREDIT MAY BE EXTENDED TO 2021

As of this printing, the Senate is about to vote on the 2021 COVID-Relief Act which would make your donation stretch further again this year! Watch the news, consult your tax advisor and donate today!

SHOW YOUR GPF PRIDE!

Visit GrandPrairieFriends.org to order logo wear: shirts, hats, jackets and more! Look for the GPF Merchandise link.



**GRAND
PRAIRIE
FRIENDS**

GIVING



PEOPLE OF THE GRAND PRAIRIE

INTERNS

GPF partners with Lake Land College to provide hands-on internships for the horticulture Cooperative Work-Study Program. In 2020, GPF also hosted interns from Eastern Illinois University, Cornell University, and University of Illinois.



Under the direction of IDNR Heritage Biologist, Morgan Walder, GPF interns Melina Pakey-Rodriguez and Katrina Davis conducted snapping turtle research at our Edna Edwards Burnett Land & Water Reserve.



"Being an intern at GPF was an awesome experience; everyone is so friendly and welcoming! I loved getting to see the wildlife day to day over the weeks. Never a dull moment on the ridges."

~Alissa Bell, Intern

TECHNICAL SUPPORT



Kaleb Lukens, Prairie Specialist



Terry Smith, Operations Technician



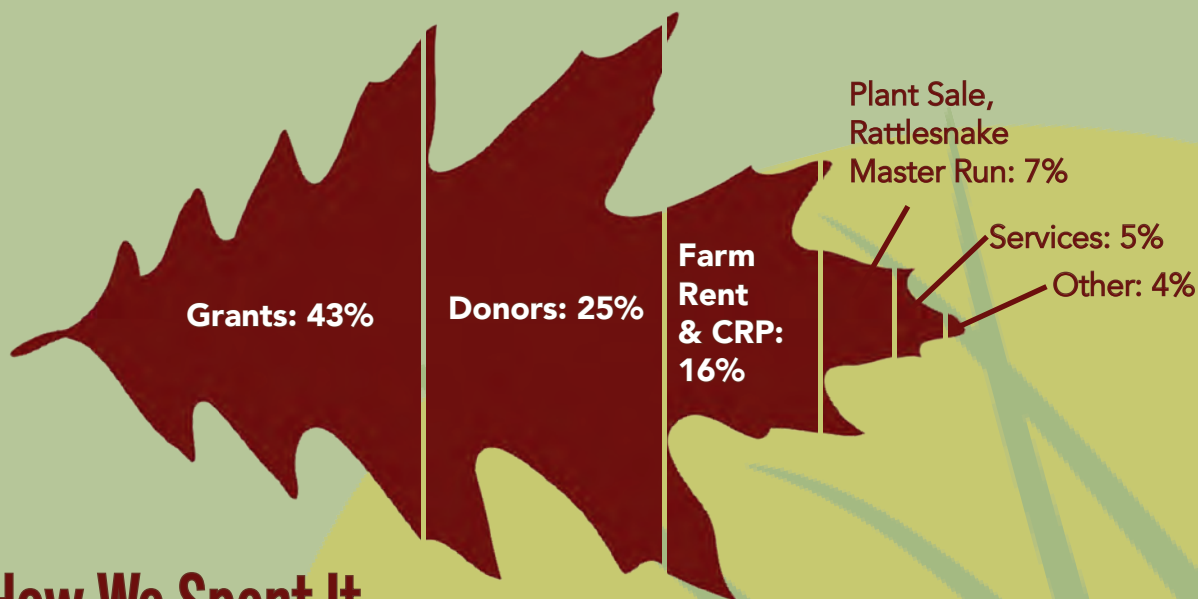
After about 10 years assisting GPF with land management, Dave Mott retired his chainsaw. He was honored by a bench at Embarras Ridges in September. Thank you Dave!

2020 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Where Our Money Came From

Restricted Land and Project Grants	\$ 146,500
Donations from Members & Friends	84,680
Farm Rent and CRP	53,260
Plant Sale & Rattlesnake Master Run	24,640
Technical Services	16,270
Other	13,250
TOTAL	\$ 338,600

\$84,680
Your
Generosity!



How We Spent It

Stewardship & Restoration	\$ 222,000
Administration	60,100
Land Acquisition	12,500
Fundraising Expenses	6,900
TOTAL	\$ 301,500

\$222,000
Restoring
Valuable Habitats!

PRESERVE RESTORE PROMOTE



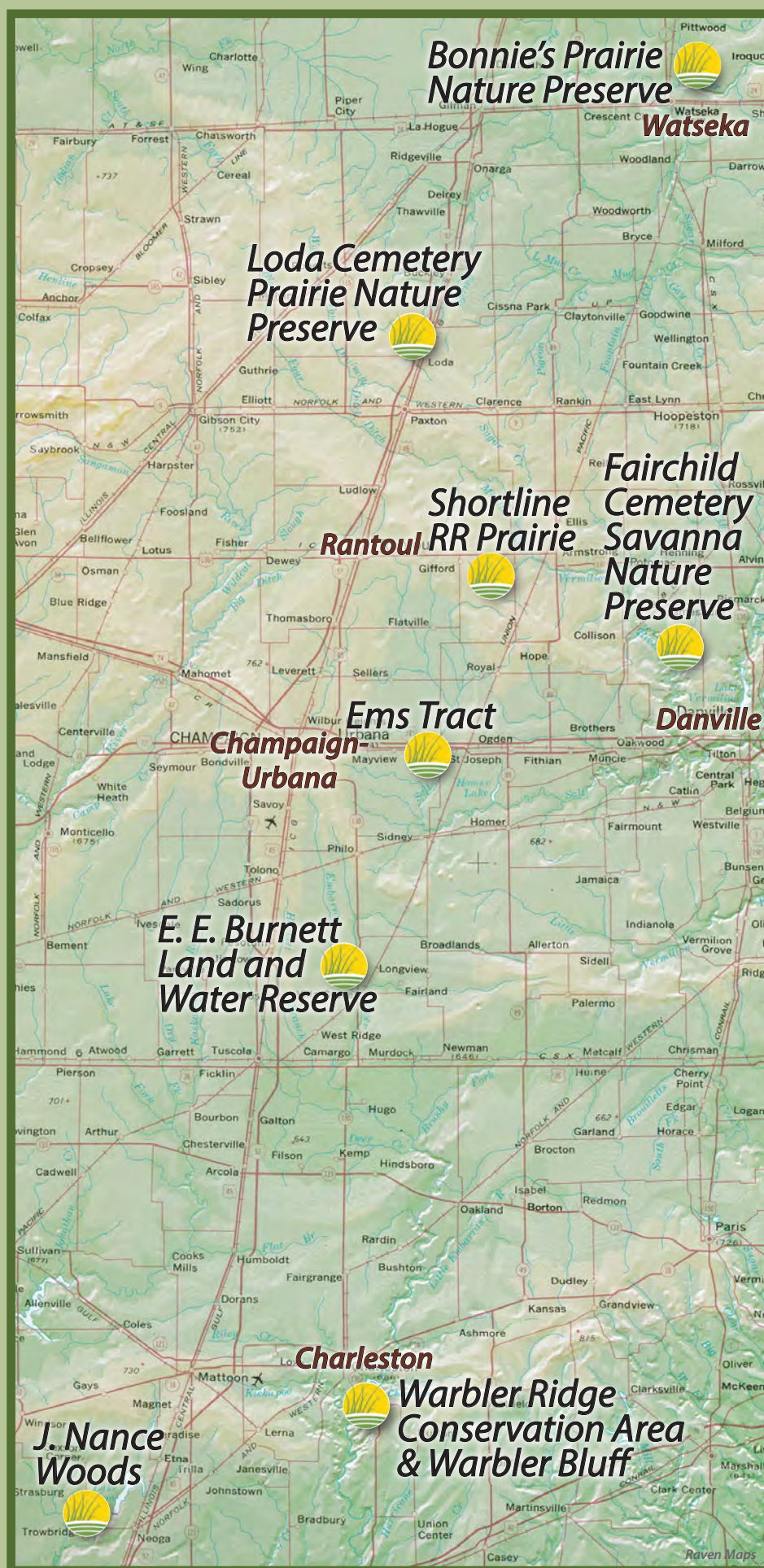
GrandPrairieFriends.org

Mission

Preserve and restore natural communities in east-central Illinois and promote an understanding and appreciation of natural resources.

What is the Grand Prairie?

The Grand Prairie was a unique natural ecosystem in east-central Illinois. It consisted of thousands of square miles of tallgrass prairie and extensive marshes, interspersed with forested rivers and oak savannas.





GRAND PRAIRIE FRIENDS

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Urbana, IL 61803-0036

2020 ANNUAL REPORT



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