

Iowa Prairie Network Newsletter

Summer 2022

Schrodinger's Prairie Network

by Aric Ping

The Iowa Prairie Network is Schrodinger's Cat. It exists, but it doesn't. Here's what I mean: Disjointed and estranged, not even gossamer binds our grasslands. They sit alone, insular, genes bottlenecking, niches widening into generalities, their web of diversity bending towards a common middle ground. Strangely, they become more similar apart than when they were whole.

Meanwhile, a web of individuals has been braided together like yucca cordage through their passion for Iowa's prairies. Not me, though. Mimicking postage stamp prairies I've kept to myself, wallowing beneath a blanket of bluestem duff. Unwilling to spread, I've hid from all but those already in the choir, the people willing to wade through the pretentious overgrowth. Titans of patience willing to sit, wait, listen, and tolerate the subtext and borderline foliar fanaticism.

Fragmented prairies, too, are hesitant to reach out, if not outright impeded. They have an entrance, but no exit. Like the concerns of modernity, adventive species find their way in; distractions and fads pulling our attention away from the underlying issues of division, disconnection, and the absence of social and ecological drivers.

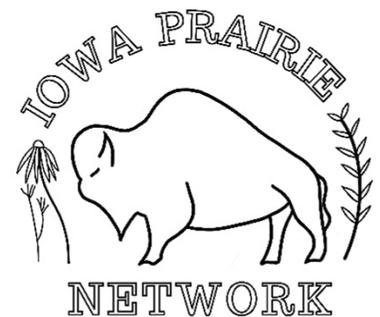
I've seen other grassland zealots struggle like wetland cordgrass meristems being buried alive beneath an annual flow of topsoil slurry. They fight to keep their heads above the compounding burdens piled onto the prairie alongside their own lives. They scramble to hold their own, but find the capacity within themselves to reach their rhizomes into new social earths.

Efforts have been made to rejoin the patches: roadside prairie programs attempt to spread native species like biotic aqueducts reconnecting evaporating remnant pools of the Sea of Grass. The Conservation Reserve Program and its ilk gather and disappear like evaporating rain puddles. They're valiant efforts. They're worthy causes in need of wider support. They're not enough.

Our prairies used to be amorphous and voluminous, their edges vague and transitory, shifting over decades. A network, however, is made up of nodes bound together by strands of similar material. Their surface area to volume ratio is huge. To put it another way: it's all edges. It's angel hair spaghetti laid end-to-end for miles connecting bits of nodal ravioli. Can an ocean flow through a canal? Can a Bison shimmy through a culvert? How do we avoid the 'edge effect' when our land is almost entirely edge? It's not enough.

We have to widen the connections. Overtop the canals and levees, scour their edges, broaden them into meandering floodplains, let them flow. I preach this sort of thing all the time in my work life, stressing the importance of connectivity, removing obstacles, ripping the seams with a chainsaw, cauterizing the grasslands together again with fire. More valiant efforts, more worthy causes, still not enough.

And that's why I've finally joined Iowa Prairie Network: to add another fiber to the thread, to be one more raindrop in the rising tide of Iowa's prairie heritage reclamation, to practice what I preach. Hello.



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Tribute to Don Nelson by Michelle Biodrowski

Don Nelson died on Friday, October 22, 2021. He was one of the first people to actively help me learn the ropes in a nonprofit organization. He was soft spoken and kind, but if he had something to say, you heard it, and I try my best to emulate that.

I spoke to a few people who knew him better than I, and they shared these thoughts:

“I can say that whenever he spoke, he was crystal clear and with sound and solid advice.”

“Don was instrumental in the rewriting of the bylaws when IPN had its restart, and he was very active in keeping our organization alive. Don was keenly interested in the mission of the Iowa Prairie Network, and he was actively immersed in IPN leadership.”

“He valued the land, and reflected those values in all he did, such as the prairie restoration work at his farm.”

“One of his neighbors said that if he could be half the man Don is, he would be a good man.”

Like the cycles of the prairie, we all must thrive and then die. Don lived his life to protect the prairie and I imagine he expects us to do the same.

Pasque Flower Walk at Loess Hills State Forest

by Lance Brisbois



On Sunday, April 3, nearly 30 people from across Iowa and beyond attended Iowa Prairie Network’s Pasque Flower Walk in partnership with Golden Hills RC&D at Loess Hills State

Forest. Participants saw thousands of the first-blooming flowers; a much-welcomed sight during the unseasonably cool spring. The walk was held at the Christensen Farm just east of Pisgah in the Pisgah Unit of Loess Hills State Forest, managed by Iowa Department of Natural Resources. This high-quality Loess Hills remnant prairie includes some of the most biodiverse plant communities in the region. DNR has been removing cedar trees and implementing prescribed fire in recent years to reinvigorate the prairies, and the pasque flower abundance indicates that their efforts are working.



Join our Board or Become a Committee Member

We are looking for individuals who are passionate about our endangered prairie ecosystem to join us in our mission! Join our Board of Directors or add your special talent to a committee (Communications, Finance, Marketing, Newsletter or Membership). Contact Tabitha Panas (tpanas@pheasantsforever.org)

IPN Board of Directors

Region 1

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Find a Prairie

The IPN website now lists public prairies in all 99 Iowa counties.
<https://www.iowaprairienetw.ork.org/find-a-prairie>

“And by experiencing prairie—over the four seasons, and at various times of day, in all weathers—you develop a heightened sense of awe and wonder that will spill over into every other area of your life.”

— Cindy Crosby, *The Tallgrass Prairie: An Introduction*

Featured IPN Connection

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



BUR OAK LAND TRUST

Mission:

Advancing biodiversity in Eastern Iowa by protecting resilient landscapes and connecting people to nature.



The sun shines brightly
Pussy toes beam scattered about
Beneath the oaks is home

By Sarah Nizzi



Butterfly Milkweed
Photo by Corinne Bulat

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 with PayPal

Don't forget to **RENEW** your membership! www.iowaprairienetwork.org. **Thank you!**

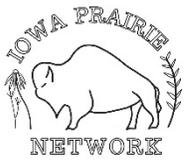
The Iowa Prairie Network is a grass-roots, volunteer organization that is dedicated to the preservation of Iowa's prairie heritage. IPN was formed in 1990 by Iowans concerned that our prairie heritage was disappearing. People needed an organization that would bring those who know about prairie together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

Summer 2022 Events

Please be advised: Scheduling of events is subject to change according to CDC Coronavirus guidelines. 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

June	1	Camp Joy Hollow Hike - Westfield
	3-5	Loess Hills Prairie Seminar – Monona County
	11	Gardening with Native Plants: Prairie Walk – West Des Moines Library
	16	Doolittle Prairie Walk with Tom Rosburg – Story County
		Nature Walk at Big Rock Park – Pella
July	21	Day of Prairie Hikes – Whiterock Conservancy, Coon Rapids
	30	Codfish Hollow Field Trip – Codfish Hollow Hill Prairie, Maquoketa
	2	INPS Tipton Prairie Field Trip – Greene County
	16	Prairie Hike – Becker East Wildlife Area, Colesburg
August	21	Doolittle Prairie Walk – Story County
	24-27	North American Prairie Conference – Lincoln, Nebraska
	13	Okoboji Blue Water Festival – Arnolds Park
	18	Doolittle Prairie Walk with Tom Rosburg – Story County
		Codfish Hollow Field Trip – Codfish Hollow Hill Prairie, Maquoketa



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

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Blooming Lead Plant
Brushy Creek State Park
Photo by Corinne Bulat