

# Iowa Prairie Network Newsletter

Summer 2023

## Free Resources for Planning Prairie Reconstructions

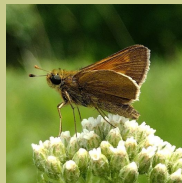
by Tabitha Panas

At Iowa Prairie Network, we are dedicated to teaching about and protecting remnant prairies in Iowa. Over the years, our organization has fielded an increasing number of questions about how folks can go about planting their own prairie reconstructions.

We are always delighted to hear about projects and to help answer questions where we can. Our Board of Directors has a wide variety of experience and knowledge that we enjoy sharing. One of our biggest challenges is that we are all volunteers and cannot always make time to personally meet on site with everyone who has questions for us.

However, there are free resources available that offer technical assistance for prairie reconstructions in Iowa. They are called private lands biologists, and they can visit with you on your land to discuss the process of prairie reconstructions (and other wildlife practices) and may assist with a site-specific plan. When planning a prairie reconstruction, there are many factors to consider and there is no simple recipe or a “one size fits all” approach.

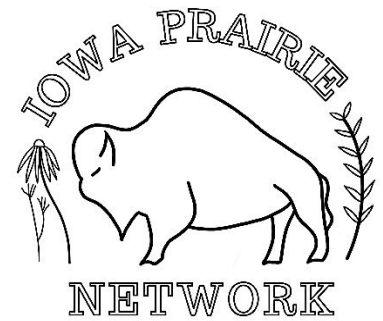
Some of these factors to consider include seed bed preparation, land aspect, soil types, slope, moisture regime, sunlight, current vs historical vegetation, land use, equipment needed/available, timing of activities, seeding method, seeding mix, long term management, the landowner’s goal, and potentially more.



I am a private lands wildlife biologist with Pheasants Forever, and a big part of my job includes helping private landowners plan and successfully grow prairie reconstructions. My assistance is a free service thanks to many funding partners. While I only cover three counties in western IA, there are other private lands biologists across the state that can offer assistance. One of the best ways to find that person would be to ask your county’s local USDA Service Center for contact information for your local wildlife biologist.

Not only can we provide technical assistance, but there are often programs that can offer financial assistance for prairie reconstructions. One program administered by the Department of Natural Resources in Partnership with the Iowa Native Seed Growers Association and Pheasants Forever is called the Prairie Partners Program. It offers a 50% off seed voucher for pollinator seedings greater than 2 acres. This program is simple, and we often can provide funding in a short timeframe. (As funding is available and eligibility requirements are met, work with your local wildlife biologist to apply). This is just one example of several programs that can offer financial assistance for habitat projects.

While prairie reconstructions can never be as diverse or as complex as a prairie remnant, they do serve important ecological services like carbon sequestration, water infiltration, and critical habitat for many suites of species that are declining, like pollinators and grassland birds. Every prairie reconstruction poses unique challenges, but also provides opportunities for wildlife and the greater community. Local biologists are here to help. Contact me with questions at [tpanas@pheasantsforever.org](mailto:tpanas@pheasantsforever.org).



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In eastern Iowa amongst the rolling farm fields there is a ribbon of rough country that has become a central part of my life. Originally it was the rivers, that created Jackson County's rugged characteristics, that I started paddling as a kid with my dad and high school buddies. Then it was the woods that I started hiking as a college intern when I first started working for Jackson County Conservation (JCCB). Now it is the rocky remnant prairie bluffs that has completely captured my attention and in many ways changed who I am.

I have always been a outdoorsy person, even as a kid. It was my Native Vegetation class that I took during my freshman year of college that first turned me on to prairies. During those early years I really thought I knew something about prairies. I could spout out a handful of common names of some common prairie plants and I could even remember the scientific name of big bluestem. Some pretty impressive stuff.

Once the covid-19 pandemic put a halt to JCCB's in-person environmental education programming in early 2020 I found myself with quite a bit of free time. There was a few weeks right when the shut down happened where I wasn't sure what I was going to do. Then the perfect solution presented itself. I could go work on the little remnant prairies that JCCB manages. Little did I know that those little prairies would change me.



*The author on a fall work day*

At first it started with plant surveys and invasive species removal. Then it ballooned into a restoration project that has completely taken over my imagination. I fell in love with these little remnant prairies. I don't have to tell the readers of this article that remnant prairies are amazing but holy heck, I discovered that these remnant prairies are amazing!

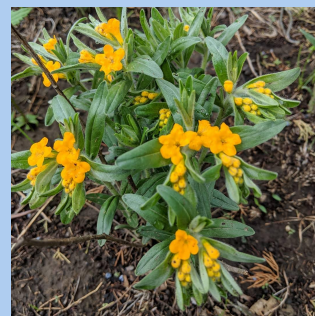
I also discovered that we haven't been managing these prairies the way that they deserve which absolutely breaks my heart. Over the past 3 years now I have tried my best to help these prairies out. There has been a lot of woodies and invasives removed, a lot of really amazing plants documented, a lot of interesting animals observed, and a lot of sweat in my hat.



*Birdsfoot violet*

Sometimes after a restoration work day I feel really good about what work has been done, and sometimes I don't. No matter how I feel at the end of restoration work day I always feel that not enough has been done. There are days where I am not working in the prairies, but I am daydreaming of running the saw and wreaking havoc on some eastern red cedars.

*Continued on page 3...*



*Hoary puccoon*

## IPN Board of Directors

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## **Find a Prairie**

The IPN website now lists public prairies in all 99 Iowa counties.

<https://www.iowaprairienetwork.org/find-a-prairie>

## **Join our Board or Become a Committee Member**

Our board currently has one opening, and we're always looking for prairie lovers who want to help with our mission! Add your special talent to a committee (Communications, Finance, Marketing, Newsletter or Membership). Contact us at ([iowaprairienetworkorg@gmail.com](mailto:iowaprairienetworkorg@gmail.com))



*You don't fall in love with prairie by standing on the edge looking in. You have to get into it and let it get into you. " -Pauline Drobney*



## Changing Each Other *(Continued from page 2)*

Even though I know more work needs to be done I am happy that these prairies are in a little better state than they were before. Already only after 3 years of restoration prairie species are responding, and in some cases blooming, in areas recently cleared of unwanted woody species. My most recent example of this is an area cleared of unwanted trees last fall that had a whole host of blooming bird's foot violets this spring.

I am glad that I have come to know the Jackson County remnant prairies although frequently I feel like I have become obsessed with them. I am glad that they have sparked something in me and have propelled me into what I am today. I am glad that they have deepened my love and understanding of prairies. I am glad that I worry about their well being and future.

I am glad that they completely turned me into a prairie person. I think it is safe to say that they have changed me. With my short time among the tall grasses, the flowers, the hills, the rattlesnakes, and everything else that the prairies are I think I have changed these prairies too. We have changed each other, hopefully for the better, and I hope it continues.



## Calling All Bumble Bee Lovers!

We are very excited to announce that Iowa is officially launching a bumble bee atlas in 2023! Set to launch this summer, the Atlas will host educational workshops that provide volunteers with the skills and knowledge needed to participate—from understanding bumble bee ecology and species identification to swinging nets and photographing bees—so volunteers walk away with the confidence to conduct their own surveys. Volunteers are asked to conduct at least two 45-minute surveys anytime between June-September, and surveys can take place anywhere there is permission to do so. Survey findings are submitted to BumbleBeeWatch.org where they receive expert verification. The data is then used to improve our understanding of bumble bees and further our ability to conserve these valuable pollinators. For anyone interested in potentially volunteering to participate in the Iowa bumble bee atlas please fill out a contact form **online**. To learn more about the general bumble bee atlas work please visit the **about page on the website**.

Contact form for interested volunteers: <https://www.bumblebeeatlas.org/iowabba.html>

Xerces Society Bumble Bee Atlas website: <https://www.bumblebeeatlas.org/>

*The Iowa Bumble Bee Atlas is a collaborative effort by the [Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation](#), Iowa Department of Resources, and Iowa State University.*

*"The great grasslands—also known as the Great Plains and prairies—test a person's fortitude as few other places do." -Daniel S. Licht*

# My Oxalis Teacher

by Kenny Slocum

A tiny little patch of remnant prairie, perched on a bluff overlooking Bloody Run trout stream, first caught my attention with the neon blossoms of hoary puccoon in May of 2016. Like a lighthouse on the shore of a sea of grasses, it drew me in for a closer look.

Stepping off the dirt trail, I spotted an uncannily familiar plant. It looked just like the yellow wood sorrel I'd nibbled in my youth. I'd comb through the grasses on my elementary school playground in search of "sour bananas," our term for the fruits of *Oxalis stricta* that tasted like candy.



Violet wood sorrel

But up on the bluff, this plant looked different. I would soon learn it was violet wood sorrell, *Oxalis violacea*, the fancy cousin of the lawn weed. A fairly conservative species, often appearing in higher-quality natural areas, this plant would partner with the puccoon to draw me back year after year - or more accurately, month after month - to watch its emergence and senescence.

In those visits I learned to ID more of the unique plants before or after they flowered - butterfly milkweed, stiff gentian, Kalm's brome, false dandelion. By getting to know their exact locales I could come back to them any time of year to say hello.

In 2018 my wife and I moved out of our apartment and into a home with a yard. I wasted no time renting a sod stripper to plant a small prairie beside my house. Like most people I started with a goal to simply have some pretty native plants that would provision my local wildlife and a smaller lawn to mow. But before long, I found myself out combing the new seeding nightly to watch its development.

"I think this is going to be a blazing star," I'd say to my wife who would nod politely, and say nothing when in a few months it would turn out to be very much *not* a blazing star.

Now after a few years of watching my postage stamp prairie develop, I realized how much it was helping in my professional life. Like the violet wood sorrel on the tiny goat prairie, the small size of my backyard prairie (and actually having a species list from the seed mix) allowed me to better know even the familiar plants before they bloomed.

The Iowa Prairie Network's official mission is "to learn about, teach about, enjoy, and protect Iowa's prairie heritage."

There's no replacing the joy of a prairie stomp in one of Iowa's beautiful remnants, whether it's a tiny blufftop on the paleozoic plateau or an endless vista in the loess hills. The discovery of an unfamiliar plant brings an undeniable thrill. There's no replacing a walk in the wild with an expert, someone to shine a light on the subtle cues that separate the indiagrass from the bluestem in their seedling stages.

But to seed a prairie is to grow a teacher. It bolsters not only the ecology, but the education. To watch the indistinguishable cotyledons develop into distinctive blooms mirrors the journey out of plant blindness for the budding prairie lover.



Author's wife and dog crewing the backyard prairie's first burn

North  
American  
Prairie  
Conference

When:  
June 25-29  
2022

Where:  
The Meadows  
Events Center  
Altoona, IA

Hosted By



Iowa  
Natural Heritage  
Foundation



"The prairie, in all its expressions, is a massive, subtle place, with a long history of contradiction and misunderstanding." -Wayne Fields.



## Featured IPN Connection

IPN works with a multitude of agencies and organizations to support us in our mission. We thank them for their support.



The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation is an international nonprofit organization that protects the natural world through the conservation of invertebrates and their habitats.

Are you interested in an Iowa Prairie Network prairie walk near you?!

Reach out to an IPN Board member in your region and we would be happy to help plan an event!

Find regions and board members in the About Us tab on the website!

Have a story you'd like to tell in the newsletter

Contact  
IowaPrairieNetworkOrg@gmail.com

### Student Scholarships!

The Iowa Prairie Network awarded 35 college students financial scholarships to attend the North American Prairie Conference on June 25-28th, 2023 in Des Moines, Iowa.

Your gifts to IPN help to support the next generation of prairie stewards!

## Membership Corner

IPN has nearly 200 members who share an enthusiasm for prairies! Join the fun today!

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (optional): \_\_\_\_\_ Circle one: home - work - cell

### Membership Levels & Dues (check one):

- Student ..... **Free** - please provide a valid school email address or ID  
 Intern ..... \$ 10       Family ..... \$ 30  
 Individual ..... \$ 20       Organization.....\$100

### Newsletter Options (check one):

- Prefer to receive newsletters via e-mail at the address listed above ..... \$0  
 Prefer to receive printed newsletters via mail ..... add \$5

*IPN is an IRS approved 501(c)(3) tax-exempt nonprofit organization*

### Please make checks payable to:

Iowa Prairie Network  
c/o Edward M. Sibley, Treas. 4015 Sergeant Road, Sioux City, IA 51106  
The membership form can also be downloaded from our website – click “Join Us”  
*You can join online or give an additional gift with PayPal*

Don't forget to **RENEW** your membership! [www.iowaprairienetwork.org](http://www.iowaprairienetwork.org). **Thank you!**

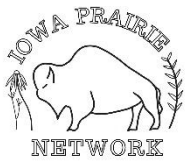
The Iowa Prairie Network is a grass-roots, volunteer organization that is dedicated to the preservation of Iowa's prairie heritage. IPN was formed in 1990 by Iowans concerned that our prairie heritage was disappearing. People needed an organization that would bring those who know about prairie together with those who wanted to learn, to form a network of advocacy for Iowa's natural heritage.

## Summer 2023 Events

**Please be advised:** Scheduling of events is subject to change. Check the IPN Calendar for continued updates. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

### Upcoming Events – check the IPN Calendar for details, updates and more events! [www.iowaprairienetwork.org](http://www.iowaprairienetwork.org)

June	20	Prairie Walk – Doolittle Prairie, Story City 7:00-8:30 PM
	24	Wendel Prairie Hike – Woodbury County 11:00 AM - 1:00 PM
	25-29	North American Prairie Conference - Altoona (5 days)
July	2	Prairie Walk – Codfish Hollow Hill, Maquoketa 6:30 - 8:30 PM
	8	Prairie Workday – Kothenbeutel Prairie, Sheffield 1:00 - 4:00 PM
	15	INPS Field Trip – Kurtz Prairie, St. Anthony 9:00 AM -12:00 PM
	18	Prairie Walk – Doolittle Prairie, Story City 7:00 - 8:30 PM
	19-21	Cyperaceae and Juncaceae I.D. Workshop- Davenport (3 days)
August	12	Blue Water Festival – Arnolds Park, Okoboji 8:00 AM - 6:30 PM
	12	Prairie Workday – Kothenbeutel Prairie, Sheffield 1:00 - 4:00 PM
	12-13	Floristic Inventory Workshop – Wildcat Den State Park, Muscatine (2 days)
	19	INPS Field Trip – Brush Creek Canyon State Preserve, LeHigh
	22	Prairie Walk – Doolittle Prairie, Story City 7:00 - 8:30 PM
	23	Prairie Walk – Codfish Hollow Hill, Maquoketa 6:30-8:30 PM



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[www.iowaprairienetwork.org](http://www.iowaprairienetwork.org)

IPN's Mission: To Learn About, Teach About, Enjoy, and Protect Iowa's Prairie Heritage



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