

UPCOMING EVENTS

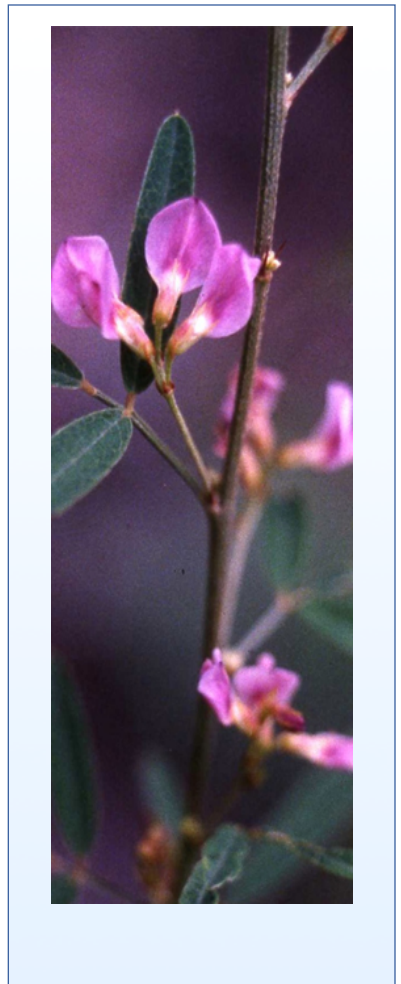
Iowa Academy of Science Annual Meeting

April 16-17, 2010

Graceland University, Lamoni

The Iowa Academy of Science will be holding their annual meeting April 16-17, 2010 at Graceland University in Lamoni. The meeting will include lectures and topics from high school, college and post graduate research work in the field of science. Gregg Pattison, USFWS, will be presenting on natural resource management which will include the Southern Iowa Oak Savanna Alliance restoration initiative and the patch-burn grazing project in Ringgold County. In addition, a field trip to Slip Bluff Park will be held on the afternoon of April 17th to further examine the natural history of Decatur County and see some of the ongoing savanna, woodland and prairie restoration efforts.

SIOSA programs and activities are open to any person regardless of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, sexual orientation, and marital or family status.



SIOSA Update

John Orvis, SIOSA President

It's been a very pleasant fall here in southern Iowa. Summer was busy, cool and wet. Everything seemed to really grow well with the weather, however there weren't many hickory nuts. I noticed more quail and deer around the yard this summer and had to fence the garden so the vegetables could survive.

The prairie conference was a huge success. The weather was beautiful and the presentations were great. We really owe the people of Graceland University a debt of gratitude for their help with the planning, facilities, and the meals. They did an outstanding job!

With fall upon us, prescribed burning and timberland improvement projects are in full swing.

During the Iowa Prairie Conference this summer, the presenters at the Dunn Ranch talked about collecting seed in the fall, drying it, and spreading it on newly burned areas in February. That approach seems to work well in southern Iowa as well so we plan to do more of it.

I've been checking into the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) that is part of the 2008 farm program. They are just starting to figure it out now but it looks like it could be a good thing for landowners if they wish to restore prairie or savanna areas on their property. You might check with your local NRCS office to see if it would work for you.

Again, we are still looking for new members and more active participation of our members. The SIOSA board is currently working on a membership database to help with this. We continue to hold monthly meeting on the second Thursday of the month at the Decatur County Courthouse.



John and Sharon Orvis

2009 Iowa Prairie Conference

Forgotten Landscapes:

Public & Private Partnerships Working Together to Restore Southern Iowa and Northern Missouri Prairies and Savannas

Gregg Pattison, USFWS

The 2009 Iowa Prairie Conference was a great success thanks to fantastic presenters, excellent field trips, great food, excited and energetic participants and absolutely beautiful weather.

The theme for this year's prairie conference was "Forgotten Landscapes: Public and Private working together to restore southern Iowa and northern Missouri prairies and savannas." The theme was chosen because we have often overlooked the grasslands and savannas of this region as a rich resource worth protecting and restoring. In recent years, that focus has changed and more interest and research has been going on to build partnerships and improve the habitats of the region in a manner that maintains the working agricultural landscape as well. To highlight these efforts the conference was designed to have a keynote speaker each morning followed by a field trip to a working landscape to see restoration and research efforts first hand. Many people commented that this format was a great way to hear how our landscapes have been influenced by humans over time and how we are turning back the clock to capture some of the lost diversity by our restoration efforts today.

Doug Ladd, The Nature Conservancy, gave the keynote address on Friday morning. His talk was a fabulous interpretation of how grasslands play a key global role in wildlife management, water quality, and the human economy. His talk was very inspirational and emphasized the need to implement sustainable grassland management into the future.

His talk kicked off our field trips to the Grand River Grasslands (GRG). The GRG is a landscape area in Ringgold County, Iowa and Harrison County, Missouri that encompasses approximately 77,000 acres. It is a focus area for conservation for the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and for the Missouri Department of Conservation. The main conservation goal is grassland management for grassland bird communities, native prairie management, water quality and wildlife dependent recreation. Conference participants were able to visit the Iowa DNR's Kellerton Wildlife Management Area near Kellerton, Iowa and The Nature Conservancy's Dunn Ranch near Hatfield, Missouri.

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At the Kellerton WMA, the group learned how the DNR is managing much of the Kellerton WMA for the re-introduced Prairie Chicken from DNR Wildlife Biologist Chad Paup. The DNR described many of the restoration measures being taken in the area for grassland management, including cool-season grass conversion to prairie, tree removal, invasive species control and prairie chicken management. Ryan Harr, Devon McGranahan and other researchers from Iowa State University also provided a background for their patch-burn grazing research and monitoring program going on in the GRG. Patch-burn grazing is a rotational grazing system that uses prescribed fire to provide fresh grass patches for cattle that essentially acts to rotate the cattle to specific portions of the pasture each year. The system works on a three year rotation so various levels of vegetation are established to provide a heterogenic pattern to the vegetation across the pasture to provide for the various needs of grassland birds, including nesting areas, brood cover areas, and feeding areas. The conference participants were able to walk out in to a restoration site and also walk through a patch-burn grazing pasture.



Randy Arndt, Dunn Ranch manager, talking to conference participants at Pawnee Prairie.

The tour of TNC’s Dunn Ranch provided the participants a chance to see the 3500 acre + nature preserve and learn about some of the management strategies employed at the site. Randy Arndt, manager of the Dunn Ranch, gave an overview of the ranch and lead the participants through the seed handling facilities on the ranch. The group was then lead to a restored prairie site where Doug Ladd was able to describe the restoration process and give details on many of the plants on the site. Over 70 native species were identified on the site during the field trip. The group was also taken to the Missouri Department of Conservations Pawnee Prairie where they could see an earlier prairie

restoration and also a high quality remnant prairie.

The busses returned to Graceland University for the evening banquet. Graceland University supplied a fantastic buffet dinner. Awards were given by Darrell Smith of the Iowa Tallgrass Prairie Center to Cindy Hildebrand and Tom Rosburg for their dedication and commitment to the promotion and protection of native prairie ecosystems. The original board members of the Southern Iowa Oak Savanna Alliance were also recognized for their efforts by the US Fish and

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Wildlife Service. Bill and Sibylla Brown, John and Sharon Orvis, Dick and Nancy Hillyard, Paul and Karla Gunzenhauser and Rich Erke were recognized for outstanding commitment to oak savanna restoration efforts and for their tireless work promoting and building SIOSA. Each family was given a signed copy of newest release of the Iowa Wildflower guidebook.

The evening ended with a open forum discussion on important topics of prairie and savanna management. About 40 people stayed around for the open discussion. Several interesting topics were discussed in a format open to audience discussion.

Saturday was again a beautiful day for field trips. Highs were in the 70's with a light wind. The day was devoted to oak savanna and oak woodland management. Connie Mutel, author of the "Emerald Horizon" gave the key-note speech to kick things off in the morning. Connie gave a great account of the historical condition of Iowa Woodlands and the fact that the majority of Iowa woodlands were dominated by oaks and had a structure of oak savanna, primarily from the effects of fire. The impact of white settlement into Iowa essential caused many of Iowa woodlands to transition into later secession state with many more shade tolerant/fire intolerant species. These include dense ironwood, maples and cedar trees. The effects are a shift to a different habitat that supports a new suite of species but, also reduces the overall diversity of the ecosystem by removing many of the vegetative plants that grow in an open oak savanna.



Richard Erke, Decatur County Conservation Board Director, discussing restoration work being done at Slip Bluff Park.

Following Connie's inspirational talk, the participants were able to visit two sites in Decatur county to see oak savanna and woodland management efforts. The first site was Slip Bluff County Park just northeast of Lamoni, Iowa. The park was chosen by SIOSA as a great place to do oak savanna and woodland management and restoration as a demonstration site for the public. The park is over 400 acres in size and has various habitats to utilize for demonstrations. The park is managed by the Decatur County Conservation Board who partnered with SIOSA and the USFWS to develop a restoration plan for the park to manage for oak savanna and native prairie habitats. The participants were able to see various methods for oak savanna resto-

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A representative from Midwest Land Restoration demonstrates the effectiveness of the Marshall Tree Saw.

ration, see the effects of understory and canopy thinning on the park and also see some invasive species problems, including *Sericea lespedeza*. Conservation Board director Rich Erke, and Gregg Pattison with the USFWS gave the field tours of the site and described the various ongoing restoration efforts on the park.

The second stop for the group was Timberhill Savanna – a private savanna restoration project owned and managed by Bill and Sibylla Brown, just south east of Leon, Iowa. The Browns were assisted in the field tour by Randy Goerndt, DNR Forester, Pauline Drobney, USFWS Biologist, and Dan and Vicki Fogle, forest consultants who completed the restoration work on the Brown’s prop-

erty. The Brown’s have been restoring and managing their property for oak savanna and native prairies for over 15 years. The Brown’s use annual prescribed fire on their property to control brush, encourage native plant germination and growth, and to improve water quality on their property. The success of the restoration efforts on their property is a testament to their dedication to listening to what the land and plants are saying versus traditional savanna management techniques. The management strategy has revealed over 500 species of vascular plants, over 80 fungi species, and over 50 ant species on the property. The site is also frequented by many rare or uncommon butterfly and insect species. In addition, well over 30 nesting bird species have been identified on the property, including many rare or declining neotropical migrating species.



Pauline Drobney, USFWS, leading a walk at Timberhill Savanna.

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The conference participants were able to get a great background presentation from Sibylla about the property and management efforts, then go into the field to talk with biologists, foresters and contractors about the restoration efforts. The conference participants overwhelmingly rated the trip to the Browns as a great learning experience.



Conference attendees enjoying lunch at Timberhill Winery.

Overall, the 2009 Iowa Prairie Conference was a great success. Over 160 people attended the conference and participated in discussions and shared valuable insights into prairie and savanna management. A survey was sent out to all the participants and we had overwhelming supportive comments come back about the conference.

A special thanks needs to go out to the Graceland University for hosting the event, Graceland has a beautiful campus and theatre for the event and were gracious hosts. Thanks also to the field trip hosts, the Iowa DNR, TNC-Dunn Ranch, Decatur County Conservation Board and Bill and Sibylla Brown. And a special thanks to the board of the Southern Iowa Oak Savanna Alliance for

their help with conference organization and management. The event ran very smoothly throughout the weekend. A special thank you also needs to go out to Darrell Smith from the Tall Grass Prairie Center at UNI for picking southern Iowa as the host location for the conference and to the Iowa Prairie Network and Carmen Rosburg for handling the registration and funds for the conference.

Finally, a thank you, to all those who took time out of their busy schedules to come to the conference and actively participate in the prairie conference. It was a great pleasure to see the exchange of knowledge and ideas at this event. It shows how passionate people are about prairie and savanna management in Iowa.

Grand River Water Trail Receives Funding

Dustin Eighmy, Decatur County Conservation Board

Winding diagonally across Decatur County, the shade canopied Grand River, or Thompson River called by some, provides some great recreational opportunities waiting to be adventured. Roughly 43 miles of this river runs through Decatur County and the Decatur County Conservation Board (DCCB) has decided to make the river a safer place for people enjoying the river. The DCCB has received a grant from the Iowa DNR for \$16,109 along with grants from SCICF and ROCCS totaling \$7,500. Other donations have been made by local individuals.

With the help of youth organizations, church groups, and volunteers, the DCCB plans to construct 6 canoe/kayak accesses so people can enter and exit the river safely. Signs will also be posted on all major roads leading people to the accesses. Bridge signs will be placed on every bridge so the navigator on the river can see where he/she is at and how far it is to the next access. Informational kiosks will be placed at certain locations to inform people of the history of the river and what types of wildlife they may encounter as they float down the Grand River. A detailed brochure with maps, pictures, amenities, parks, mileage, accesses, etc. will be made to better help people to navigate the river.



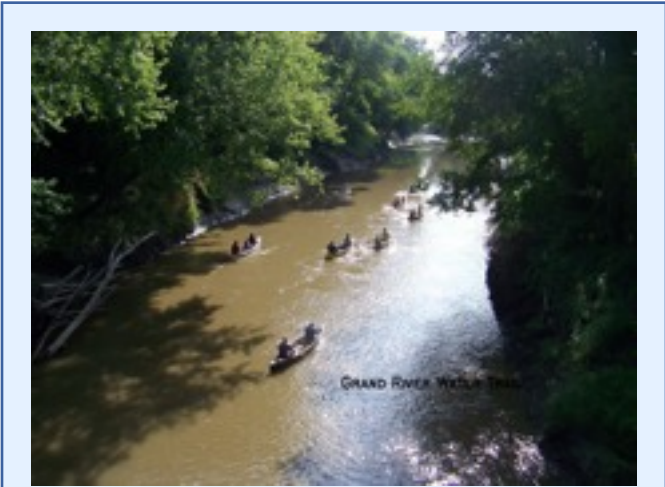
Large trees forming an impressive canopy over the Grand River.

With its large limestone outcroppings and giant oak trees, the Grand River Water Trail will also provide the DCCB an excellent opportunity to showcase the area's high quality oak savannas. By partnering with organizations such as SIOSA and the US Fish & Wildlife Service, the DCCB hopes to work with landowners owning property adjacent to the river in hopes of restoring these unique ecosystems.

DCCB has not started on the construction of the river accesses but would like to start sometime this fall. The DCCB is still waiting on the grant money from the DNR and needs to get a couple construction permits for two accesses. But don't let any of this stop you from adventuring

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down the river. “I have been on the river three times this year and each time it gets better. You just have to make it a point to be extra careful getting in and out of the river, and you are bound to get muddy no matter what!” states Dustin Eighmy, DCCB Park Ranger.



Volunteers canoeing the river during cleanup day.

August 22nd, several youth groups got together with DCCB and canoed down the river from the old town of Westerville to Shewmaker Park just south of Grand River. This canoe float was the 1st annual canoe river cleanup and Jason Brown, Iowa’s country music star, was in town and decided to join the group for the morning float. A lot of trash was picked up and the kids really enjoyed visiting with Jason Brown. The DCCB hopes to make this an annual trip and possibly add a couple more.

For questions about the Grand River Water Trail project, contact Dustin Eighmy at the Decatur County Conservation Board (641)446-7307.

Lespedeza Update: Opportunity for Decatur County Landowners

Gregg Pattison, USFWS

Sericea lespedeza (*Lespedeza cuneata*) continues to spread into Iowa. Reports from the Iowa Prairie Conference show that the plant has now spread the very northeast corner of Iowa and can be found at Effigy Mounds National Monument in Allamakee County. Several other accounts of the species were shared across central Iowa. Although the species is a target for most conservationists, it is a relatively unknown problem to most Iowans. *Sericea* will quickly move into grassland and disturbed areas and within a couple years produce a monoculture that will displace native plants.

Sericea is of special concern to us in southern Iowa where the populations are very high with some areas being completely infested with the plant. It is a particular problem in areas where we are restoring oak savanna. By opening the woodlands, we are providing an opening for *Sericea* and need to be on top of any potential invasions into the newly restored acres. In many cases, high quality oak savanna remnants have populations of the plant adjacent to or on the restoration sites. These infestations need to be controlled in order to have a high quality restoration. Therefore, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Decatur County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) will partner to combat *Sericea* in Decatur County in a pilot program to find best management practices to control *Sericea*.

Through a cooperative agreement, landowners in Decatur County can sign up for assistance with controlling *Sericea* on their property through the Decatur County SWCD. Sites will be visited by a biologist from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to verify the infestation and develop a control plan. With an approved plan, the landowner will be eligible for cost share to help with the cost of controlling the plants. Once the treatments are complete, the landowner will be reimbursed by the Decatur County SWCD.

Sericea has been a problem for several years in Oklahoma, Kansas and Missouri. Not only has it caused problems for native habitats, but is also a major concern for cattle producers. *Sericea* will invade pastures and displace grasses,



Sericea Lespedeza

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reducing productivity of pastureland. In early growth stages, Sericea can be a good food source for cattle, but it quickly becomes unpalatable and has a negative impact on pasture productivity. Sericea should be a concern for everyone and action needs to be taken quickly to help control the spread of the species.

Contact Gregg Pattison of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service if you have any questions about the Sericea control program in Decatur County, or if you feel you have the species on your property outside of Decatur County. Gregg can be reached at (641) 784-5356 or at Gregg_Pattison@fws.gov.

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Help Savanna Habitat Restoration by joining SIOSA (Southern Iowa Oak Savanna Alliance)

Members receive quarterly newsletters and can participate in activities throughout the year relating to oak savannas.

Annual membership rates:

- \$10 Student Member
- \$25 Savanna Friend
- \$100 Supporting Member
- \$250 Sustaining Member
- \$500 Savanna Steward

Name: _____

Address:

Phone:

Email address:

Send completed form with check or money order payable to SIOSA to:

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c/o Richard Hillyard
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SIOSA newsletters are published quarterly. Submissions to the newsletter should be sent to the editor:

Mark Erke at SIOSA@me.com