



Tallgrass Prairie CENTER

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

FALL 2018 NEWSLETTER

IRVINE PRAIRIE

Laura Jackson, Director
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May 18th, 2018: a picture perfect morning. If you were arriving by light aircraft, the first thing you would notice is a line of cars parked along Benton County 55th Street, 1.5 miles of rolling gravel from the Tama County line. On the north side of the road, a thriving farmstead embraced by shelterbelts, and then fields in all directions. Across from the farmhouse, a cluster of people gathered in the shade of two walnut trees, on a narrow strip of grass between road and field. A boulder, delivered to this farm a half million years ago by the last glacier, and then (much later) to the crest of the hill by a front-end loader, greets approaching

visitors. A small banner announcing "Irvine Prairie" quivers in the breeze. Parked in last year's corn stubble, a tractor and Truax native seed drill are dwarfed by the disked field. Later in the day it will circle it repeatedly, until all 8.5 acres are planted.

This was the scene on May 18th 2018 when we dedicated Irvine Prairie, a 77-acre prairie restoration in Benton County. Cathy Irvine donated this land in memory of her late husband David and his father to the UNI Foundation Properties Corp. for the Tallgrass Prairie Center to establish and take care of. Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation

protects it in perpetuity from further development, using a conservation easement. Cathy's vision is to create a place where people can come and see what Iowa used to look like. Many people and organizations are helping to make this vision a reality:

- Tallgrass Prairie Center will design the seed mixes and plant using the best methods available. Cathy's gift will also provide the resources for us to manage it in perpetuity. This year's "hilltop mix" designed by Justin Meissen contains 9 grasses, 5 sedges, 9 legumes, and 49 other forb species.

continued on next page





Spotted so far: native grasses, purple prairie clover, partridge pea, milkweeds, and species in the aster family (so hard to tell apart at this stage). There are weeds, and there are a few sparse places, but the weather has been favorable so far, with timely rains. We can only imagine the dense and deepening metropolis of plant roots underground, feeding the life in the soil.

A dedication is just the beginning of much hard work, advances and inevitable setbacks to come. There are so many as yet unimagined possibilities waiting for us as Irvine Prairie becomes part of UNI, the local watershed, and the local community.

- Cathy's long-time neighbor and tenant has collaborated with site planning and ground preparation, and allowed us to store equipment in their shed across from the prairie. He will continue to farm the unplanted areas of the 77 acres until we plant the final 14 acres in 2022.
- Union Community High school teachers Craig Hemsath (MS Biology 2007) and Louis Beck have pledged to involve their vocational agriculture, horticulture, and biology students. Mr. Beck's students are interested in growing hard-to-establish prairie species like shooting star in their greenhouse for later transplanting.
- UNI Biology professors Kenneth Elgersma and Ai Wen and their students have come

out to sample the soil, and we anticipate that many other UNI students and faculty and local high school students will study Irvine Prairie to learn how water, plants and wildlife change over time and from place to place.

- Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation will help us with prescribed fire and will inspect the property each year for compliance with their conservation easement.
- Cathy will supervise the frequent mowing needed in the first year to keep tall annual weeds from setting back the growth of natives.

We come and go
but the land is
always here and the
people who love and
understand it are the
people to whom it
belongs.
For a little while.
-Willa Cather



2018 PRAIRIE ON FARMS FIELD DAYS

Ashley Kittle, Prairie On Farms Program Manager
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The Tallgrass Prairie Center is providing two field days this year. The first one took place on June 21st, in Elkader, IA. The next field day will be held on September 13th near Dike, IA. These field days address how to plant successful native prairie plantings on agricultural fields. Field days are free and welcome to the public, conservation planners, technical service providers, landowners, land managers or anyone interested in learning more about the role native prairie vegetation can play on farms for soil erosion prevention, nutrient reduction, monarch recovery efforts and increasing habitat for wildlife and pollinators.

Don't miss our next field day; Mark your Calendars!

**Thursday, September 13th 4:30 - 6:30pm
J.H. Roadman Memorial Park, Dike.**

This field day is in partnership with the ISU STRIPS team and will highlight the planting of in-field prairie strips and a saturated buffer. This field event takes place in the Middle Cedar Watershed. A complimentary dinner will be provided at the conclusion of the event. J.H. Roadman Memorial Park is located 1.5 miles west of Dike on County Road D-19 (160th St.). The park is located on the north side of the road. Pre-registration is not required, but appreciated to communicate any logistics that may change due to inclement weather.

For **Questions**, please contact:
Ashley.Kittle@uni.edu

To **RSVP**, please contact:
Staci.Mueller@uni.edu
or 319-273-3866.

Highlights from the June field day at the Roverud Family Farm in Elkader

Over 20 attendees learned about the benefits infield prairie strips provide in row crop systems from Prairie On Farms Program Manager Ashley Kittle and ISU STRIPS Farmer Liaison Tim Youngquist. Participants also heard from two landowners who successfully planted and maintained infield prairie strips. Following the indoor presentations, participants walked through the strips and asked questions about layout, feasibility, and performance of the strips.



Adam Rodenberg, field manager, answers participant questions.



Landowner and land manager share learned lessons for planting infield prairie strips.



IRVM SEED PICK UP

Kristine Nemecc, IRVM Program Manager
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On June 13-14, roadside managers and technicians from 39 counties came to the Tallgrass Prairie Center to pick up native seed that was purchased with a federal Transportation Alternatives grant. Enough native seed to plant 1,300 acres of county roadsides was distributed. Thank you to UNI students Joyceline Amoako, Tammerlane Schnock, Loren Thalacker, and Destiny Magee for their help in organizing and distributing the seed.

DR. DOUG TALLAMY

Award-Winning Author of *Bringing Nature Home*, to Speak in Cedar Rapids on September 13th

Dr. Doug Tallamy, scientist and author of *Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants* and co-author of *The Living Landscape: Designing for Beauty and Biodiversity in the Home Garden*, will speak at the 32nd annual roadside conference banquet on Thursday, September 13th. The banquet and talk will be from 6-8pm at The Hotel at Kirkwood Center, 7725 Kirkwood Boulevard SW,

Cedar Rapids, and is open to the public. The title of his talk is *Making Insects: the Little Things that Run the World*.

Dr. Tallamy is a nationally-recognized expert on native plants and beneficial insects. He is a regular columnist for Garden Design magazine and Lifetime Honorary Director of Wild Ones. He has received the Garden Club of America's Margaret Douglas medal, the Tom Dodd, Jr. Award of Excellence, and the American Horticultural Society's B.Y. Morrison Communication Award. The cost of each banquet ticket, which includes one meal and the talk, is \$25.

Registration is due by September 6th and is available online at: <https://tallgrassprairiecenter.org/roadside-banquet>

For **questions**, contact program manager Kristine Nemecc at: kristine.nemec@uni.edu.

NEW STAFF AT THE TPC



KATE SINNOTT

Waterloo, IA

B.A. in Linguistics, Macalester College, MN, 2014

B.A. in Biology, UNI, 2019

Kate joined the Tallgrass Prairie Center in May as a Research Assistant in the Natural Selections Seed program. Before enrolling at UNI, she worked extensively in small-scale farming, floristry, and conservation research throughout the US. At TPC, Kate works in multiple areas of native seed production, from maintaining production plots to harvesting and cleaning seeds. She is also involved in the Prairie Roots program. During her time at TPC, Kate will continue to develop her interest in restoration ecology and her knowledge of the prairie. After completing her second bachelor's degree at UNI, Kate plans to attend graduate school in ecology.

LAURA WALTER

Cedar Falls, IA

B.A. Biology, 1991

*and M.S. Biology, 1995,
Kansas State University*

Laura is managing the TPC seed production program, Natural Selections, for this summer, with the help of Kate Sinnott. You can find her out weeding or mowing in the production plots most days. She is also handling communications with seed companies and maintaining records for the seed production plots, harvest, and seed inventory.

Laura is originally from the western edge of the tallgrass region in Kansas. She spent several summers doing field work in plant community ecology at the Konza Prairie Research Natural Area, an 8600-acre prairie preserve managed by Kansas State

University. She finds it reassuring that she will never be surprised by a bison herd while working at the TPC.

Laura has taught biology and earth science at Waverly-Shell Rock High School for the past five years. Prior to that, she taught at Price Laboratory School, was an Adjunct Instructor in Biology and Science Education at UNI, and worked in the Youth Department of the Cedar Falls Public Library. She and her husband Michael Walter, who teaches biology at UNI, have lived in Cedar Falls for 21 years and raised three children here.

"Working with the plants and the team of people at the TPC feels like coming home. My enthusiasm for this work has deep roots and was just waiting for the right opportunity to grow and bloom!"





SAVE THE DATE

IOWA PRAIRIE HERITAGE WEEK

September 9-15, 2018

Look for events across the state that celebrate our prairie heritage!

32ND ANNUAL ROADSIDE CONFERENCE

September 12-14, 2018

The Hotel at Kirkwood Center
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

PRAIRIE ON FARMS / ISU STRIPS FIELD DAY

September 13, 2018

J.H. Roadman Memorial Park
Dike, Iowa

LINN COUNTY LANDOWNER FORUM

September 16, 2018

Location TBA

This newsletter is published electronically twice per year. For subscription information or questions, contact the editor:

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