



COULEE CHAPTER NEWSLETTER

FALL 2008

Chapter President's Message

I've had two songs stuck in my head lately – The Byrds “Turn, Turn, Turn” and Dylan’s “Times they are a-changin’”. Well, for some reason, the first always makes me think of fall – the start of school, shorter days, and cooler weather just around the corner. Even though summer is coming to an end, the prairie always puts on a spectacular finale. So don't forget to check out one of this year's remaining field trips – or take an unscheduled field trip of your own.

Lucky for us, this year's North American Prairie Conference was held in Winona, MN at the beginning of August. I hope that some of you were able to attend. I certainly enjoyed the last two; unfortunately, the Ecological Society of America held their conference in Milwaukee at the same time – that's where I was. This is where song #2 comes in: climate change. I attended several sessions that focused on prairie response to changes in temperature and water availability. All of it very interesting. As hard as we try to predict the future – we'll never know until it's upon us. Prairies are plastic; they've been around for the last 50 million years and managed to survive a multitude of climate changes in one form or another. So as long as we make sure the prairie remains, it will always have a fighting chance. It's important work that we Enthusiasts do!

And speaking of work, field season is upon us once again. Start thinking of work that needs to be done - and when - so we can start scheduling fall work parties.

Enjoy the Fall!

Jessica

REMEMBER!!

The Coulee Chapter's Fall Members Meeting will be held Saturday September 20 at Decorah Mound. Meeting begins at 10:00 am. A work party will follow on the Mound prairie.

TPE Coulee Chapter Officers and Officials for 2008

Name	Office	Phone	Email
Jessica Bolwahn	President	608-637-3753	Ja4bolwahn@hotmail.com
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Jean Stramel	Membership	608-625-4069	jeanstr@mwt.net

Coulee Volunteers on TPE Corporate Board and Committees

Name	Office
Jim Rogala	Corporate Board
Carmeen Johnston	Fundraising and Endowment committee
George Johnston	Fundraising and Endowment committee
Jim Rogala	Land Management committee

Coulee Chapter Business Items

TPE – Coulee Chapter Spring Meeting May 31, 2008 Norskedalen Center near Coon Valley Meeting Minutes

Members present: Jessica Bolwahn, Armund Bartz, Anna Motivans, Greg Nessler, Jim Rogala, George Johnston, Carmeen Johnston, Paul Hayes, Bernadette Hayes, Gordon Powell and Don Nelson. Guests included: Ben Johnston and Diane Gunvalson.

President Bolwahn opened the meeting at 10:10 am.

Old Business:

Goat Prairie Display: Jim Rogala shared a 22" X 16" photocopy of the goat prairie display. It was felt that the smaller size would be more economical to share with other TPE chapters, nature centers and governmental agencies. Jim reported that an article would be published in an upcoming *Promoter* that should prompt interest in the display and brochures.

TPE Brochure: Jim Rogala reported that the current TPE membership brochures can be amended with a stick-on label to correct inaccurate contact information. New membership brochures with the correct information will be available in the near future.

TPE Conference '09: Next year's conference will be held in conjunction with the Invasive Plant Association of Wisconsin (IPAW) in the Madison area during early March 2009. TPE would still host its traditional banquet while TPE and IPAW would work together to develop the conference's program.

Burn and Chemical Use Workshops: Jessica Bolwahn reported that she has been in contact with the Wisconsin Prescribed Fire Council about providing a workshop on conducting prescribed burns. The workshop would be held in the La Crosse area in the fall of 2008. The possibility of holding a separate workshop on the use of chemicals for invasive plant control was discussed. Bill Carter, Dave Troester, and Nate Tucker were mentioned as possible presenters or round table participants. Jessica will follow up with these individuals to gauge their interest in the chemical use workshop.

Elk Creek Project: Jessica reported that the Elk Creek project is up and running again and that Amy Steffen of the TPE staff has been hired by DNR to get the project moving. Amy is asking for assistance from the Coulee Chapter to help on some aspects of the project. George Johnston and Paul Hayes expressed an interest in helping.

New Business:

Holland Sand Prairie Kiosk: Friends of Holland Sand Prairie and a local Boy Scout troop are working to build an informational kiosk for Holland Sand Prairie. The structure has been designed and contributions are now being sought to cover the cost. Jim Rogala moved that Coulee Chapter contribute \$500 towards the project. Don Nelson seconded the motion. During the discussion that followed, the issues of vandalism and building materials were brought up. These concerns will be forward to the planning group. The question of the donation was called and approved by a vote of the members present.

Membership and Mail Lists: Don Nelson mentioned some inconsistencies in the two lists. Several individuals were listed on either one or the other, but not both, lists. Jim Rogala volunteered to look into the issue. A membership directory will be published and distributed once the inconsistencies are cleared up.

Coulee Chapter Newsletter: As newsletter editor, Don Nelson reported his concerns about the poor quality of reprinted images. The images are OK in the proof but are grainy and indistinct when printed. Jim Rogala suggested printing from an electronic file rather than a paper copy. Don will look into Jim's suggestion for the next newsletter. The possibility of going to an all-electronic newsletter was also briefly discussed. Anna Motivans mentioned that she likes the print newsletter and believes that many members still prefer the paper version. It was decided to continue to mail out the newsletters.

Field Trips: Jim Rogala mentioned several upcoming fieldtrips of special interest in our region. Those include Holland Sand Prairie on June 7th, Fort McCoy on June 14th and Coulee Point on June 22nd. Field trip details are in the latest newsletter and on the TPE website.

Prairie Burning Stories and Photos: Jessica asked members to collect and make available their stories and photos for upcoming Coulee Chapter and TPE newsletters. If you have information you would like to share, please contact Jessica or Don Nelson. Their contact information can be found in the chapter newsletter.

Burn Alert - Smoke on the Road: Members were reminded of the importance of signage to warn motorists about smoke on the roads during prairie burns. Apparently, the state is getting increasingly interested in this issue but has not yet issued clear guidelines. Several members shared what they had done about smoke during their burns.

Meeting Adjourned at 11:20 a.m. Minutes submitted by Don Nelson

Coulee Chapter Fall Meeting – September 20, 2008

We will meet at Decorah Mound at 10:00 am on Saturday September 20th for our Fall Members Meeting,

After the meeting, we'll be cutting brush on the prairie, so bring your bushwhacking tool(s) of choice. The work party will last as long as people willing, so bring something to eat and plenty of water. Even if you can't stay to work, be sure to check out the prairie while your there.

Directions to Decorah Mound: If you're heading north on Hwy 53 (between Holmen and Galesville), cross the Black River and take a right onto Hwy 54 (conversely, if you're headed south from Galesville, if you hit the river, you've gone too far). A short distance (less than mile) there's a big right angle bend to the right and a blue house (I think) at the outside of the corner - that's where we'll be meeting. Please, park along the outside of the bend as far off the road as possible.

Your participation is crucial to TPE and our chapter. Hope to see you at the meeting!

Having Trouble Remembering Your TPE Dues?

You don't need an elephant to remember for you. All you have to do is check the mail label on our latest *Prairie Promoter* newsletter. This new feature will help you keep current with your membership and make sure you don't miss an issue of *Promoter* or the Coulee Chapter newsletter.



The Prairie Practitioner

Dealing with Invasives – One Plant at a Time by Don Nelson

A favorite topic of conversation whenever prairie enthusiasts get together is out invasive plants. Most of us are pretty limited when it comes to prairie maintenance and we have to make up for our lack of resources and equipment with sweat and persistence.

Over the next couple of issues, I would like to highlight some of the “low tech” approaches that members have used on their prairies to deal with those pesky aliens. OK, I guess because I brought it up, I should go first.

For me, thistles (bull and Canada) top my list of *Evil Doers*. I have been engaged in hand-to-hand combat with these guys for five years on my ten-acre restoration. After trying a number of techniques that haven't worked, I've developed a battle plan that is showing some promise.

I believe the key to success is keeping after them the entire growing season. With thistles, that means starting first thing in the spring. When the rosettes show up, I put several drops of *Round*

Up Concentrate Plus (18% glyphosate) directly on each rosette I can find. Later, when the plants start developing, I prune the plant at ground level and then add the drops to the cut stem (using a dropper bottle gets the chemical right on the problem plant and reduces the chance of spillage or drift).

In early summer, the plants are generally large enough to yank out. But by mid-summer, the growing prairie forbs and grasses are tall enough to hide my thorny adversaries and so I wait for the thistles to begin blooming in August. While flowering thistles are easier to see, they're tougher to deal with. The dry ground and prickly stems makes yanking them a real challenge. First, I trim off all the flowers heads and drop them in an empty seed bag, then try to pull the plant out using Vise-grips. If I can't yank 'em, I cut the stems and do the *Round Up* drops.



I try to get out every few days as new blooms seem to show up daily. While its hot and itchy work, the knowledge that one flowering thistle can produce hundreds of offspring keeps me going. I don't expect my prairie will ever be thistle-free (as always, my neighbors' thistles are doing very well). I do know, however, that there will be fewer thistles to deal with next year.

What plants are on your *Evil Doers* list? What have you tried that worked (or didn't)? Email me your story, and I'll get in an upcoming issue. Remember, there may be more of them, but that shouldn't stop a Prairie Enthusiast from taking them on even if it is one plant at a time!

Prairie Education and Outreach

Upcoming Prairie Field Trips in the Coulee Region

September 14* (Sunday) *La Crosse River State Trail's Rockland Prairie

Asters will dominate the scene this time of year, with Bottle Gentian and Grey Goldenrod also likely in bloom. This will be a leisurely walk on level terrain.

Time: 1:30 pm

Trip Leader: Bob Lee (608-486-2154)

October 5* (Sunday) *La Crosse River State Trail's Rockland Prairie

This will be the year's last walk along the railroad's prairie remnant. We'll look for late bloomers such as Little Bluestem, Sweet Everlasting and Downy Gentian. This will be a leisurely walk on level terrain.

Time: 1:30 pm

Trip Leader: Bob Lee (608-486-2154)

Directions for both fieldtrips: Meet in Rockland, WI (near I-90 in eastern La Crosse county) at the railroad crossing on Commercial Street (same as County Road J).

Information about Prairies and Oak Savannas

Taxonomy 101 for Plants of the Coulee Goat Prairies by Jim Rogala

NOTE: This short narrative is provided to introduce you to some species likely found in bloom in specific settings or time frames. These narratives do not include taxonomic details on how to identify these plants, but may point you in the right direction. There are several excellent field guides and taxonomic texts for those interested in a more complete description of the species discussed below - J. R.

The False Foxgloves

After describing some common species in my last writing, I promised to provide some more challenging species in the next couple newsletters. I've selected the false foxgloves for this newsletter. Hopefully some of you immediately asked yourselves whether the subject is the genus *Agalinis*, or the genus *Aureolaria* (and there are additional species that use this common name as well). I'll write of the purple false foxgloves (*Agalinis*) here, and cover the yellow false foxgloves another time.



There are six *Agalinis* species in Wisconsin. All have pinkish to purplish tubular flowers, and have rather inconspicuous stems and leaves on a plant that reaches no more than two feet in height. Three of the six species are dry species that might inhabit goat prairies. The Rough False Foxglove (*A. aspera*) is by far the more common species, and has a distinct roughness (as the name implies) on the stems. The other two dry species are fairly rare, and one might assume an *Agalinis* on a goat prairie is the *A. aspera* unless it is very smooth. The two rare species, both listed in Wisconsin, are the Pale False Foxglove (*A. skinneriana*) and the Round-stemmed False Foxglove (*A. gattingeri*). Distinguishing these two is beyond "Taxonomy 101," so use a reference taxonomic key if you think you have encountered these.

It's worth noting that all *Agalinis* species are annuals and, as is common with many annuals, seem to vary greatly in abundance from one year to the next. It took me many years to find the rough false foxglove on my goat prairie due to this annual variation in abundance. This year it appears that I should have a good showing of these delicate flowers. Look for it blooming in Late August and into September on the goat prairies you visit.

Contact us with your items for our newsletter. We want to hear from you!!

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