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### Preface

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# Preface

## The Conservation Legacy Lives On ...

“...before a single grass-blade had sprouted, a hopeful multitude of large hairy, silky buds about as thick as one’s thumb came to light, pushing up through the black and gray ashes and cinders, and before these buds were fairly free from the ground they opened wide and displayed purple blossoms...giving beauty for ashes in glorious abundance. Instead of remaining in the ground waiting for warm weather and companions, this admirable plant seemed to be in haste to rise and cheer the desolate landscape...” John Muir writing about pasque flower in his autobiography, *The Story of My Boyhood and Youth*.

Aldo Leopold, who spent much of his adult life in Wisconsin, observed the prairie’s loss in *A Sand County Almanac* as he passed by a lone *Silphium* growing in a Sauk County cemetery: “What a thousand acres of *Silphiums* looked like when they tickled the bellies of the buffalo is a question never again to be answered and perhaps not even asked.”

Wisconsin has a strong environmental legacy. The writings and conservation efforts of individuals, such as John Muir and Aldo Leopold, have deep Wisconsin connections. Prairie studies and restoration experiments, begun by botanists John Curtis and Henry Greene in the late 1930s, continue to the present. The University of Wisconsin Arboretum initiated the first recognized prairie restoration and continues to study this ecosystem through Greene Prairie and Curtis Prairie restorations as well as the Faville Prairie remnant along the Crawfish River near Lake Mills. Wisconsin is also an important setting for the environmental arts. Jens Jensen and Frank Lloyd Wright both resided for a portion of their lives in Wisconsin and heavily promoted the idea of the prairie style in landscape gardening and in architecture. Today, individuals at the University of Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, The Prairie Enthusiasts, The Nature Conservancy, and many of Wisconsin’s citizens carry on this more than a century old tradition.

Of course, Wisconsin does not have a patent on such legacies. Throughout the Midwest, many naturalists and botanists have studied and encouraged the preservation of the prairie—Robert Betz, Ada Hayden, Lloyd Hulbert, Wes Jackson, Roger Landers, Bohumil Shimek, John Weaver and too many others to name. But the legacy does not end or truly begin here. Many individuals from wide-ranging occupations have reflected on the idea of the prairie and its importance to those who dwell on this landscape. The writings of Willa Cather, Hamlin Garland, Ole E. Rolvaag, and Laura Ingalls Wilder testify to the strength of the prairie landscape. Harvey Dunn’s paintings, hanging in the South Dakota Art Museum, illustrate the brilliant colors, contrasts, textures, and emotions found in the prairie. The need to conserve the prairie was recognized by University of Illinois professor and horticulturalist Wilhelm Miller, who, in 1915, called for every state to

preserve at least 1,000 acres of prairie before it disappeared due to agriculture and development.

The influences that the prairie has had on the development and our perceptions of the Midwest are tremendous and widespread. In a sense that is what makes the North American Prairie Conference unique and helps me to understand why it brings together people from all backgrounds and interests. Each of us is instrumental in conserving, restoring, and understanding the natural and cultural value of the remaining prairie we find today. The theme of the conference “...the conservation legacy lives on...” is, therefore, quite appropriate for this event. To honor this legacy and the prairie landscape, the conference committee insisted on having a diverse group of plenary speakers and evening entertainment.

The North American Prairie Conference has its own considerable history, beginning in 1968 as a symposium on prairie and prairie restoration at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois. The success and interest in that first meeting instituted an alternate year meeting schedule starting in 1970. The gathering was renamed the Midwest Prairie Conference and remained so until 1978, when it became the North American Prairie Conference after an informal committee of past chairs and attendees recognized the continental extent of both grasslands and grassland interests.

While the conferences have grown in attendance and the topics covered have broadened, other venues for learning and networking about North American, as well as international, grasslands and savannas have also developed. A challenge to the future of the North American Prairie Conference is, therefore, to maintain a niche and format that is attractive to grassland specialists and students, especially during these times when each of us must decide which of many conferences and meetings we can afford to attend. To answer this concern, conference attendees might contemplate the development of a mechanism to encourage and provide support to groups who may be considering hosting a future conference. The linkages between past and present conferences have always been informal, and yet the ease of each new conference host’s tasks is dependent on receiving support from previous hosts. This independence has been an asset to a conference’s personality.



However, as the complexity and costs of hosting a conference has grown, I ask is it time to discuss the creation of a more formal structure as well as a conference support committee. Such a committee, possibly represented by individuals from the entire tallgrass prairie region, would be a support group to future conference hosts—providing information on past conferences, mailing lists, initial support funding, and assisting with finding future conference hosts.

In your hands are the Proceedings of the Nineteenth North American Prairie Conference. It includes abstracts of all the papers and posters presented at the conference, except those presented at the opening plenary session and those accepted as papers for the proceedings. Six hundred fifty attendees listened to 109 papers and were able to visit 25 posters at the conference. Thirty-two of those presentations are included in these proceedings. The process of selecting papers for the proceedings was straightforward. Papers were initially self-selected in that presenters had the option of submitting their conference presentation for publication. Each submitted paper was then sent out for peer-review. After evaluation of the reviewers' comments by the editors, authors of papers that passed the peer-review process received those comments and were given the opportunity to revise their manuscripts. The conference proceedings are also available in a CD-ROM format for those of you who are fully into a computerized world. In addition to PDFs of all the submitted papers and abstracts, the CD-ROM contains the plenary session talks of Curt Meine and Tom Hooyer. The papers presented at the conference covered a wide range of topics and speakers represented nearly the entire extent of the tallgrass prairie. As has been the case in past years, the proceedings display a wide interest in prairie-related topics, including papers about prairie flora and fauna, ecological restoration, education, management, and the prairie's physical properties.

Many people came together to give this conference its personality and to play a role in its success. I will not even attempt to mention them all, although I hope that Dave and I were able to capture everyone in the listings on the preceding pages. One testament to the interest in this conference is the financial support given to it during the two years

of its planning. The conference was well funded with generous support of more than \$35,000 in donations from agencies, non-profits, and businesses that focus on prairie preservation, restoration, propagule production, planting, and management.

The steering committee was made up of a dedicated set of volunteers from the University of Wisconsin–Madison, The Nature Conservancy, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Earth Arts, Inc., and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Volunteers staffing the conference were university students and members of the community-at-large. Field trips were organized by Ted Cochrane and led by individuals who took time off from work to show participants the richness that Wisconsin's prairies contain as well as the ongoing activities in preserving and restoring this ecosystem. Amy Martin did a stellar job of contacting and tracking manuscript reviewers. Entertainment was provided on a variety of fronts, much of it gratis. Environmental art was a second theme of this year's conference, and the conference included its first artist-in-residence, Glen Wolff, whose two pieces of work from the conference are on permanent exhibit—at one of the north entrances to Curtis Prairie at the University of Wisconsin–Madison Arboretum and at the International Crane Foundation. New music from Madison's Festival Choir arranged specially for this conference, the photographs of Terrill A. Knaack, and recent films about the prairie by Daryl Smith and Chuck Johanssen were only some of the conference highlights.

Much work went into organizing the conference and I want to recognize the University of Wisconsin–Madison College of Agricultural Outreach Services for its tremendous administrative support. Lastly, the conference's success rests on the individuals attending, giving presentations, asking questions and networking about their activities focused on the prairie ecosystem. A committee can put the event together, but it is the attendees and their participation that truly makes such an event a success.

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