

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center  
P.O. Box 117  
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Denton, NE 68339

Prsrt. Std.  
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Permit 1147  
Lincoln, NE



# THE PRAIRIE SAGE

SPRING CREEK PRAIRIE  Audubon CENTER

Winter 2005

## Fall Prairie Burns

by Arnold Mendenhall

Prescribed burns were conducted in four small areas (12 acres in all) the last week of October by staff with help from volunteers Corinne Kolm and Ernie Rousek. Three of these previously disturbed areas had been seeded last spring to a highly diverse mixture of native plants, while the other was being overtaken by encroaching woody species like dogwood and sumac.

Higher plant diversity can be a response to fall burns. Also, most of the annual weeds already present, like foxtail, would deteriorate so much that by spring the areas would not carry a fire. By burning in the fall, we'll get to compare how the plants respond versus the more common spring burn. We still have two other seeded areas to burn next spring and will compare results to the fall activity. If we can't burn them, they will be mowed.

On the area with a high density of invasive woody species, we wanted to see if a fall burn would reduce their numbers. Past spring burns have had little impact on these plants.



Staff and volunteers oversee a prescribed burn.



Hay and straw bales placed inside new education building.

PHOTO BY KEVIN POAGUE

## Hey! Bales!

One of the most exciting aspects of the education building construction process has begun! Straw and prairie hay bales have been moved into the building structure. The first course of bales has been set and the remaining bales are in motion. Framers, electricians, and other sub-contractors are on site every day getting things ready for enclosure. What a thrill to see actual Spring Creek Prairie hay incorporated into the new center! A truth window in the building's entry way will allow all visitors to see this homegrown, natural insulation.

For those used to more conventional building techniques, the process of

construction may seem a little different. Learning about how this approach works is one of the many factors that has made this project so exciting. When the building is completed, special programs will be offered to highlight the green aspects of the design and construction.

We encourage you to stop by during our open hours and see for yourself. Although the actual structure is off-limits to visitors due to safety issues, there is much that can be seen from a safe distance, and our staff will be happy to share information with you. We hope to see you at the prairie soon!



Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center  
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Open M-F, 9-5 all year, except holidays.  
Weekend hours seasonal.

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Habitat Manager: Arnold Mendenhall  
Newsletter Layout: Kevin Poague

## CALENDAR

### DECEMBER

24-31 SPRING CREEK PRAIRIE CLOSED

### JANUARY

3 SPRING CREEK PRAIRIE REOPENS

14 NEW YEAR'S WALKABOUT

28 NATURE JOURNALING FOR ADULTS

### FEBRUARY

4 SNUG AS A BUG

25 BECOMING A WINTER NATURALIST


### MARCH

11 BACKYARD HABITAT PROGRAM AT FINKE  
GARDENS & NURSERY, LINCOLN

22 & 25 A SPRING TREASURE HUNT

### APRIL

22 EARTH DAY

 Publication support provided by:  
A to Z Printing  
8230 Cody Dr., Lincoln, NE 68512  
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YES! I want to support and help promote conservation and nature education at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center. Enclosed is my tax-deductible contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_ Street Address \_\_\_\_\_ C/S/Z \_\_\_\_\_ Please mail to the address above. Thank you!

## PROGRAMS

Class sizes are limited so register early by calling 402/797-2301.

### NEW YEAR'S WINTER WALKABOUT

SATURDAY, JANUARY 14 10:00 A.M. TO 12:00 NOON  
\$5/ADULT & \$3/CHILD & 1:00 TO 3:00 P.M.

Winter on the prairie can be a wonderful time to discover some of Mother Nature's best-kept secrets. Don your warmest winter togs and come explore some of the more remote areas of Spring Creek Prairie. Learn why winter is an important, even essential, part of the cycle of life in Nebraska. This event is for all ages and will take place outdoors, so participants should dress for the weather.

Register for **either morning or afternoon** session. Children 12 and under must be accompanied by an adult. Preregister by January 6.

### A TRIBUTE TO THE PRAIRIE WINTER: NATURE JOURNALING FOR ADULTS

SATURDAY, JANUARY 28 10:00 A.M. TO 2:00 P.M.  
\$8/ADULT

Join center staff and embrace the wonders of the winter season. Participants will explore the prairie and its connecting habitats while honing observation and recording skills with fun and enlightening activities. Time will be divided between inside and outside activities, weather permitting. Participants will need to bring a sack lunch and dress for the weather. Writing materials will be provided, but participants are invited to bring their own journals if they desire.

Program is designed for people 16 and older. Preregister by Jan. 27.

### SNUG AS A BUG

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 4 10:00 A.M. TO 12:00 NOON  
\$6/ADULT & \$4/CHILD (12 and under)

Using magnifiers, microscopes, and mindful techniques, adult/child teams will probe through leaf litter and logs to discover a variety of spineless wonders wiling away the winter. Activities include a short hike, weather permitting, and an indoor investigation session. This program is appropriate for grades K through 6 and designed for adult/child teams of 2 or 3. Preregistration required by February 3.

### BECOMING A WINTER NATURALIST

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25 10:00 A.M. TO 12:00 NOON  
\$6/ADULT & \$4/CHILD

Find out what animals stay active and how they adapt to winter's fickle weather. Discover examples of plant life cycles in all their stages. There is always much to see and explore when you become a winter naturalist. A majority of this program will take place outside, weather permitting. This program is appropriate for age 8 and older and all participants

must dress for the weather. Children 12 and under must be accompanied by an adult. Preregistration required by February 24.

### BACKYARD BIRDS AND WILDLIFE HABITAT

SATURDAY, MARCH 11 10:00 A.M.  
FINKE GARDENS & NURSERY, 500 NO. 66<sup>TH</sup> ST., LINCOLN  
FREE

Staff of Spring Creek Prairie will present an hour-long program at Finke Gardens and Nursery as part of their series of winter landscape classes for the public. Learn the common backyard birds of the area and discover what plants to establish to entice birds and other forms of wildlife to your yard. The talk is free, and reservations are not required.

### IN SEARCH OF A SEASON: A SPRING TREASURE HUNT

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22 9:00 A.M. TO 2:00 P.M.  
SATURDAY, MARCH 25 9:00 A.M. TO 12:00 NOON  
STARTING TIMES EVERY 30 MINUTES  
\$15/TEAM

Teams of two to ten participants will be given a treasure map and clues and will search for hidden treasure chests along the trails of Spring Creek Prairie. At each chest they will use observation skills, deductive reasoning, special equipment, and common sense to investigate the sights and sounds of the prairie and discover the subtle and sometimes elusive treasures of spring. The activities are geared for a variety of skill and interest levels, and each team must have at least one adult. Teams must preregister for a starting time by March 21.

## The Price of Success

by Marian Langan, Center Director

*The Prairie Sage* is one way for us to keep our supporters informed of programs and happenings at the prairie. Over the years, the newsletter mailing list has grown beyond 1,300. In order to be fiscally responsible, we are making some changes to our approach.

The newsletter will be available on our website to download. Also, starting with the next newsletter, only donors and program participants at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center will continue to receive our newsletter. Visitors to the prairie can pick up a free issue. If you are in a special circumstance and still would like to receive our newsletter, please call Deb at (402) 797-2301 and we will make arrangements to keep you on the list. If you do not receive a newsletter in April and believe you should have, please notify us. Thank you for your understanding!

## The Power of Prairie Roots

by Marian Langan

As shown by the articles in this newsletter, the myriad activities that are part of connecting people with nature at Spring Creek Prairie continue to grow. Over the past few years:

- Over 10,000 children and adults have had the opportunity to experience their prairie heritage by participating in our education programs
- Our list of community volunteers has grown to more than 200
- There have been visitors from 46 states and 19 countries
- Schools and groups from Beatrice, Crete, Denton, Dorchester, Exeter-Milligan, Fairbury, Hickman, Lincoln, Omaha, Sutton, and York have taken part in our programs
- Classes have visited from Concordia University in Seward, Doane College in Crete, Union College in Lincoln, University of Nebraska-Kearney, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, and Nebraska Wesleyan University
- Children from under-served populations have experienced the prairie through Carol Yoakum Family Learning Center, Cedars Youth programs, Family Services Association, and Lighthouse
- Spring Creek Prairie has been recognized as an Important Bird Area in Nebraska, an international bird conservation project of the National Audubon Society
- Ruts from the Nebraska City-Ft. Kearny Cutoff qualified our listing on the National Register of Historic Places
- We received the Lincoln/Lancaster County Environmental Education/Awareness Award in 2002

- Five Eagle Scout projects have been completed on site
- Spring Creek Prairie has been featured in articles in *The New York Times*, *Nebraskaland*, Lincoln Public Schools' *Free Times*, *Rural Electric Nebraskan*, *AAA Nebraska Home & Away*, *Lincoln Journal Star*, *Omaha World-Herald*, as well as numerous local and statewide newspapers, and will be featured in an upcoming issue of *Nebraska Life*

*"Financial support makes an amazing amount of activity possible here."*

The future looks bright, as they say, because our new education building will greatly enhance the experience for all of our visitors and will allow our programs to grow even further.

**Financial support makes an amazing amount of activity possible here. A monetary gift from you will help ensure that this important work continues. A reply envelope has been inserted in this issue and we look forward to welcoming you as a member of the Prairie Roots Community Fund. Amazing things will continue to happen when we all work together!**



## Prairie Impressions Art

by Deb Hauswald

Lincoln artist Susan Brasch facilitated the creation of a community art piece (pictured below) at September's Twilight on the Tallgrass event. Many attendees, young and young-at-heart, participated by adding an image from the prairie to the canvas. Susan spent several hours after the event using her artistic eye and creative brushstrokes to tie the images together, making a cohesive piece. The resulting work is a wonderful representation of diversity, an important factor for both a healthy prairie and a healthy community.

We are currently seeking the names of those people who participated in the creation of this art piece so credit may be given when it is exhibited in the new education building. If you are one of those people or know someone who added to this piece, please call Deb Hauswald at (402) 797-2301 so the names can be assembled.

We are deeply grateful to all the artists who shared their impressions of the prairie, and especially to Susan, who brought it all together in such splendid fashion.



The Susan Brasch-inspired community art piece

PHOTO BY KEVIN POAGUE