

A Prairie Rendezvous

A joint publication of:



Summer 1999

In the premier issue of A Prairie Rendezvous we featured an article by Dwain Berggren that spoke to the origins of our modern landscape and how that impacted the very natural areas we strive to protect. In this issue, we also have a piece that speaks to our modern landscape. Not a history but a guide to a new set of eyes through which to see our Midwestern landscape. So if your summer reading list is empty, be ready to fill it up.

We also have a pair of articles about two underappreciated elements of the restoration community: farmers and students. Chris Hauser becomes a personal demonstration of the power of small "wild" areas while Kevin Green's personal demonstration occurs across hundreds of acres of farm land and beyond.

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Writing the Land - Part 1

by Eric T. Freyfogle

To know a place and make it one's home, there's no substitute for muddy boots. You can't sink roots in a place without mixing your life with the soil and meeting, face to face, the plants and other animals that share your home. You need to walk the land, listening, touching, smelling, and seeing. History is a part of it, and so is beauty. Still, there's much to be said for a good guide, including a guide whose impressions grace the pages of a book. To see the land through the eyes of another is sometimes to see it anew.

Particularly over the past half century, American writers have excelled at the literary genre known as natural history. Quantitatively, the output has been vast, and a good bit of it, happily, yields as much delight as marshland birdwatching in May. The land can come alive when seen through the eyes of a poet. The ordinary can become extraordinary.

The ten authors mentioned below offer a point of beginning for readers new to this literary form. All have written about the Midwest, and nearly all have called the region home. Inevitably a list focused on the Midwest leaves off many superb writers, like John Hay, Terry Tempest Williams, Mary Oliver, Gary Snyder, William Kittredge, and Gretel Ehrlich. But for readers linked to the Midwest, it makes sense to hire local guides..

No writer dominates conservation writing in this century like **Aldo Leopold**; his only peers in American history have been John Muir and Thoreau. Leopold's classic, known to millions, is his posthumous collection of nature sketches and essays, *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here and There*, first published 50 years ago this fall. Direct, concise, poetic, and rich in wisdom and aesthetics: it's hard to think of book that does so much with so few words. A native of Burlington, Iowa, Leopold lived most of his adult life in and around Madison, Wisconsin, and his family "shack" was (and is still) located north of Madison along the Wisconsin River. The *Almanac* largely deals with that countryside, though one of the book's treasures is the mournful "Illinois Bus Ride."

Leopold is known for his science (the first professor of game management) and his philosophy (especially his land ethic), but he was a master too of nature observation and a moving, lyrical writer. The only trouble with his *Almanac* is its deceptive depth. Few first-time readers get more than one-tenth of what Leopold has to say; the book repays frequent reading. Readers fond of this book can turn to the collection of his essays, published in 1991, *The River of the Mother of God and Other Essays*. This fall, coinciding with national celebrations of the *Almanac*,

(see *Writing*, pg 7)

A farmers commitment

by Alf Siewers

Driving along I-74 from Urbana to Danville it's hard to miss Kevin Green's sign, "Green 1891," on a broad side of his barn. Green's commitment to his family's longtime farming operations in the Oakwood area is as large as his commitment to conserving wildlife habitats, planting native species, and supporting rail-to-trail conversion in Vermilion County.

As both vice president of the county Farm Bureau and habitat director for the local chapter of Pheasants Forever, a conservation group focused on wildlife habitat, Green sees a number of different sides to local environmental debates that concern restorationists in our region.

And he wants to encourage farmers to continue to be more ecologically-minded, while also urging environmentalists with urban backgrounds to be more respectful of the work farmers are already doing as large-scale stewards of the east central Illinois landscape.

(see *Farmers*, pg 6)

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A Prairie Rendezvous is a joint publication of the Grand Prairie Friends of Illinois (GPF) and the Prairie Grove Volunteers (PGV) for the restoration community of east-central Illinois.

A Prairie Rendezvous is published approximately on a bimonthly basis. Article submissions should be sent electronically to the editor at d-chien@uiuc.edu

GPF is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization dedicated to prairie preservation, restoration, and education in east central Illinois. Inquiries and tax-deductible donations should be sent to: Grand Prairie Friends, PO Box 36, Urbana, IL 61801.

The PGV is part of The Nature Conservancy's Volunteer Stewardship Network. Its stewards help coordinate volunteer workdays at native prairie, savanna, wetland, and woodland remnants. Inquires and tax-deductible donations should be sent to: Prairie Grove Volunteers c/o The Nature Conservancy, 8 South Michigan Avenue, Suite 900, Chicago, IL 60603

A students perspective

by Chris Hauser

Recently, I was asked how I became involved in Grand Prairie Friends, and what it was about tallgrass prairies that interests me. I couldn't think of a good answer. I guess, I love prairies because they are natural. I have always loved nature - plants, birds, and rocks. And when I think about why I have always appreciated these things, it is difficult to decide exactly why. They have always been a part of me. I guess I was just born with a strong appreciation of the outside world.

I'm sure many other people were born with an deep understanding of nature, but I'm afraid most will never develop this part of their lives simply because they don't have the chances to see it. Although I had parents, friends, and teachers who gave me an appreciation of nature, my greatest influence was the time that I spent in natural areas. Not snow-capped mountains, wild rivers, and vast wildernesses. I'm talking about the little patch of desert behind our house.

As I was growing up I would spend hours wandering around that few acres of "vacant land", discovering that it really wasn't "vacant" at all, but was full of plants, insects, and birds. At a young age I learned to observe. I learned why certain plants grew only under larger bushes, that different kinds of ants dug out different sized pebbles, and how a rabbit's tracks divulge how fast it was running. In the time I spent in that little area, I discovered how varied and special life is.

I know it's easy to become cynical because our prairie preserves are so tiny. "There's not enough genetic diversity in a few acres to be sustainable," some say. But just remember that we're not saving these places just for the plants and animals. We're saving them for ourselves, too. And we're saving these remnants because there will always be children who love nature, but just don't know it yet. 

Volunteer Workday



Calendar



Special 'Fridge' Edition Insert - Summer 1999

Grand Prairie Friends and the Prairie Grove Volunteers are working to restore and manage these few examples of our shared natural heritage; the prairies, savannas, woodlands, and wetlands of east-central Illinois. These areas are under attack from non-native weeds and need our help.

SATURDAY, JUNE 5: HORSESHOE BOTTOM NATURE PRESERVE. See **rugged topography**, beech-maple forest, calcareous seeps, and unusual wetland plants with Rick and Jim while cutting black locust and removing exotic species from a bottomland restoration site. Wear gloves and long sleeves and bring water and a lunch. Contact Rick Larimore (h: 337-7006) or Jim Smith (h: 896-2079) for more information.

GPF AT THE FARMERS MARKET. Help sell native plants and pick up some fresh farm grown vegetables at the same time. Four people are needed. If you are free anytime between 7:15 and Noon please call Jim Payne (h: 344-7840, w: 684-2120, or email jpayne@shout.net).

SATURDAY, JUNE 12:

WINDFALL PRAIRIE NATURE PRESERVE. Bursting with rare flowers on the banks of the Middle Fork River, occurs one of the few remnants of hill prairies in Illinois. Join us as we meet to preserve this natural area by pulling sweet clover and other non-native invasive plants. Meet at ANPC at 9:00 am to carpool, or at the Lake Mingo parking lot in Kennekuk Cove County Park at 10:00 am. Contact Dave Ketzner (w: 244-8821) for more information.

SHORTLINE RAILROAD PRAIRIE. Wild parsnip pulling. Come help us remove non-native vegetation from the prairie remnant! Meet at APNC* at 9:00 am to carpool, or on site at 9:45 am. Contact Phil Hult (h: 586-4511) for more information.

GPF AT THE FARMERS MARKET. See Saturday, June 5.

SATURDAY, JUNE 19 (FATHER'S DAY WEEKEND):

BUSEY WOODS. Enjoy a woodlands close to home (if you live in Champaign-Urbana!). Brush cutting and removing non-native species. Bring loppers or hand saws if you have them. Meet at APNC* at 9:00 am. Contact Kim Bauer (h: 328-0552) for more information.

FAIRCHILD CEMETERY SAVANNA NATURE PRESERVE. Join the effort to keep this rare savanna remnant healthy by removing non-native invasive species such as vetch and sweet clover. Meet at APNC* at 9:00 am to carpool, or at the Lake Mingo parking lot in Kennekuk Cove County Park at 10:00 am. Contact Alicia Admiraal (w: 244-2168, h: 351-8405) for more information.

GPF AT THE FARMERS MARKET. See Saturday, June 5.

- Please leave your pets at home. Pets are not allowed on Nature Preserves.
- Wear appropriate attire for working outdoors, (i.e. gloves, boots or comfortable shoes, long sleeves, long pants, durable clothing)
- Bring drinking water and a snack.
- If you have tools such as loppers, handsaws, and pruners please bring them.
- Sunscreen and a hat

SUNDAY, JUNE 20 (FATHER'S DAY WEEKEND): HORSESHOE BOTTOMS NATURE PRESERVE. Prickly Pear Cactus Hike.

Come see if we can catch the prickly pear cactus in bloom!!! Be prepared for a moderate hike. Meet at APNC* at 1:00 or at Parking Lot #6 at the Middlefork Fish and Wildlife Preserve at 1:45. Contact Rick Larimore (h: 337-7006) or Jim Smith (h: 896-2079) for more information.

SATURDAY, JUNE 26:

GPF AT THE FARMERS MARKET. See Saturday, June 5.

SATURDAY, JULY 10: PROSPECT CEMETERY PRAIRIE NATURE PRESERVE. One of the finest local mesic tallgrass prairie remnants with an even more rare savanna remnant. We'll be cutting brush and battling other invasive species at this 5 acre cemetery. Some 80 species of native herbaceous forbs and grasses grow at this site. 21 of these are found nowhere else in this county! Meet at APNC* at 9:00 am to carpool, or on site at 10:00 am. Contact Chris Hauser (384-5048) or John Taft (w: 244-5046) for more information.

SATURDAY, JULY 17:

BUSEY WOODS. BUSEY WOODS. Brush cutting and removing non-native species. Enjoy a woodlands close to home. Bring loppers or hand saws if you have them. Meet at APNC* at 9:00 am. Contact Kim Bauer (h: 328-0552) for more information.

LODA CEMETERY PRAIRIE NATURE PRESERVE. Another one of our finest local mesic tallgrass prairie remnants in full bloom! Come help us preserve this high quality prairie by cutting and pulling non-native, invasive vegetation. Bring pruners if you have them. Meet at Loda Cemetery at 9:00 am, or contact Dwain Berggren (h: 367-5014) to make carpool arrangements.

SATURDAY, JULY 31: SHORTLINE RAILROAD PRAIRIE. Come experience the satisfaction of removing sweet clover and other non-native vegetation from this prairie remnant. Meet at APNC* at 9:00 am to carpool, or on site at 9:45 am. Contact Phil Hult (h: 586-4511) for more information.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 21: BUSEY WOODS. see July 17th.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 28: LODA CEMETERY PRAIRIE NATURE PRESERVE. Teasel follow-up and weed pulling. See Loda in late summer bloom! Summer wildflowers include rattlesnake master, compass plant, and wild quinine. Bring pruners if you have them. Meet at Loda Cemetery at 9:00 am, or contact Dwain Berggren (h: 367-5014) to make carpool arrangements.



Directions:



APNC - ANITA PURVES NATURE CENTER. Urbana Park District. 1505 North Broadway, Urbana. Busey Woods is located behind the APNC.

FAIRCHILD CEMETERY SAVANNA NATURE PRESERVE - Vermilion county. From C-U take I-74 east to US Rt. 150. Exit 150 east. Turn left (north) on 1300 E and go about 4.5 miles. Follow signs into Kennekuk Cove County park.

WINDFALL PRAIRIE NATURE PRESERVE - see directions for Fairchild Cemetery Savanna above.

PROSPECT CEMETERY PRAIRIE NATURE PRESERVE - Champaign county. Take US Rt. 45 north from Rantoul. Just before entering Paxton turn right (east) on Green St (about one mile past 2700 N). At "T" intersection turn right and park along road.

LODA CEMETERY PRAIRIE NATURE PRESERVE - Iroquois County. From C-U go north on US Rt. 45 to Loda. At north end of town turn left on to North Fifth Street (look for sign to Pine Ridge Cemetery). Follow signs to site, do not park in cemetery.



Grand Prairie Friends is applying to participate in regional caucuses for the Illinois Department of Natural Resources' Conservation Congress IV.

Joyce Hofmann will represent, GPF with Heidi Leuszler as the alternate. Regional caucuses begin in August 1999 and the Congress will convene in September 2000.

The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) established the Conservation Congress to give interested parties an opportunity to provide input on policies and procedures affecting the "preservation, restoration, use and development" of the state's natural resources and recreational facilities. Every three years the Congress' Assembly of Delegates meets at the Illinois State House for three days to discuss issues, listen to expert testimony, and vote on recommendations to the DNR and other policy makers. The Assembly consists of 118 delegates; 48 delegates are selected by major statewide conservation organizations and 118 are elected at the regional caucuses.

Regional caucuses, which are considered the most important part of the Congress, are held in the five DNR administrative regions. Grand

Prairie Friends participates in the Region III caucus, which covers east-central Illinois. The caucuses are conducted by DNR facilitators and attended by representatives of accredited regional not-for-profit organizations, businesses, and other groups interested in conservation. Caucuses provide a forum where issues can be identified, discussed, and prioritized and possible solutions developed. All Conservation Congress recommendations must originate in the caucuses. Members of the Region III caucus will elect 10 delegates to the Assembly.

Past Conservation Congress recommendations have led to the establishment of the Illinois Conservation Foundation which raises external funds for DNR programs, the environmental license plate which benefits the State Park Fund, and Conservation 2000, a six-year, \$100 million initiative to protect and manage Illinois' natural resources.

Members of GPF should send any opinions on conservation issues that they would like to have expressed at the regional caucus to Joyce at jhofmann@mail.inhs.uiuc.edu or c/o GPF, PO Box 36, Urbana, IL 61801.

Plant Sale Update

GPF participated in the May Day Celebration at Lake of the Woods this year. Many events and demonstrations were staged, including a traditional maypole dance. GPF plants were available for sale all day, generating \$361 in sales.

On May 8, we held our plant sale at Lincoln Square, with John Marlin selling native woodland plants at our booth, and the C-U Business & Professional Women offering traditional annual plants at theirs. This sale generated \$2,989. All plant sale proceeds fund our summer interns, who will be performing stewardship activities at prairie sites in addition to helping some of the local schools with their prairie gardens.

Summer Interns

Be on the look out for the three interns hired for the GPF summer internship program. Robin Grom, Jason Sheperis, and Jim Hoyt will be engaged in all sorts of natural areas restoration work this summer at sights owned or managed by the Prairie Grove Volunteers and Grand Prairie Friends.

They will also be attending the workdays so please attend, lend a helping hand, and say hello. Let's make this another successful summer internship program for everyone.



(Farmers continued)

"In the last few years more and more farmers are planting native grasses because they're getting some money to help pay for it and they see it can provide the best habitat for wildlife," Green explained on a recent tour of the approximately 900 acres that he farms. There, some 35 acres of marginally productive land are now being planted for conservation, including some with native species such as Indian grass, switchgrass, and big bluestem. He'll use burn management in future on some of those areas.

Green wants to get the word out to farmers and other rural landowners that federal and state funding can help them preserve and restore wetland, prairie and oak forest areas, with information readily available from county soil and water district offices in our area. In the process, he says everyone gains from decreased flood problems and increased habitats for rare species.

Currently for example, about four or five different funds are providing some \$30,000 to farmers in Vermilion County to plant native grasses this season, he says. And although he often buys seeds from elsewhere, such as switchgrass from Kansas, he said he'd be open to buying more Illinois-specific seeds if a supply market develops.

We wanted to pay Green a visit as part of our series profiling active environmentalists from different walks

of life in the Grand Prairie region, and how their work relates to restoration. But he first contacted us, in response to an article in our last issue that expressed concerns over opposition by some farm owners to rail-to-trail projects in Illinois. He wanted to let us know that farmers shouldn't be stereotyped on environmental issues.

Indeed, Green noted that he's helped to raise some \$20,000 in mainly rural Vermilion County for public purchase of the old Conrail line from Urbana to Danville, and that in his role on the Farm Bureau board he helped keep the county farm organization neutral on the issue.

Some farmers want to claim legal rights under 19th-century deeds to old railroad beds, rather than letting them be sold by others for public trails, he said.

Green is eager to see nationwide legal controversy over the issue come to an equitable end for farmers, and construction of trails to begin, "so my kids can bicycle on this trail before they're grown up." He even has a pile of old railroad ties in his farmyard awaiting construction of the local trail.

Kelly Kavicky, natural resources educator with the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service in Vermilion County, said that it's farmers such as Green who are making a difference in building up a conservation ethic in the region's agricultural community.

During the past two years, some 1,100 acres of "filter strips" (unfarmed land along waterways designed to decrease nitrate runoff into streams and provide habitats) have been established in Vermilion County alone by farmers participating in federal and state programs, she said.

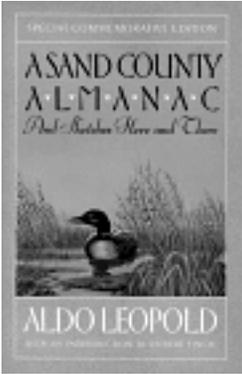
And volunteers such as Green have established and maintained the Vermilion River Ecoregion Partnership and Lake Vermilion Water Quality Coalition in recent years, both of which help design and fund such programs, she said. Funding from Pheasants Forever has also stimulated planting of native grasses as habitat on area farms. The latter is especially important to Green, because he and his son enjoy

hunting deer and rabbits along the tributary of Stony Creek that runs through their land. He also voluntarily participates in the "Roadsides for Wildlife" state program, by not mowing roadsides until August and posting signs to that effect.

"My grandparents were very active in the Audubon Society and some other local groups so when I was a kid they dragged me along with them," he said, and he's been active with Pheasants Forever for the past seven years.

Kavicky of the Cooperative Extension Service cites Green when she says that in terms of long-term solutions to regional ecosystem problems, "Farmers are part of the solution." 

(Writing continued)



two new Leopold books will appear: *The Essential Aldo Leopold: Quotations and Commentaries* and *For the Health of the Land: Previously*

Unpublished Essays and Other Writings on Conservation. Then there's the wonderful biography of Leopold by Curt Meine, *Aldo Leopold: Life and Work*.

Perhaps no current Midwestern writer is more skilled in the craft than **Scott Russell Sanders**, a native of rural Ohio, now living in Bloomington, Indiana. The place to begin his work is his essay collection *Writing from the Center*. Sanders writes, not just from and about the center of the country, but from the center of his life. He is a well-placed person in the literal sense, and he writes elegantly about that place, including the people who live there. One of the book's best pieces assesses critically the present and past state of writing on the Midwest, so the book supplies good references for further reading. In sampling his work, don't miss his essay collections, *Staying Put* and *Secrets of the Universe*.



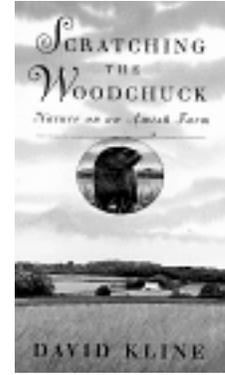
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Sanders dedicated his *Writing from the Center* to the author most honored today by his fellow writers about land and place: Kentucky farmer and poet **Wendell Berry**. Author now of some

three dozen books, Berry is a master of poetry, the essay, and fiction. Rooted in his ancestral home in Kentucky, just a few miles south of the Ohio River, Berry's work with both shovel and pen "has been motivated by a desire to make myself responsibly at home both in this world and in my native and chosen place." Berry's fiction—some ten volumes in all—is set in a fictionalized version of his home town, and deals with several generations of interrelated farm families. Avid readers—and there are tens of thousands— anxiously await each new tale about this now familiar place. Begin his fiction with his short-story collection, *The Wild Birds*, from there heading to his *The Memory of Old Jack* and his masterpiece, *A Place on Earth*. His poetry is best sampled with his recent *Selected Poems*, his essays with his *Recollected Essays 1965-1980* and his *Home Economics* and *What Are People For?*



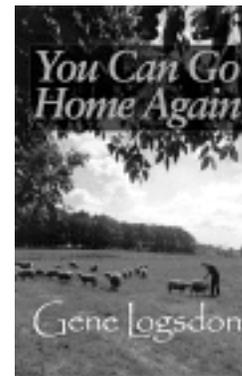
One of Berry's friends in the writing community is Amish farmer and naturalist **David Kline**, whose life centers around his Ohio farm and whose attachment to that place is loving and unbreakable. An avid bird watcher, Kline writes about life on his farm, and about the many life forms he encounters there, for various Amish publications. Two books collect his work, and they are gems. *Great Possessions: An Amish Farmer's Journal* borrows the name that Aldo Leopold planned to use for his *Almanac*, it has become, among nature lovers and bird watchers, an underground (or perhaps in-the-dirt) classic. Kline's more recent



book, loaded with anecdotes and his infectious passion for all life, is *Scratching the Woodchuck: Nature on an Amish Farm*.

Living nearby, and a friend of both Berry and Kline is Ohio

farmer **Gene Logsdon**, who shares Berry's sharp criticism of industrial agriculture and styles himself the "contrary farmer." Though his life centers around his small, diverse farm, his writings wander the Ohio countryside. He would make, readers sense, a most delightful guide. More than Kline and Berry, Logsdon is out to encourage people to acquire rural land and make a life on it, with subsistence needs mostly met by the land itself. His several how-to books describe many of the needed skills,



particularly gardening. His engaging essay collections include *Farming at Nature's Pace*, *The Contrary Farmer*, and *You Can Go Home: Adventures of a Contrary Life*.

To read Logsdon is to put your life at risk.

To be continued next issue...

Eric T. Freyfogle, a native of central Illinois, teaches environmental and natural resources law at the University of Illinois.

NOTEWORTHY

5th Central Illinois Prairie Conference
“People and Prairie: Caring for Where We Live”
September 18th - 19th, 1999

Parkland Community College, Champaign, IL
Cosponsored by Grand Prairie Friends of Illinois
and the Champaign County Forest Preserve
District.

Mark you calendars today!



Browsing the fine selection of native prairie plants available at the GPF plant sale at the May Day Celebration in Lake of the Woods. Look for this display all June at the Farmers Market in Urbana .

Apologies to those who did not get the last issue or sent us a note requesting a correction. Due to unforeseen problems we were unable to fix these in time for this issue. The mailing list will be corrected and updated for the next issue. Thanks for your understanding.

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