

Iowa Prairie Network Newsletter

Spring 2023

Fellowship Amidst Fragmentation

by Kenny Slocum

In February, the Iowa Prairie Network had the honor of hosting its annual winter seminar at Drake University.

The event featured speakers, roundtable discussions, vendors, a silent auction, and all around good vibes. The event began years ago as a regional IPN meeting, and has since blossomed into one of IPN's largest events each year.

The morning began with sessions on prairie seedling identification, courtesy of Diversity Farms' John Judson and Drake professor Tom Rosburg who supplied the wee flowers, grasses, and sedges for an enthusiastic bunch to pour over. Attendees gained a few identification cues which, like any good plant enthusiast, they will promptly forget when that new prairie seeding starts to grow in earnest come May (or maybe that's just me).

Concurrently, a session hosted by our fearless leader Tabitha Panas and IPN vice president Tim Youngquist covered the prairie S.T.R.I.P.S. program, a burgeoning practice allowing producers to integrate prairie vegetation into their ag land.

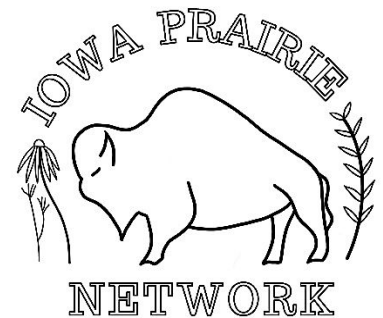
Behind door number three, two scruffy naturalists from Jackson and Clayton County (board members Tony Vorwald and myself, respectively) hosted a roundtable-format discussion on how people come to love prairies, and how we can use that experience to become better advocates for the resource we all love.

After lunch, the group coalesced into one room to hear from the afternoon speakers. Following a brief address from Tabitha, Kody Wohlers from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation offered a fascinating talk on how climate change affects prescribed burning. The talk illuminated the complexities of adapting ancient practices to a changing environment. Shifts in phenology, precipitation patterns, and rising temperatures during burn season all add new variables to the already-complicated art of prescribed fire.

Dr. Marshall McDaniel followed with a talk on soil biology, and what we're learning as we strive to thread the needle between productivity and sustainability. We have better tools than we have ever had to observe and quantify the impacts of practices like prairie strips. With those tools, he could demonstrate how beneficial impacts like carbon sequestration and improved soil biology reached far beyond the borders of the strips themselves to punch well above their weight in terms of restoration and regeneration.

Scott Moats of the Nature Conservancy rounded out the "main event" speaker section of the day with an in-depth discussion of grazing, with both bison and cattle, as a management tool. He made a powerful case that, like the prairie strips, the ripple effect of grazing goes far beyond just the plants they eat. Scott told a heart-wrenching story of a prairie rattlesnake den that, because life intervened and the vegetation above never got grazed, likely failed to produce any young one season.

Continued on page 2...



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Fellowship Amidst Fragmentation *(Continued from pg 1)*

The day wound down with several beautiful readings from Connie Mutel's new book "*Tending Iowa's Land: Pathways to a Sustainable Future*" (see page 3 for a review by Sarah Nizzi).

Organizationally, we were overjoyed with the turnout and enthusiasm shown by attendees from all over the state who came to celebrate prairies together. Personally, I noticed something else: the energy.

Put a bunch of prairie people under one roof, and something remarkable happens. Virtually every side conversation I heard, and definitely every side conversation I had, focused on the subject at hand. This was a room full of Iowans, gathering in the middle of winter, and I don't think I heard one person engage in the customary small-talk about the weather.

During Tony and I's roundtable on plant blindness, I had another insight. We wanted to know what inspired the attendees' passion for prairies. I expected most of the answers to revolve around the ecology itself; birders speak of "spark birds," a bird that for whatever reason caught their fancy and turned them into proper bird nerds. I assumed prairie lovers would arrive at their passion via a similar mechanism. I was wrong.

Virtually every person pointed to a *human* as the spark that lit their prairie fire. A professor, a grandparent, a spouse... Few people had a "spark flower," or a peak experience that changed them forever.

It makes me think back to the energy I felt in that building that day. It makes me think how, like prairies, we're at our healthiest and happiest when we're all connected. On the prairie, forbs and grasses wax and wane over years and decades. The grasses become dominant, the soil biology becomes loaded with grass-suppressing microbes, the grasses decline, the forbs fill the gaps, and the cycle repeats - but only if the soil has all of its own diversity in place.

The bison wallow, and the fritillaries puddle amongst the bare dirt they leave behind. Between fires, a thicket of sumac develops offering cover to turkey poultts between bouts of foraging. Before the thicket can get too big for its britches, another fire comes through to level the playing field.

The winter seminar had professors and students, professionals and amateurs, photographers and graziers, gene-jockeys and firebugs, and more than a few "generalists" fluent in two or more of those languages. Like a prairie, with so many niches occupied, the whole group felt stronger.

I felt an unexpected pang driving out of Des Moines. I had more questions with which to bother all the smart people. I wanted to hear more stories of botanical wonder, to see more battle scars from my fellow veterans in the war on multiflora rose. In that building, I had felt like a plume of junegrass waving in the once-endless expanse alongside partridge peas and gnarled oaks. I felt connected.

It made me wish the prairie could move like we can. It made me wish I could show my local, tiny goat prairies the vast remnants of the Loess Hills, or the black-soil prairies of the Des Moines Lobe.

Alas, aside from shrinking, a prairie cannot move much. But we can, and it's a blessing to pull our fragments together and experience connectivity, if only for a day.

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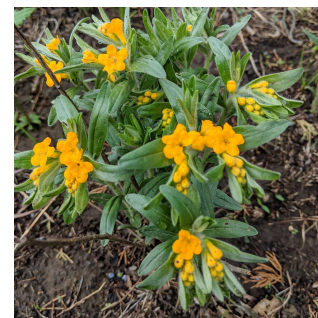
At Large

Jon Judson
Aric Ping
Shami Morse
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Derek Miner
Pete Eyheralde

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 is currently full, but 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)

*"As my eyes search the prairie, I feel the summer in the spring."
— Frances Densmore*

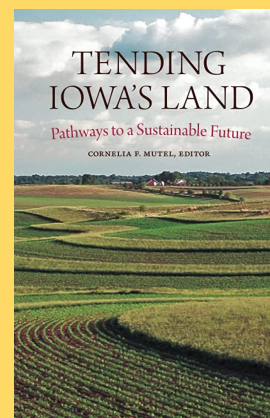
A Review of *Tending Iowa's Land: Pathways to a Sustainable Future* by Sarah Nizzi

Connie Mutel is no stranger to Iowa literature. Connie has penned numerous books on natural history, ecology, and more. Her work was first introduced to me in college in 2010. Over 12 years later, I am humbled to be able to review her latest publication. *Tending Iowa's Land: Pathways to a Sustainable Future* is a collection of science-based essays and personal stories reflecting on the connection of agriculture and Iowa's natural ecosystems. Iowa agriculture and conservation haven't always been thought of together, particularly over the last several decades. Agriculture once worked alongside nature, but as pressure grew to increase production and technology, agriculture industrialized and distanced itself from nature. Fast forward to today, and we are faced with serious issues related to water quality, soil health, loss of biodiversity, and climate change. To maintain and increase sustainability within our state, we must bridge the gap between agriculture and conservation. Mutel's latest book gives space to academics, scientific researchers, farmers, community leaders, stewards of the land, and others to share their perspectives and provide hope and actionable items we can take to move Iowa in a direction that promotes both sustainable agriculture and biodiversity.

The contributors themselves say it best. An excerpt from Chapter 6 Tracing the Trends: Improving Iowa's Water Quality

"The science is actually pretty simple and the proposed solutions are not complicated. So we are left to wonder, Do we have sufficient societal will to make the changes needed to improve water quality? Because so much economic activity in Iowa depends on the status quo, changes of this sort will be very challenging. But the path to better water quality is well lit and open. All we need to do is take it."

I encourage anyone and everyone to read *Tending Iowa's Land: Pathways to a Sustainable Future*. All Iowans are affected by the choices we make on the land. We are all interconnected with the land, water, soil, air, and wildlife as they are all interconnected with each other. Our actions can either harm or rebuild our natural resources in a number of different ways. We have a moral obligation to do better. The next generation of Iowans deserve better.



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 spring, 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](https://www.bumblebeeatlas.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.

"All that mattered was the hum of the bees and the chirp of birdsong, the way the sun beamed on the edge of a blue wildflower –Alison Croggon

Spring Is The Worst

by Aric Ping

Spring is the Worst

Fall-Summer-Winter-(large gap)-Spring - that's the correct order of seasonal preference.

Spring is disappointment. The flowing sap, the warmer weather. It'll be wonderful, you think, but that's not what spring is. Spring is a liar, a tease.

Spring is a frost-split garden hose.

Spring is a high of 44 degrees with overcast skies and a bone-chilling 20 mph wind. And now it's starting to rain.

Spring is eager green leaves edged in brown frostbit death.

Spring is a siren calling you to a muddy mire you'd mistaken for a hiking trail.

Spring is eternal, feeling like it'll never end.

What else...

Spring is flowers. Pasqueflowers and pussytoes and trout lilies and bloodroot and sedges and marsh marigolds and the pants of the dutch.

Spring is spiraling, tornadic flocks of snow geese reflecting radar.

Spring is the scent of blooming serviceberry and plum dragging you to them airborne like Pepe Le Pew toward some cat's perfume.

Spring is green nubbins of silky wild rye emerging from a fall fire's black.

Spring is the melting of winter's cold silence through warm bird song, chorusing frogs, and buzzing bees.

Spring is the tempering crescendo before summer's deafening roar. The quiet before the storm.

Spring might be alright.

(Still the worst though.)



**North
American
Prairie
Conference**

When:
June 25-29
2022

Where:
The Meadows
Events Center
Altoona, IA

Hosted By



**Iowa
Natural Heritage
Foundation**

PRAIRIE RIVERS
by Aric Ping

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.

Save The Date!

Loess Hills Prairie Seminar
"Head for the Hills"
June 2nd-4th, 2023
Monona County

Birding, biking, hiking,
botanizing, and speakers

For more information,
visit
www.LoessHillsPrairieSeminar.com

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

Contact
IowaPrairieNetworkOrg@gmail.com

Student Scholarships!

The Iowa Prairie Network will be providing financial scholarships to several college students that attend the North American Prairie Conference on June 25-28th, 2023 in Des Moines, Iowa. Details and applications available by January 1st, 2023 on www.NorthAmericanPrairie.org

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!**

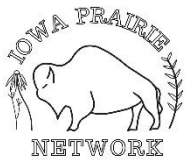
The Iowa Prairie Network is a grass-roots, volunteer organization that is dedicated to the preservation of Iowa's prairie heritage. IPN was formed in 1990 by Iowans concerned that our prairie heritage was disappearing. People needed an organization that would bring those who know about prairie together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

Spring 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

April	21	Pasque Flower Hike – Motor Mill Historic Site, Elkader Gardening with Native Prairie Plants - West Des Moines Public Library
	22	
May	6	Fowler Forest Wildflower Walk – Fowler Forest Preserve, Smithfield Savanna Saunter - Bloody Run County Park, Marquette Hamilton Tapken Prairie Walk – Hamilton Tapken Prairie, Onslow Sioux City Prairie Hike – Sioux City INPS Yellow River State Forest Wildflower Walk - Harpers Ferry Broken Kettle Joy Hollow Complex Hike - Joy Hollow, Westfield Codfish Hollow Prairie Hike - Codfish Hollow, Maquoketa Coriell Nature Preserve Prairie Walk - Atalissa
	12	
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June	2-4	Loess Hills Prairie Seminar IPN annual meeting *during Loess Hills Prairie Seminar; 4:30 PM*
	3	



Iowa Prairie Network, Inc.
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www.iowaprairienetwork.org

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



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Inside this issue:

Page One
Fellowship Amidst Fragmentation

Page Two
Fellowship
(continued)

Page Three
Review of *Tending Iowa's Land: Pathways
to a Sustainable Future*
Iowa Bumble Bee Atlas 2023

Page Four
Spring is the Worst

Page Five
Membership info & Events