

The Prairie Sage

SUMMER 2015



We are delighted to welcome Jason St. Sauver to our staff as Community Education Director at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center. Jason started on April 14. He worked for the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service for many years in both the biological and environmental education fields, and most recently was the Education Manager and interim Center Director at the Mitchell Lake Audubon

Center in San Antonio, Texas where he worked with people of all ages to share his love of nature.

Jason has spent over ten years educating youth on a variety of subjects from theatre to wetland ecology, and in a wide array of settings such as NYC after school programs, 4-H and Scout projects, and of course, many recent years immersing students into the world of science, conservation, and environmental education with Audubon. A self-proclaimed "Birdnerd," Jason is also an avid birder and hopes to bring his love of birding to the area with new programs such as Birding by Ear and Birding for the Blind, which he started in Texas.

"I'm thrilled," shares Jason, "to be able to bring my passion, enthusiasm, and skills to the tallgrass prairie of Nebraska and join the great team of staff, volunteers, and board members at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center. Soon you'll see me exploring the native grasses, investigating insect populations, and enjoying the grassland bird songs right along with the students and visitors to this amazing habitat."

A native of South Dakota, Jason is happy to get back to the prairie. Welcome, Jason!

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Summer Camp Fun

Ten students from Lincoln's Community Learning Center at Arnold Elementary took part in a week-long camp at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center. Led by Jason St. Sauver, the kids were able to explore all aspects of prairie life: they saw insects living in the prairie grasses and under logs in the woods, birds building nests and feeding chicks, and plants with their colorful flowers.

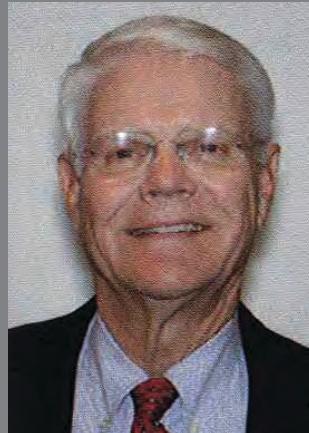
One of the highlights was getting to see a female thirteen-lined ground squirrel with a litter of six babies! Each day ended with the campers adding words to the camp poster with the theme "Prairie is..." describing something new they saw that day.

We know the kids had a great time at the prairie, and hope to see them back again soon!

Letter from the Interim Director

Gerry Dimon

Each season brings its own energy and vitality to the prairie. Spring is a time of change and rebirth, growth and momentum. We greeted new staff, launched the spring education programs, and welcomed numerous volunteers as we hit the ground running on all fronts. It was busy, productive, and exciting – a great time to be at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center!



Jason St. Sauver has joined us as Community Education Director, hosting several school groups this spring, some classes from as far away as Central City. His work is critical to our mission, we connect these youth with nature, give them time outside, time in the dirt, in the wetlands, in the "grasses so tall they touch the sky." Through this work, we are cultivating the next generation of conservationists.

Our habitat work is year-round, with each season bringing its own focus and dynamic to the work, work necessary to conserve the tallgrass prairie for the grassland birds, for the wildlife, and for our community. Spring is burn season, fire plays an integral part of our habitat management plans as part of the natural course in nature. This work would not be possible without the support of our volunteers, our "burn team" goes above and beyond, on a moment's notice, to help with our management plans. They deserve a big round of applause for all they help us accomplish each year!

The summer will be just as busy, with an exciting partnership with the Community Learning Centers, hosting other youth groups, and preparing for the fall Prairie Immersion students and our keystone event, Tastes in the Tallgrass (Sunday, September 13).

Thank you for your support of our mission, our work, our passion. Because of you, we are able to share this wonderful ecosystem, our native tallgrass prairie with future generations. Thank you for being part of the success at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerry Dimon".



Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center received a visit from Chad Wilsey (photo, left), who is a research manager in the Climate Initiative division of the National Audubon Society. He was in town in April to speak at Wachiska Audubon Society's annual awards banquet. Accompanying him were Shari Schwartz (center), Wachiska and SCPAC volunteer, and Elizabeth Nelson, president of Wachiska Audubon Society.

Looking for a Place to Host an Event?

Remember Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center when planning business meetings, wedding and anniversary receptions, and other get-togethers. Call (402) 797-2301 for information and rates.

Letter from the State Director

Marian Langan

Returning Upland Sandpipers, a newly finalized strategic plan, fresh green grass coming through a blackened burn, and fundraising goals for a new year – all things to make a director's pulse quicken! Some might not think a few of these would be exciting, but they are for me because they all represent the same thing: possibility.



All of the conservation impact we make is because people see what is possible and they act on it. The current state of politics in our country leaves a lot to be desired, and I hear people say that they don't know why they should bother with trying to change anything. I tell them why they should bother. It is because of the glowing faces of the third-graders from Wilber-Clatonia at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center today. Because of the Prairie-Chickens seen on the new conservation area purchased last year. Because of all the kids on pins and needles waiting for their adventures on the river at our summer SOAR camps.

Your contributions to this effort make a difference every day. Every dollar donated, every hour volunteered, every person you talk to – it rolls up into real impact for birds and people. And THAT makes a director swoon!

Membership Update

Our SCPAC members have played a key role in taking this vision for the tallgrass prairie from a dream to a reality! As in all aspects of life, change is inevitable. Beginning in July, Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center will cease offering individual and family memberships. Benefits previously enjoyed by these members will now be offered to all supporters who make annual gifts of \$50 or more:

- Free admission to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center
- Reciprocal admission to Iain Nicolson Audubon Center at Rowe Sanctuary (near Kearney, Nebraska)
- 10% discount on Gift Shop purchases
- Unlimited access to the walking trails between sunrise and sunset

All donors of \$20 and above become members of National Audubon Society and receive the award-winning Audubon magazine. If you do not wish to receive any of these benefits, please notify us at scp@audubon.org.

With your support, as a donor, volunteer, advocate, and more, we are able to enrich our community, foster a connection to our natural and cultural history, and share that with more than 10,000 visitors every year. Thank you for your continued support!

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center Newsletter

The Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center newsletter is written especially for you. We would like to get your feedback and suggestions on the newsletter content, layout, timeliness, and frequency. Please go to this link <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/SCPAC> and complete a brief survey. **Thank you for your input!**

Message from SCPAC's Stewardship Board

Greetings,

An essential item for any organization as you know is the strategic plan. We are extremely proud of where the last plan brought us -- and we are VERY excited about how we grow our future.



A group of Board members and staff began last summer. We interviewed some of our major stakeholders and key audiences for essential feedback and reviewed our historic activities. A SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) was done as well as a visioning exercise during a full Board retreat. We then drafted our guiding principles, mission statement, and goals.

The information was used to help draft a summary statement that captures a consensus vision of what we hope to become over the next 5 to 10 years. There is much to celebrate and likewise, there is much to do and improve.

We will be working on the implementation process with staff and Board committees. It is our goal to be accountable and use this document as our guide toward building the organization we all envision. Like any good strategic plan, we need the document to be flexible too. Opportunities arise and changes occur, so it is important to build in flexibility as we look toward that shared vision.

I want to thank you for your continued interest as we pave the way together toward an even better SCPAC future. It is truly humbling to have your support, confidence, trust, partnership, as well as your volunteer time and talent as we look toward growing this special place.

Gratefully,

Lana Flagtwet
Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center
Stewardship Board President

P.S. Calendar alert! Tastes in the Tallgrass is scheduled for Sunday, September 13, 2015.

BIRD CALENDAR

Meet the Prairie Birds

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center's mission is to conserve and restore the tallgrass prairie ecosystem including birds, other wildlife and their habitats for the benefit of humanity and the earth's biological diversity.

A special group of birds protected here are prairie species that require this specialized habitat. Here is a quick guide to help you identify these birds on your next visit.



Grasshopper Sparrow

Size: Goldfinch-sized, smaller than House Sparrow.

Field Marks: Native Sparrows can be challenging to see, let alone identify. This species is a small brown bird with large, flat head and neck for its size, with an unstreaked tan breast, and a light stripe down the middle of the head.

Where: One of the most common prairie species found at SCPAC, mostly in upland prairie areas.

Voice: Fortunately this bird is not shy about making its presence known. It throws back its head and gives a few short, quiet notes followed by a long insect-like buzz.

Field Sparrow

Size: About 6 inches in length, roughly between the size of a Goldfinch and the common House Sparrow.

Field Marks: Another one of the ubiquitous LBJs ("little brown jobs"). This sparrow has a plain gray face, no streaking on the breast, reddish feathers on top of its head, and a white eye-ring.



Field Sparrow photo by Phil Swanson

Where: Not a common sparrow here, it's best found in prairie areas next to ravines or woody/shrubby areas.

Voice: One of the great sounds of the prairie is the distinctive, accelerating whistle of the field sparrow, much like the sound of a ping pong ball dropping.

Henslow's Sparrow

Size: Average-sized Sparrow, 5 inches in length.

Field Marks: Aside from looking like a typical sparrow, Henslow's have a breast with black streaks, white eye-ring, and, in the right light, sports an olive-green tint on its rather large head.

Where: These native Sparrows prefer prairies that have not been burned in several years, where layers of plant debris have accumulated on the ground.

Voice: Thankfully, this bird doesn't stay hidden while in its territory. Males will sing, if you can call it that, from the top of tall grasses while defending their nesting sites. Their song, easily missed, consists of two short, quiet buzzes, and can be drowned out if there are Dickcissels singing nearby.



Eastern and Western Meadowlarks

Size: About the size of a Robin.

Field Marks: The two species of meadowlarks are virtually indistinguishable from each other. Both have a yellow chin and belly separated by a black "V" chest mark, brownish streaked back, streaked sides, and white stripe through the eye.

Where: Both can be found in open grassy areas throughout SCPAC.

Voice: Learning their distinctive songs is how to tell them apart. Westerns have the longer call, starting high and slow, and then cascades down in a quick descending twitter. Easterns usually sing a five-note call of slurred whistles, rising at the end and ending in a higher pitch than the western.

Both species are common singers here and can be told apart with a little practice.



THISTLES: TELLING THE GOOD FROM THE BAD

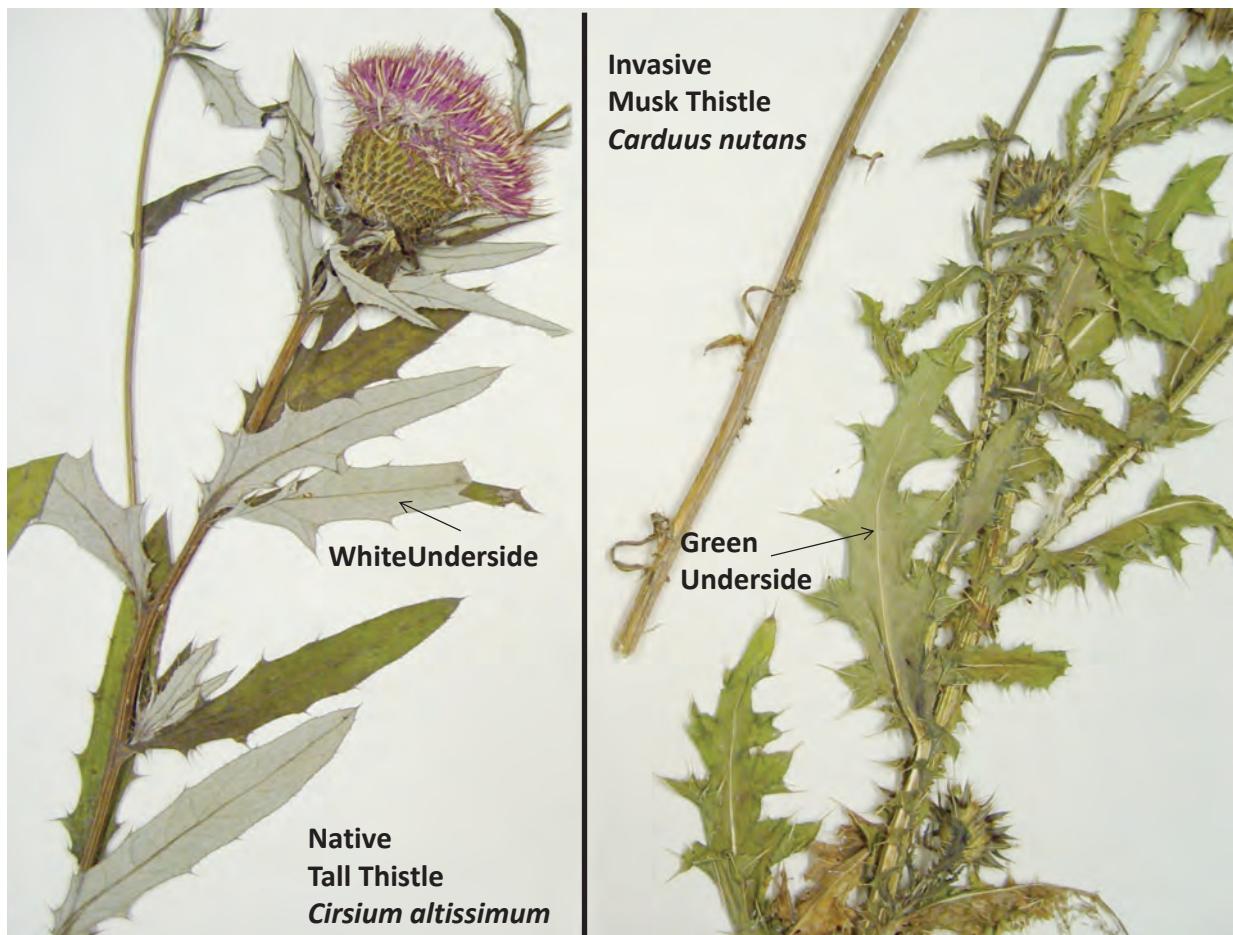
What do you think of when you hear the word “thistle”? For many it conjures up images of unwanted plants taking over pastures and hayfields, or it represents long days in the hot sun cutting these plants as part of a summer ritual of their youth. While these spiny plants are a little hard to like, not all thistles are created equal. In fact, Nebraska has 10 species of thistles, five of which are native and can be important food sources for insect pollinators as well as birds like Goldfinches.

Of the five non-native thistles, three (Canada, musk, and plumeless) are declared “noxious” by the state, which legally obligates us to control them. We have musk thistles at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, and because they have been removed from their native environment and they have no natural predators here, these aggressive plants spread rapidly. Staff and volunteers spend time each summer digging up these plants to reduce their numbers.

Three of Nebraska’s native thistles are found here (tall, Flodman’s, and wavyleaf). Native thistles have natural predators that keep their numbers in balance. Since they aren’t aggressive they don’t need to be controlled and are highly sought after by butterflies and many other insects and

spiders. Tall thistle is our most common native thistle and is often blooming in the butterfly garden near the visitor center. Because this species looks very similar to the invasive Musk thistle, we get questions or comments from visitors about why certain plants haven’t been removed. This gives us a great opportunity to explain that not all thistles are bad and one can tell the native from the invasive. At SCPAC all of our native thistles have white undersides to their leaves and the invasive musk thistle is green underneath (see photo), so determining a native thistle from an invasive one is as simple as flipping over the leaves.

So the next time you see one of those purple flowered spiny plants, don’t be so quick to judge – they aren’t all bad. For more information on other Nebraska thistles, read “Thistles of Nebraska” from the Nebraska Weed Control Association and the Nebraska Department of Agriculture: <http://www.neweed.org/Documents/Thistles%20of%20Nebraska.pdf>.



RETIREMENT INCOME YOU CAN DEPEND ON



With all the ups and downs in the financial markets, many of our friends are turning to Audubon's Charitable Gift Annuity program to create a steady, dependable stream of lifetime income. Charitable Gift Annuities offer other benefits too, a good payment rate, income that is partially tax-free, income tax charitable deduction, and, of course, the fact that they are helping a good cause like Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center.

Easy to Do

With a few simple questions, we can prepare a simple gift illustration outlining how your gift can benefit Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, how much you will receive for the rest of your life, how much of that income will be tax-free, and the amount of your income tax charitable deduction. We will need to know your specific birthdate, the size of gift you want to make, and whether it will be cash or stock.

For Example

Mary Smith is 75 years old and gives \$20,000 to Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center in exchange for a Charitable Gift Annuity. CGA rates are based on age, the payment rate for her age is 5.8%, which means she receives \$1,160 annually, of which \$899 is tax-free. In addition, she receives a charitable tax deduction of \$8,852.

MAKE A DIFFERENCE

There are many ways that you can help us fulfill our mission of conserving the tallgrass prairie by engaging people in our natural and cultural resources. Support of all types makes such a difference, with your help we can make the world a better place!

- Become a volunteer. Our volunteers are an important part of our successes. There are many opportunities available that can fit in to any schedule. We're happy to play "matchmaker" and find the perfect volunteer opportunity for your interests, skills, and time!
- Tell your friends and family about us! Raising awareness of our work opens many doors, and introduces a new group of volunteers, donors, and supporters to our mission.

Create a Legacy

Leaving a gift to protect birds and their habitats is easier than most people think, and we can help make it even easier. It is especially quick and simple to name Audubon as a beneficiary of a retirement account, life insurance policy, or other financial account. These gifts:

- Cost you nothing now
- Enable you to change your beneficiaries at any time, for any reason
- Require no minimum contribution

For more information, request our free guide today by contacting Shari Kolding at 512-236-9076 or skolding@audubon.org. You may also download our guides and other information at www.audubon.org/legacy.

Mary will receive fixed payments for the rest of her life. Because the payments are backed by the full assets of National Audubon Society, her annuity checks will always be there for her.

Annuities can also benefit two people, and are a popular choice for married couples and those wishing to help secure additional income for loved ones.

For more information, contact Melissa Filipi at 402-797-2301, mfilipi@audubon.org, or Shari Kolding at 512-236-9076, skolding@audubon.org.



- Donate. We rely on the generous support of our donors for the work that we do. We do not receive funding from any national organization. All money raised here, stays here. You can return a gift in the envelope provided, visit our website to donate online, or stop by our Education Center to make a gift in person.
- Commemorate a life event with a gift in honor or memory of friends, family, or occasions.
- Take a look at our wish list (page 8) for additional gift ideas.
- Become a monthly donor. You can provide regular, ongoing support for our work by visiting our website, springcreekprairie.audubon.org.

PROGRAMS & EVENTS

Butterfly Count

Saturday, July 11

9:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Take part in the annual butterfly count sponsored by the North American Butterfly Association.

After an hour-long introductory slide show at Pioneers Park Nature Center, participants will then disperse to the three count areas: Pioneers Park, Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, and Nine-Mile Prairie. No need to be an expert, an experienced guide accompanies each group.



The count involves walking about 2 hours and covering 2 to 3 miles. Children must be accompanied by an adult. \$5/person. Register by July 8 by contacting Pioneers Park Nature Center, 402-441-7895.

Tastes in the Tallgrass

Our annual outdoor dinner fundraiser will take place Sunday, September 13, from 3:30-7:30 p.m. Please contact us to be added to the mailing list for an invitation.

Twilight on the Tallgrass

Our annual prairie festival will take place Saturday, September 26, from 5:00-10:00 p.m. Enjoy the autumn prairie as the prairie grasses mature and the fall wildflowers come into full bloom. A fun event for the entire family. Watch our website and e-mail news blasts for details.

Prairie Destination in Two Passport Programs

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center is one of the locations in two passport programs in the state.

SCPAC will be one of 80 featured stops as part of the Nebraska Tourism Commission's 2015 Nebraska Passport Program. The Passport Program encourages travelers to explore Nebraska, collect stamps from participating attractions, and earn great prizes. Complete information can be found at the Commission's website, <http://visitnebraska.com>.

Also, SCPAC will again take part in Lincoln's "Be a Tourist in Your Own Hometown" promotion. Have your passport stamped on your next prairie visit. More info at <http://www.lincoln.org>.

Admission

SCPAC Supporters (\$50+)	FREE
Adults	\$4
Seniors (60+)	\$3
Students	\$3
Ages 6-17	\$3
Ages 5 and under	FREE
Tuesdays	FREE

Members of National Audubon Society and Wachiska Audubon Society receive \$1 off admission.

Insectigations

Saturday, August 22

2:00-3:30 p.m.

The heat of the summer is a great time to catch and investigate prairie insects, especially grasshoppers, praying mantises, and more! Join us for a fun-filled afternoon about our six-legged friends & allies, and get up-close-and-personal with the bugs in the tallgrass.



Fee: \$5/person or \$8/family. This program is designed specifically for kids and their families. To register, email scp@audubon.org or call 402-797-2301

Show Your Support – Adopt an Acre Today!

The Stewardship Board of Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center is excited to announce a new program to help support our growing needs. Many people like their support to be given in a way that is more tangible, and the Board worked to meet that need. You can be an integral part of the work that we do, contribute to ongoing habitat management, support our education programs for youth and adults, and help provide a safe refuge for birds and wildlife. We work to preserve this area because of its tremendous value as wildlife habitat and as a site to engage people in volunteerism and in education programs.

Become part of the mission to conserve this imperiled ecosystem, the native tallgrass prairie.

Proper management of the prairie requires many activities, including re-seeding, controlled burns, rotational cattle grazing, invasive tree removal, and more. We have continued to successfully develop a mosaic of habitats that suit the needs of grassland birds such as Greater Prairie-Chickens, Henslow's Sparrows, Sprague's Pipits, and Bobolinks, as well as other wildlife. These bird species have specific habitat needs, and are facing great pressure from the loss of this habitat. You are helping to maintain one of the last tracts of tallgrass prairie in Nebraska that is large enough for the habitat needs of these birds, and at a location easily accessible for the benefit of people.

Please consider supporting Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center by Adopting an Acre.

Your donation of \$1,000 to Adopt an Acre will provide much needed support of our work. As part of our family, you will receive a stunning picture of the prairie combined with your personalized certificate, illustrating your support and passion for our natural heritage.

Each year that you Adopt an Acre at Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center, you will receive a certificate with a different picture of the prairie and/or its wildlife. You will periodically receive *The Prairie Sage* newsletter with special behind-the-scenes stories and features about SCPAC, as well as invitations to participate in certain habitat management activities at the prairie. In addition, you will become part of our Tallgrass Prairie Society and be listed as such in our newsletter and the Audubon Nebraska Annual Report.



Spring Creek Prairie received 6.3 inches of rain in a seven-hour period on May 6-7. The water fell so quickly that it flowed over bath dam spillways and over the top of the main dam. A large amount of erosion occurred on one of the emergency spillways, shown in photo at left, which will need major repair. Minor damage occurred to fences, a footbridge, and the willow blind.

The storm occurred early enough in the season as to not impact the nesting of most migratory grassland birds – they had not yet returned. The rain may have affected nesting for some of our resident birds, but it is early enough in the season that there should be time to re-nest.

Spring Creek Prairie Audubon Center

11700 SW 100th Street
P.O. Box 117
Denton, NE 68339
Phone: (402) 797-2301 (-2304/fax)
scp@audubon.org
<http://springcreekprairie.audubon.org>

Open Monday - Friday 9 - 5; Saturday - Sunday 1 - 5

All year, except major holidays

Admission charge; Tuesdays free

Gerry Dimon – Interim Director

Ben Mullarkey – Habitat Program Manager

Kevin Poague – Operations Manager/Important Bird Areas Coordinator

Amy Plettner – Caretaker

Jason St. Sauver – Community Education Director

Audubon Nebraska

Marian Langan – Executive Director

Melissa Filipi – Director of Philanthropy

Carey Collingham – Corporate and Foundation Coordinator

Cindy Houlden – Donor Relations Coordinator

Stewardship Advisory Board

Lana Flagtwet <i>Chair</i>	Greg Hurlbut	Eric Rasgorshek
	Jeff Jewell	Cindy Rose
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Stephen Gage	Arnold Mendenhall	Tom Tallman
Matt Gonzalez	Cindy Morris	Barbara Wright-Chollet
Jeff Hagaman		

Thank You!

Flora of Nebraska, Robert Kaul et. al., 2nd (new) edition
– Donated by Liz Lange and Jessica Putney

Cooler – Donated by Tom Bouse

Pop-up Canopy Tent – Donated by Tom Bouse

Installation of new telephone – Donated by Central States Telecom

Two framed canvas prints – Donated by Bruce Wendorff

Camping tent – Donated by Maricela Flores

LCD projector and sound system – Donated by Tyler Sutton

Wish List

Metal detector

Truckload of river rock to extend the permanent fire break around visitors center

Pop-up Canopy Tents

Trail Camera

Periodic use/purchase of telescoping pole pruner (Stihl H131 power pruner, e.g.) & backpack leaf blower (Stihl BR500, e.g.)

\$5 million Endowment



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Also find us on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.