

Prairie Wind

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PCM Partner School

By Hallie Rasmussen, Visitor Services Specialist



"I am on my mountain in a tree home that people have passed without ever knowing that I am here."

These words, spoken by main character Sam Gribley in the novel *My Side of the Mountain*, were considered by 5th grade students from Prairie City/Monroe, Iowa (PCM) schools as they visited Neal Smith NWR during the month of February. They did not go to a mountain and live in a tree home, but they did visit the prairie and oak savannah of Neal Smith NWR to gain real life experiences which made their study of the novel more real.

With support of School Superintendent Jane Babcock and guidance from teachers Donna Schaudt and Rebecca VerHeul, these 5th graders had the opportunity to

understand *My Side of the Mountain* in concrete ways through four visits to Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge during the month of February. The PCM teachers worked in partnership with Neal Smith Visitor Services Specialists Hallie Rasmussen and Al Murray and Prairie Wetlands Learning Center Instructional Systems Specialist David Ellis to bring their 5th grade students on these weekly visits to the refuge which were integrated through hands-on activities with the novel study of *My Side of the Mountain* in the classroom at school. Each week, students wrote about their experiences at Neal Smith in a newsletter style report which was sent home to the families of the PCM 5th graders.

During these four visits, the students had the opportunity to make connections that increased their comprehension of the novel by experiencing things similar to what Sam Gribley did in the novel: cold, snow, beauty and wonder of nature, physical challenge, and discovering nature with a knowledgeable adult. Teachers were able to build understanding of the vocabulary and in-depth comprehension of the novel through the real experiences their students had with plants, animals, winter survival, and snowshoes.

One of the best ways to share the significance and success of these visits is to read the writing of the students who experienced four weeks of visiting the refuge themselves:

- "We had to wear layers of clothes to keep warm. When we were outside we saw lots of tracks. Some of the tracks we saw were rabbit, coyote and deer... We also get to go back in the spring."

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- After visiting Neal Smith, Jacob commented, “Yes, I love the prairie,” and Taylor stated, “Yes, I like nature.”
- Wade’s response after his third visit to the refuge was, “I liked all the animals living on the beautiful prairie.” (Editor’s note: Wade spoke these words during one of the strongest winters Iowa has ever experienced.)

A powerful summary of the impact and effect of the PCM 5th graders visits to Neal Smith is found in the snowshoe poems written by Lilly:

Snowshoes

Hard, cold

Falling, walking, hike

Snowshoe, boots, snow-pants

Talking, running,

Gloves, hats.



Though Neal Smith NWR is not a mountain home, it was a prairie destination for 5th graders to discover in greater depth how nature works on the tallgrass prairie in winter during the month of February 2010. These students and their teachers gained new understanding about how nature works, a sense of companionship which comes in sharing nature together, and real experiences which enabled students and teachers to increase learning.

James Everson, Spring Intern



My name is James Everson and I am the Visitor Services Intern for the spring semester on the prairie. I was born in Wisconsin but have since moved to a closer location in Knoxville, Iowa. Upon graduation from Knoxville High School in 2009, I enlisted into the United States Marine Corps Reserve with a rifleman occupational specialty. I intend to attend Des Moines Area Community College for the summer semester, catching up on general education; but, I look forward to attending Iowa State University in the fall, concentrating on a history major, though I am contemplating changing my major to politics.

I am extremely excited and proud to be working on the prairie and helping to bring back its beauty and life. Getting my hands dirty with the multitude of activities and programs established here at Neal Smith Wildlife Refuge will definitely give me an experience I will never forget, and an even stronger appreciation for the wonders of the prairie.

Linking Girls to the Land 2010

By Hallie Rasmussen, Visitor Services Specialist



It was one of the first sunny spring days in 2010 when Girl Scouts of all ages came to celebrate “Linking Girls to the Land” at the Refuge. *Linking Girls to the Land* (LGTTL) is a partnership between Girl Scouts of the USA’s Elliott Wildlife Values Project and federal natural resource agencies, initiatives and partnering organizations. It is also a celebration to recognize the birthday of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

This year the girls were able to participate in a number of activities that involved getting them outside, interested, and involved in the prairie. The girls explored the outdoors by hiking the trail and discovering the changing prairie that has started to come alive. They were also stewards by getting their hands dirty in the greenhouse

helping prep for future spring planting. Some of the older girls spent time building bird houses while the younger Daisies and Brownies learned about camouflage through games and stories.

It has been a long winter in Iowa and this event was a great way to celebrate the much anticipated spring. The girls' enthusiasm shined through their smiles and by the end of the day they still weren't ready to go home. It was another victory towards “getting kids outside” and overall just a fun day.

New Opportunities in the New Year

By Al Murray, Visitor Services Specialist

Let’s face it, this past winter was hard on all of us in central Iowa. Who knew that the early snow in October would usher in a winter bringing us a total of 69 inches of snow! Even the most ardent snow enthusiast (a category into which I fall), eventually said enough. However, this series of events led to a unique opportunity for refuge visitors.

The refuge purchased 25 pairs of snow shoes, which arrived in early January, to be used for programming with our partner schools. This gave me pause to think perhaps there might be a few folks in the community that might be interested in viewing wildlife while participating in a snow shoe hike. After kicking around some ideas and developing a press release, I advertised “Snow Shoe hikes with a ranger” in the local media for Saturdays in January and February.

What happened next, from my perspective as a refuge ranger, was a wonderful thing. Folks immediately began contacting me asking for an opportunity to participate. Individuals, families, extended families and assorted groups ventured to the refuge over the course of the month to take part in the hikes. The theme of the hike was life, winter, and adaptation. As the hikes progressed and wildlife observations were made, visitors questions opened opportunities to explore how different animals adapted different strategies for survival.

In all, nearly 80 people took the time to come out in the cold and experience the refuge in a different way. I look forward to offering this program next winter, because let’s face it folks, this is Iowa and the snow will be back...

NWRA "Fly-In" Hill Rally

By Nancy Gilbertson



*Nancy with Secretary of the Interior
Ken Salazar*

Tom Prall and Nancy Gilbertson represented the Friends at the annual National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) "Fly-In" Hill Rally on March 9. Approximately forty Friends groups from all over the United States attended. NWRA provided advocacy training the evening before which gave the group tools and resources to successfully communicate individual refuge needs as well as the Refuge System needs to the elected officials.

In general, the four "asks" presented to our Congressmen were to:

- Support the requested \$578 million FY 2011 Refuge System Operations and Maintenance budget.
- Support full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund at \$900 million.
- Request the house member to join the Refuge Caucus (this was a no-brainer since Congressman Boswell IS ALREADY A MEMBER!)
- Support wilderness designation for the 1.5 million acre coastal

plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Specifically, the Friends of PLC advocated for support of funding to purchase the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) 840 acre tract which they are holding, pending reimbursement from the federal government. (If you will recall in a previous newsletter, the purchase and importance of the purchase were discussed. The Friends provided INHF with \$1.5 million to clinch the \$2.7 million sale.) Mr. Boswell has listed the request for a second year in his Appropriations Request.

Congressional staffers listened carefully and asked questions regarding what the Friends would do with the money if they were reimbursed for the land purchase. Friends would be able to provide money for other land purchases; and they could expand their educational assistance program such as providing additional bussing for field trips for schools in the lower income areas. This was of much interest to the staffers. Senator Harkin's office requested additional information.



Marvin Light



My name is Marvin Light and I just began participating in the Student Temporary Employment Program at Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge in March. I was born and raised in the greater Des Moines area before moving to Arkansas in 1994. I spent twelve years in northwest Arkansas where I started my family before moving back to Iowa a little over three years ago. I am very blessed to have my wife and two beautiful little girls. I am currently a student at Des Moines Area Community College with plans to go on to Drake to finish my degree in Secondary Science Education with a minor in Biology. Now that the snow is gone, I look forward to seeing this incredible prairie come alive. I am grateful to be working with Al Murray and to be a part of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife team. I look forward to the summer at the Prairie Learning Center and am excited to share this amazing facility with many visitors throughout the season.

2010 Federal Junior Duck Stamp Contest

By Doreen Van Ryswyk



The 2010 Iowa Junior Duck Stamp Contest entries were judged on March 24. There were 465 entries this year, up 100 from last year's contest. When all was said and done, Haley Kreiter, a 16-year-old from DeWitt took Best of Show honors. Her winning entry depicted a bufflehead duck done in acrylics and will compete against 51 others at the Minnesota Science Museum in St. Paul on April 23. The winning entry at the national judging will be the 2010 Federal Junior Duck Stamp. All 52 best of show winners will be included in an exhibit that travels across the county for a year.



This year's Iowa judges were (l to r): Doug Helmers, Iowa Private Lands Coordinator; Josh Finley, Ducks Unlimited Regional Director; Randy Munson, Ducks Unlimited; Brad Reece, Maynard Reece Gallery; and Brian Murillo, artist and two time Iowa JDS best of show winner.

New Books at the Prairie Point Bookstore

By Carl Nollen, Bookstore Manager

Gladys Black, The Legacy of Iowa's Bird Lady, by Larry Stone and Jon Stravers. Turkey River Environmental Expressions, Elkader, IA, 2010, paperback, 147 pages, \$19.00. A biography of possibly Iowa's most influential amateur birder. She lived in Pleasantville, wrote for the Des Moines Register, was a bird bander, and wildlife rehabilitator.

Wildflowers of Iowa Woodlands, by Sylvan T. Runkel and Alvin F. Bull. University of Iowa Press, 2009, paperback, 274 pages, \$29.95, 2nd edition. All new photographs.

The Indians of Iowa, by Lance M. Foster. University of Iowa Press, 2009, paperback, 148 pages, \$16.95. A summary of the tribes who have lived in Iowa from prehistoric times to the present. Written by a member of the Ioway tribe.

Wildlife Sketching, Pen, Pencil, Crayon, and Charcoal, by Frank Lohan. Dover Publications, 2009, paperback, 240 pages, \$16.95. Includes trees, flowers and mushrooms. Like all Dover publications, very good quality and price.

Agnes Chase's First Book of Grasses, The Structure of Grasses Explained for Beginners, by Lynn C. Clark and Richard W. Pohl. Smithsonian, 1996, 4th edition, paperback, 127 pages, \$18.95. In print since 1922. Both writers taught at Iowa State University in Ames. Mr. Pohl was my advisor when I was a student of botany at ISU in the 1950's. He was the foremost expert on American grasses.

How to Identify Grasses and Grasslike Plants, by H.D. Harrington. Swallow Press, 1977, paperback, 154 pages, \$12.95. Includes rushes and sedges.

Born in the Spring, A Collection of Spring Wildflowers, by June C. Roberts. Ohio University Press, 1976, paperback, 159 pages, \$21.95. Ninety plants illustrated with drawings and very accurate watercolors.

Come Grow With Us

The power of a Friends' group is its members. We represent a variety of interests, talents and financial support allowing the Friends of the Prairie Learning Center to meet its mission and goals. We encourage you to renew your support or become a new Friend by completing the membership form below. Friends of the Prairie Learning Center is a nonprofit organization and all donations are tax deductible.

____ \$25 -- Big Bluestem Friend ____ \$50 -- Buffalo Buddy
____ \$100 -- Savannah Saver ____ \$250 -- Prairie Patron
____ Other -- \$ _____

Be sure to find out if your company will match contributions.

Please circle one.

New Member

Renewal

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Date _____

E-mail _____

Mail to: Friends of The Prairie Learning Center, PO Box 399, Prairie City, Iowa 50228.

Upcoming Events at Neal Smith 2010

May 8: International Migratory Bird Day/Junior Duck Stamp Celebration -

Join us for bird hikes, crafts, and much more!

September 11: Monarch Madness-

Come help us collect and tag butterflies on their migration south through the refuge!

September 25: Buffalo Day/Public Lands Day – A buffalo chip throwing contest and a guided bus tour through the bison enclosure are just two activities at this all-day event.

October 9: Ding Darling Day – Join us for a day of volunteer work on the refuge!

Photography Workshop

By Joan Van Gorp, Friends Board Member

The Friends of the Prairie Learning Center are sponsoring a photography workshop taught by Carl Kurtz, Saturday, July 24, from 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. The workshop will provide ample time to take a variety of photographs outside on the refuge, both before and after lunch. There will also be time to review the photos taken and Mr. Kurtz will give a presentation with lots of ideas on photography.

Lunch will be provided. Please bring your own water and a laptop if available, as they may be used to review the photos taken. The cost of the day-long workshop is only \$40.00.

Experience the beauty of the prairie, while learning about photography from an amazing artist! Send in your registration and payment as soon as possible, as participants are limited to 15. We will keep a waiting list and if you find you are unable to attend and give notice at least one week prior to July 24, the fee will be returned.

Send payment and the completed registration form to:
Friends of the Prairie Learning Center
Attn: Photography Workshop
P.O. Box 399
Prairie City, IA 50228

Call Joan Van Gorp at (515)994-2918 with questions.



Registration Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email: _____

A Message from the Friends President

By Mark Lyle

This upcoming season will be exciting. The snow has finally gone, leaving a prairie awaking from its slumber.

One particularly exciting program, totally sponsored by the Friends of the Prairie Learning Center, is a new way to locate invasive species. Until now, staff, interns and volunteers have surveyed the Refuge looking for plants that do not belong in a tallgrass prairie. This spring and summer, refuge staff will be working with a firm from Montana, Working Dogs for Conservation. They have dogs that can be trained to search out specific invasive species just like explosive or drug sniffing dogs. The project will look at two aspects of the program: the accuracy of the dogs and the efficiency of the dogs versus humans.

Also, our college scholarship program for local Prairie City-Monroe High School students interested in acquiring a college degree in a conservation area is rolling. The program is not only designed to help the student, but also to allow the Refuge to work closer in the community. This program is also funded by the Friends.

More news on both programs will follow in the next newsletter.

Prairie Wind
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