
A Prairie Rendezvous



FALL VOL. 17, NO. 3, 2015
.....

Spring Plant (not just Milkweed) Sale

“What do we want?” “MILKWEED!”
“When do we want it?” “MILKWEED!”



There was no tear gas, and, in fact, it was pretty orderly as the hordes streamed towards us in

the corridor of Lincoln Square one Saturday last May. But the story really started in October, 2014, when a group of volunteers met to decide the fate of the GPF Annual Plant Sale.

Each year GPF volunteers have collected seed from the various prairies we manage. During the winter months, we clean the seed and plant it. Germination and early growth took place in University of Illinois greenhouses in which GPF rented space.

Then in April seedlings were moved to individual pots for our plant sale in early May. But the University had officially decided to discontinue using the greenhouses. No other greenhouse space was available with sufficient space to meet our needs. We had seeds, but without the warmth and watering of a greenhouse, we would have no plants to sell.

(continued on page 3)

Campus Area Native Plant Projects

The Florida – Orchard prairie has experienced a fantastic year. The many hours Master Naturalists invested the past 3 seasons are paying off in a dramatic decrease in weeds and surge in native plant diversity.

The need for volunteers at this site has been minimal this summer. Weeds were an issue this spring, but have been manageable by student hourly workers since then. Volunteers will likely be needed occasionally for seed collecting and a few other tasks this fall.

The site is full of bees and other insects. A fox was in residence earlier and put a dent in the rabbit population which was digging up newly planted seedlings. There was also a noticeable increase in the number of voles.



(continued on page 3)

A Prairie Rendezvous

P.O. Box 36 • Urbana, IL 61803-0036

Editor: Jim Fay**Assistant Editor:** Jamie Ellis

A Prairie Rendezvous is a publication of Grand Prairie Friends for the restoration community of East Central Illinois.

A Prairie Rendezvous is published quarterly. Article submissions should be sent electronically to the editor at jimfay7@gmail.com or by mail to the GPF P.O. Box 36, Urbana, IL 61803. Member submissions are gladly welcomed.

Grand Prairie Friends is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization dedicated to natural community preservation, restoration, and education in East Central Illinois. Our stewards help coordinate volunteer workdays at native prairie, savanna, wetland, and woodland remnants. Inquiries and tax-deductible donations should be sent to the P.O. Box listed above.

GPF mission is to preserve and restore natural communities in east-central Illinois and promote an understanding and appreciation of natural resources.

Stay in touch with the GPF community through the website (www.grandprairiefriends.org), facebook (www.facebook.com/grandprairiefriends) or the ecostewards e-mail list (lists.communitylists.org/listinfo.cgi/ecostewards-communitylists.org).

GPF Board of Directors (term ends)

Jamie Ellis, president (2015)

Ruth Green, secretary (2015)

Fred Delcomyn, treasurer (2016)

Dave Easter, vice-president (2016)

Pam Leiter (2015)

Rob Stanton (2016)

Carol Steinman (2017)

Craig Milling (2017)

VACANT (2017)

Board meetings are regularly scheduled for the fourth Monday of each month (except August and December) at 5:30 PM in the Forbes Building (1816 S. Oak St., Champaign)

GPF Committees

For information on volunteering and getting involved with any committees, please contact the following:

Membership & Volunteerism: VACANT

Stewardship: VACANT

Education: VACANT

Finance: Fred Delcomyn

Publicity: Derek Liebert

Land Acquisition: Dan Olson and Jim Payne

Fund Raising: VACANT, Terry Rathgeber, and Jamie Ellis

Submission Deadlines

- Summer Issue (June, July, Aug.): May 1
- Fall Issue (Sept., Oct., Nov.): Aug. 1
- Winter Issue (Dec., Jan. 2014, Feb. 2014): Nov. 1
- Spring Issue (Mar., Apr., May): Feb. 1

PRESIDENT'S REPORT**AUGUST 2015**

*by Jamie Ellis, President,
GPF Board of Directors*

Late summer is one of my favorite times of year to be in a prairie or almost any bit of grassland in Illinois. The buzz and hum of crickets and grasshoppers provide a soothing soundtrack to the brilliant yellows and golds atop Silphiums, sunflowers, and goldenrods. Hot sun tempered by an ever-present breeze. Dry stalks crunching underfoot. Tall grasses swish as I push through to look for the next bit of natural beauty that prairie has to offer.

Since my last report in March of 2015, I am very, very happy to report that GPF was successful in its purchase of 90 acres of forested property in Coles County! This property adjacent to Warbler Woods Nature Preserve and not far from Embarras Ridges Land and Water Reserve brings our land holdings in Coles County to a whopping 433 acres. We want to sincerely thank the Lumpkin Family Foundation and the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation for their generous grants, and we deeply thank all of our members and friends—over 100 of you—who contributed some amount of money to help with the purchase of this land.

Back in early May, GPF once again held its annual native plant sale. This past year the plant sale was on some shaky ground because of the uncertainty of greenhouse space, but a dedicated group of volunteers came together to make sure the show would go on. We ended up buying seedlings from a native plant vendor and then volunteers helped to re-pot these seedlings. Dozens of you came out to help, and on the day of the big sale, we almost sold out! Special thanks goes to Dave Easter, Ed and Diane Whilite, Gary Russell, and Jim Fay for their outstanding dedication and time to make the sale a success.

(continued on page 5)

(SPRING PLANT SALE...)

At the October gathering, we decided that the Plant Sale should not be allowed to wither away without a fight. There was a strong feeling that the plant sale provides significant support to the GPF mission: hundreds of people acquire thousands of native plants, members of GPF pull together to accomplish the sale itself, and the money raised is used to pay our summer interns and for stewardship of the natural areas we own.

So, we decided to keep the plant sale alive using a different model. We would place an order for seedlings of some of our more popular plant species from past years. In effect, we would pay the nursery to use their greenhouse space during the dead of winter. Furthermore we set up a steering committee to run the whole process of the plant sale, relieving Jamie Ellis of the bulk of the responsibility for it.

In January we placed an order for 2736 seedlings of 28 species, including over 1000 milkweed and butterfly weed. Then we kept our fingers crossed until they were delivered on April 1. They looked good! Squads of volunteers transplanted the seedlings into the sale pots. We used the physical space of the U of I greenhouse, but we had to arrange our own temperature control and watering. More volunteers. (See “Plant Sale Volunteer List,” page 7.)

Because of some multiple germinations, we actually ended up potting 3186 plants. Another 300 plants were donated for the sale (thanks, Phil Hult and Don Gardner).

Total revenue this year was down a little from the 2014 record, but expenses were also lower because we did not have to rent greenhouse space. Bottom line, the plant sale netted \$9103 for GPF, a new record.

(CAMPUS AREA NATIVE PLANT PROJECTS...)

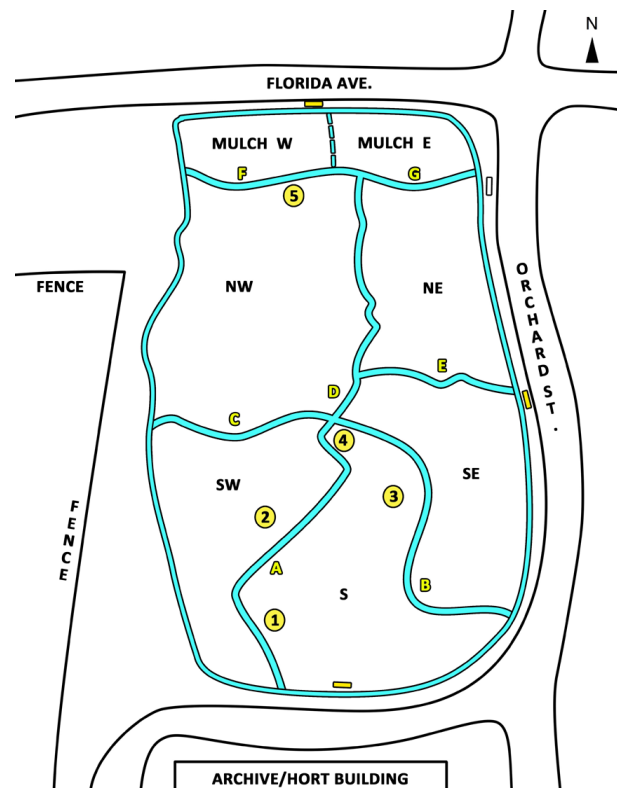
Red Bison grew seedlings this winter which were used to fill in areas where weeds, especially thistle and creeping Charlie, were removed. Seedlings were also used near the pollinarium. Four small prairie plots were established by the pollinarium to demonstrate how plantings of short, medium and tall plants could look in a yard or municipal setting.

John Marlin is the steward on these projects.

In April many MNs joined student volunteers and community members in removing honeysuckle along the road leading to the Pollinarium from Windsor Ave. The effort involved numerous campus units including the Arboretum, campus forester, Pollinarium and student groups. Three four

hour sessions were needed to clear brush along the road so that school buses could safely use it again.

A long term action plan is being developed to clear the mess and re-establish native plants in the area east of Lincoln and South of the Pollinarium as far as Windsor. During the next year several work day will be targeted on chipping brush cut by a chain saw crew.



Land Acquisition Success...And GPF Thanks You!

Early in 2015, Grand Prairie Friends made an appeal to its members and friends to protect more forested natural area, and you responded generously! With the generous help of two foundations and members and friends, GPF now owns 90 more acres of forestland.

This new property is adjacent to Warbler Woods and Embarras Ridges—both owned by GPF. These properties along with the nearby Fox Ridge State Park and other protected properties are considered natural areas of statewide significance.

Grand Prairie Friends needed to raise \$295,000 plus closing costs by May 15, 2015. We also created a budget that included some restoration costs, money

for a parking area and sign, and an informational brochure. GPF would like to sincerely thank the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation for a grant of \$198,000 and the Lumpkin Family Foundation for a grant of \$100,000 to help pay for acquisition, restoration, and other improvements. Over 100 generous members and friends contributed almost another \$40,000 for this project.

This property is located about 3.5 miles south of Charleston. A name has yet to be chosen (the sellers last name was Scaggs). This property is composed of ridges, slopes, and ravines cloaked with forest that harbors a diverse assemblage of native plants. It lies adjacent to

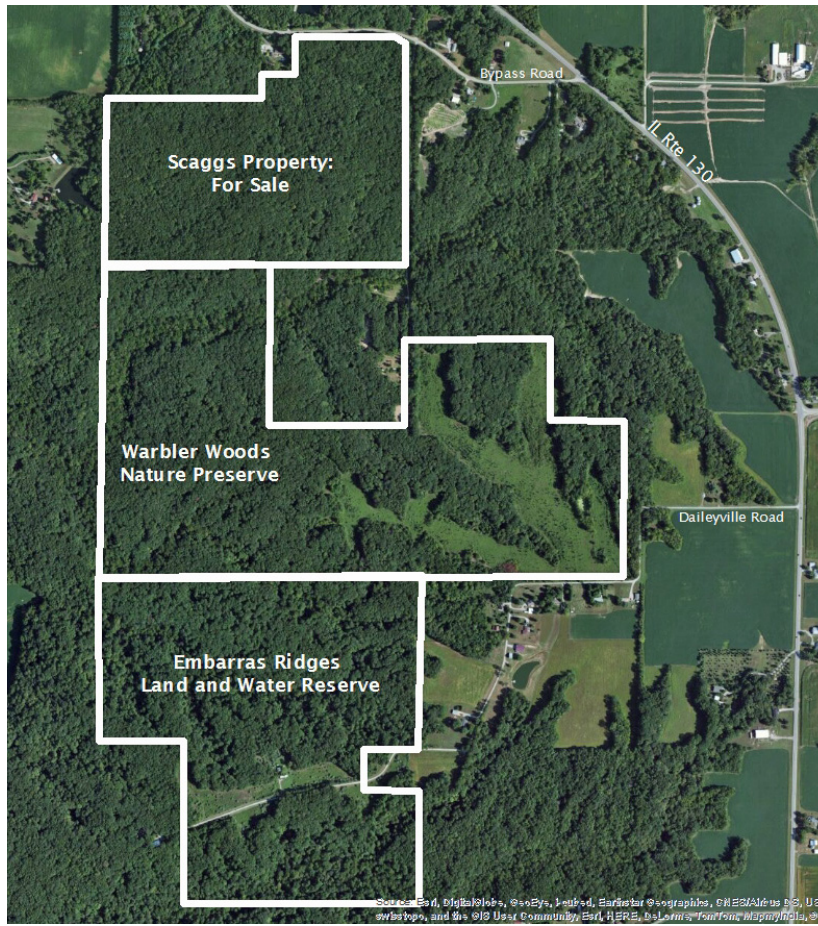
the north boundary of the 202-acre Warbler Woods Nature Preserve, which is contiguous with the 141-acre Embarras Ridges Land and Water Reserve. The three sites taken together contain approximately 430 acres of forest.

Over 100 different types of plants have been identified in the oak and hickory forest at Embarras Ridges.

A one-day bird survey at the new property recorded 17 bird species including 3 species in greatest need of conservation as identified in Illinois Wildlife Action Plan (Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Acadian Flycatcher, and Wood Thrush) and 9 species that are either moderately or highly sensitive to forest fragmentation. At least 57 species of birds inhabit the adjacent Warbler Woods NP during the breeding season, and it is likely that many of these birds also occur in the new property. Finally, the Wood Frog makes its home across all three properties.

Now that GPF owns the property what's next? Plans are underway for restoration work that includes removal of invasive plant species like bush honeysuckle, autumn olive, and multiflora rose. We will also work to put in a small parking area for access and erect a sign to direct visitors and passersby. An informational brochure will follow. The big dream and vision is a hiking trail that connects and goes through all three GPF properties!

Come to Embarras Ridges Fall Fete on October 3 to learn more about this new property and project.



GPF Fall Events

GPF Annual Membership Meeting September 25, 2015

All members and friends are invited to join Grand Prairie Friends at 7:00 PM in the Anita Purves Nature Center (1505 N Broadway St, Urbana, IL 61801) for the Annual Membership Meeting. This meeting is called to conduct organizational business and to elect new board members.

Please join us to welcome special guest speaker: Dr. Sam Heads, Palaeontologist, Illinois Natural History Survey. Dr. Heads is an expert in all things Orthoptera—crickets, grasshoppers, and katydids.

A short business meeting to elect Directors to the Board will precede the guest speaker.

This event is free and open to the public. Desert potluck—bring a dessert to share. Eating utensils and drinks provided.

Embarras Ridges Land and Water Reserve Fall Fete

At Embarras Ridges south of Charleston (17161 Daileyville Road, Charleston, IL 61920)
October 3, 2015
3-6 PM (come early, stay late)

Join fellow GPF members to hike around the fall woods of Embarras Ridges and Warbler Woods. We'll fire up the grills and light a bonfire. Bring your lawn chair, a dish to share, and tableware. RSVP to events@grandprairiefriends.org or 217/244-5695.

Rattlesnake Master Run for the Prairie

November 1, 2015, 9 AM
Meadowbrook Park, Urbana



This 5 and 10 K fun run and walk has become a beloved event for local running enthusiasts as well as GPF members. It is a great opportunity for us to encourage families and youth to get together beyond the I-Phones and personal devices and enjoy and appreciate the natural world in which we live.

We can all enjoy the Meadowbrook Park Prairie on a crisp fall morning, mingle with fellow runners, and raise awareness and funds for GPF's conservation mission.

More information and to register here: <http://grandprairiefriends.org/rattlesnakemaster.php>.

(PRESIDENT'S REPORT...)

I reported earlier that we received a generous donation of 20 acres of land from Ralph Burnett. This property is in southern Champaign County not far from Villa Grove, and it protects a small stretch of the upper Embarras River. By the time you read this the proposal to register this property as the Edna Edwards Burnett Land and Water Reserve will likely be approved. Look for more information about a dedication event in the future.

Back in April of this year I led a group of about 15 GPF Directors and Life Members on a tour south to explore properties that we own—James Nance Woods, Embarras Ridges Land and Water Reserve, Warbler Woods Nature Preserve, and the Burnett property. It was a great day full of discoveries. Now to find a time to head north to places we own—Shortline Prairie, Fairchild Prairie, Bonnie's Prairie, Ems Tract, and Loda Prairie.

David Mott continues to work hard clearing unwanted woody vegetation at Embarras Ridges Land and Water Reserve as part of a stewardship grant from the Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation. He's working on thinning maples on the oak dominated ridges as well as invasive species such as autumn olive, multiflora rose, and bush honeysuckle. The grant ends in December, and he'll be working hard until the weather turns cold.

I'm looking forward to the Fall Meeting September 25. We will welcome Dr. Sam Heads as our special guest speaker. Sam is a palaeontologist, entomologist, and general expert in all things orthopteran—crickets, grasshoppers, and katydids. I'm also looking forward to our Fall Fete at Embarras Ridges on Saturday October 3. All enjoyed our inaugural event last year. Let's hope for good weather and I look forward to seeing you there!

James.ellis72@gmail.com
217.649.7230

Remember:

To download this issue as well as previous issues of *A Prairie Rendezvous* go to:

<http://grandprairiefriends.org/aprarchive.php>

By the same token, for a variety of useful, informative documents on prairie stewardship topics go to:

<http://grandprairiefriends.org/corner.php>

Natural Areas Internship 2015—A Report

Do you remember all the rain in June? Did you know that there were two very committed young men working hard to help manage the prairie and woodland natural areas that we love in spite of the rain? These two young men were Alexander Mueller and Justin Vitkus.

Since 1994, Grand Prairie Friends has hired two or three usually college age folks to learn about natural areas management. This means learning from local stewards and professionals as well as pulling weeds, cutting unwanted woody vegetation, or selectively applying herbicide.

James Ellis has coordinated and supervised the summer internship program since about 2000, but he cannot do this work alone. This year, GPF would like to sincerely thank those who put up their hand and put in the time to teach and lead Alex and Justin.

Those folks include Jim Payne, Paul Tessene, Phil Hult, and Gary Russell. Special thanks to David Mott and Mary Kay Solecki who lead the interns in a grueling week at Embarras Ridges Land and Water Reserve installing boundary signs.



Alexander Mueller and Justin Vitkus, 2015 GPF Summer Interns, take a quick break at Embarras Ridges Land and Water Reserve. In July, they helped Mary Kay Solecki from the Illinois Nature Preserves Commission and local steward David Mott post property boundary markers.

They worked at many sites including Loda Prairie Nature Preserve, Prospect Prairie Nature Preserve, Shortline Prairie, Welles Cemetery Prairie, Pellsville Cemetery Prairie, Buffalo Trace Prairie, Embarras Bluffs, Jasmine Hollow, McMillan-Ehler Prairie, Embarras Ridges Land and Water Reserve, Warbler Woods Nature Preserve,

Fairchild Cemetery Prairie, and the recently donated Burnett property. They also took time to explore sites in Vermilion County like Windfall Hill Prairie, Russell Duffin Woods, and Doris Westfall Prairie Nature Preserve.

Now for a report in their own words...

Alexander Mueller

Hello GPF members! My name is Alexander Mueller and I am one of the GPF summer interns. I am from Chicago, IL, and this fall I will be entering my senior year at Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington, IL. I am an environmental studies major with a concentration in ecology.

I have been interested in the natural world for as long as I can remember but my passion was further strengthened at the end of my sophomore year when I attended a tropical ecology course in the northwestern portion of Costa Rica. That course is part of the reason why I applied for the position with GPF. It helped me realize which direction I wanted to take my life.

When James told me I got the position for the summer, I was ecstatic. This is the first real job I have gotten that relates to my interests. I felt like I knew what to expect coming into the internship. I knew this position would be physically demanding and that most days would be very hot and humid. I knew there would be bugs, thorns, and various plant induced rashes. This was no problem for me since I am no stranger to these conditions.

I further expected to learn a great deal from this internship. Both of these expectations became reality. Yes it was hot, yes it was hard work, and yes I got some poison ivy rashes, but James and all the other stewards have been great mentors this summer and I have learned so much from them.

This summer Justin and I have worked on a sizeable amount of invasive species such as yellow and white sweet clover, multiflora rose, wild parsnip, autumn olive, teasel, and more. I feel a great sense of accomplishment on our part when I realize how many of the prairies looked at the beginning of the summer as compared to now.

I am happy to know that my work has helped improve the biodiversity of east central Illinois and would like to thank James and GPF for this great opportunity.

(continued on next page)

(NATURAL AREAS INTERNSHIPS...)**Justin Vitkus**

Hello Everyone! My name is Justin Vitkus, and I am one of the 2015 Grand Prairie Friends interns. This past May I graduated from the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign) with a Bachelor of Science degree in Environmental Sustainability. I was born and raised in Sycamore, IL, and I was actively involved in Boy Scouts from a young age. I strongly credit scouting for my interest in the environment. Some of my other interests include practicing cello, playing soccer, and cycling.

Before I was an Environmental Sustainability major, I was working to become a Landscape Architect. After an amazing study abroad trip with Professor Amita Sinha in India for a landscape architecture studio, I realized the design field wasn't for me, so I transferred to the School of Earth, Society, and the Environment.

Two years later, I returned to India with Professor Amita Sinha to study pollution and water quality issues in the Ganges, River in Varanasi. In the summer of 2014, I was an environmental and landscape studies intern with Derek Liebert, Superintendent of Planning and Operations at the Urbana Park District. This internship was great, and I worked on designing a lake rehabilitation plan for Crystal Lake Park in Urbana.

I found Grand Prairie Friends through my Environmental Writing Professor, Dr. Rob Kanter, and I was immediately interested. Throughout my studies in Environmental Sustainability, I learned a lot about the Illinois Grand Prairie and was shocked to learn how fast it is disappearing. Unfortunately, my course studies did not include much plant identification, so I saw GPF as a positive learning experience. Throughout my time at GPF, I have learned so much about prairie plants, but I feel like there is infinitely more to learn.

Overall, this internship has been a great experience. It has involved hard work in the heat and rain, but all of it was worth it. Alex and I have removed a substantial amount of invasive species, including white and yellow sweet clover, wild parsnip, autumn olive, teasel, multiflora rose, and Japanese honeysuckle. I feel as if Alex and I have done a tremendous job at helping maintain the health and beauty of multiple prairies and forests, and I want to thank you all for the opportunity to be a part of Grand Prairie Friends.

Bi-County Prairie Garden Update

The Bi-County Prairie Garden project in Villa Grove is well underway after a rough start with a variety of setbacks that included a very long, cool, wet spring. The early planting of hot weather tall grass prairie plants got engulfed spring weeds.

But with the efforts of a host of volunteers including members of area prairie preservation groups as well as area flower gardeners and farmers, the garden now well underway. It consists of two components. The first is a butterfly wildflower garden made up of flowers, largely commercial, donated by area residents from their gardens.

The second component is a collection of prairie plants collected from remnant prairies within ten miles of Villa Grove. These plants were located, identified and transplanted by volunteers from such prairie interest groups as GPF, Master Naturalists and Red Bison. Over 30 plants are included in the collection. Many are donated from area farmers who care for privately owned tracts of remnant prairie.

If you have questions or comments about the gardens, or if you would like to be involved in the effort, contact Jim Fay at jimfay7@gmail.com.

Plant Sale Volunteer List

Kudos to these volunteers for making the plant sale such a success

Chad Ackerman	Car Alstetter	Zoe Andsager
Bruce Barnard	John Bergee	Cathy Bernard
Eileen Borgia	Isabell Cole	Evie Cragoe
Duan Dassow	Dave Easter	Dianda Easter
Jamie Ellis	Jim Fay	Meredith Fay
Sandy Finnerty	Joe Finnerty	Beverly Foote
Bill Ford	Jim Hamilton	Alan Hays
Debbie Insana	Doug Jackson	Rhonda Jurinak
Pat Kane	Karen Kane	Pam Leiter
Caitlin Lill	Larry McCotter	John McWilliams
Gail McWilliams	Nancy Mickenbecker	Craig Miller
Craig Milling	Beverly Rauchfuss	Linda Ricker
Alan RiderJ	ackie Roy	Gary Russell
Bil Schnitzlein	Robert Stanton	Carol Steinman
Topper Steinman	Bob Vaiden	Jackie Vaiden
Diane Wilhite	Ed Wilhite	

Remember: The Rattlesnake Master Run
November 1, 2015, 9 AM
Meadowbrook Park, Urbana