

Newsletter of the Appalachia Ohio Alliance

In Praise of Prairies

Grasses are, unarguably, not only the world's largest family of plants, but also the most important to humankind around the earth, for they feed not only the human population but also many of the animal species. Named differently on several continents, in America they are prairies (French for "meadow"), those grasses which allowed large herds of bison to prosper on the vast plains. Later they gave rise to the great cattle drives and the cowboy mystique so entwined in our lore. (There is an excellent article on "The Grand Grasses" in the August 2008 newsletter of Dawes Arboretum.) In many states dedicated citizens and organizations, like The Nature Conservancy, endeavor mightily to salvage the few remnants of those once majestic prairies. And, as importantly, many people have become aware of the need to propagate new prairies, as small

gardens or in large acreages, before yet more plant species are lost to civilization and "progress."

Why bother? They look weedy to many people and we surely have no buffalo pasturing to worry about. Yet restoring native plants through prairie development has taken on vital significance with growing realization of their importance: for medicinal uses, for greatly lessened water and chemical usage, for work-saving and money-saving, to name a few. Large areas of mowed grass are handsome but extremely costly practices which may well have to be curtailed because of our increasing water shortages nationwide.

Yet not too many years ago a few early pioneers for prairie plantings in the city were ostracized by their neighbors. Their first year's weedy stages were not to be tolerated next door to the comely green turfed and manicured flower beds of the community. Now however, in wider recognition of the physical and financial cost of maintaining these symbols of a

"happy home", the prairie yard or acreage of ancient grasses mingling with purple coneflower and pert black-eyed susans has fortunately become quite a bit more fashionable. As has Going Green in many areas of our lives, including our outlook on what is beautiful. And smart!

'Tis true, prairies don't appear by skipping gaily across the landscape scattering edelweiss seeds to "the sound of music." The first year requires clearing the ground, harrowing (or roughing up) the soil, and sowing seeds by hand-broadcasting, a time honored method. And patience, lots of it. For early results are not handsome, yet the second year's become exciting, and from the third year on, it's Reap The Rewards Time!

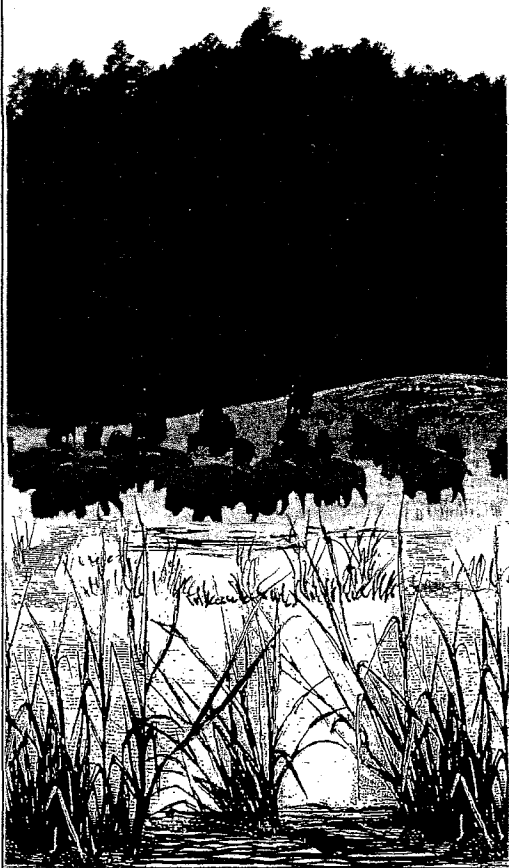
So if you too are thinking there might be better ways to spend time than buying weed-and-feed, mulch, fertilizers, irrigation devises, fussing over a cranky lawnmower - and worse, *using* it - ponder a prairie!



Several of our AOA board members have both personal and professional expertise in planning and planting such areas, beneficent both to the aesthetic senses and to the green planet itself. Contact us through our Consultant, Steve Goodwin, and learn more.

Just think. You too could be lazying under a summer sky, enchanted by blue-eyed grasses (not really a grass), orange butterfly weed (and the butterflies who hover over them), grey coneflower (actually, it's yellow!), purple prairie clover, tall coreopsis, as a mini-example. And Mother Nature will be generously contributing much of the needed material and labor in return for the precious water you have not wasted, and the gasoline consumption and polluting fumes she has been spared. And, you may well pay for the seed with those chiropractor appointments you didn't need!

by Rosemary Joyce



If You Love a Piece of Land Here's how to save Your Little Share of the Wilds

by George Reiger

If you'd like a quick and easy gauge of conservation easements' worth, you should know that most real estate agents and developers hate them. Easements are legal agreements between land owners and land trusts that permanently prohibit development of the land in order to protect it. Easements are based on the premise that the best way to save ecologically significant land is to let its owner keep it (and continue paying taxes on it). They encourage owners to continue doing whatever they had been doing (or not doing) to make their properties ecologically valuable in the first place.

Tying Up Land Forever

Easement philosophy is probably best summed up by a Lakota proverb: "We don't inherit land from our parents; we borrow it from our children."

Although many easements protect pristine wetlands, prairies and valleys, most sustain family farms, ranches and woodlands. These latter easements are designed to maintain activities that are compatible with nature. And because more rare and endangered species are found on private property than in all the public parks, refuges, and preserves in the nation, easement-protected farms, ranches and woodlands are essential to conservationists' efforts to perpetuate threatened wildlife.

Until a few decades ago, the only way to preserve land was to convince a legislature to provide sufficient

funding so that a state or federal agency could acquire it. This meant that only superexceptional - and often extremely threatened or partially degraded - landscapes could be saved. It also meant that public access, which goes with public acquisition, frequently created new problems that subsequent funding (or bureaucrats) were unable or unwilling to address.

Once-great private duck clubs form the core of the national wild-life refuge system. However, since the federal government took them over, many of these wetlands have suffered serious declines in quality and hence in numbers of waterfowl using them. By contrast, the members of duck clubs today can donate their properties' development rights - or in some cases even sell those rights - to one of more than 200 nongovernmental organizations qualified to accept conservation easements. This means the members can continue to practice the kind of management they (and the ducks) need.

Options

Some easement owners withhold a few building sites for their children. They lose less in property value, but get less in the way of tax breaks. Others withhold nothing - meaning no building at all in the future - and even that land may lose little in monetary value if they find the right buyer. Several years ago, my wife and I put a conservation easement on our farm. The real estate firm that sold the property for us advertised its virtues - the woods, fields, streams and ponds - and we got our asking price.

From the Conservation section of the February 2003 issue of Field & Stream magazine.

Two Bills In Congress For Permanent Tax Incentives

AOA would like to thank three of our Ohio Congressional Representatives for being co-sponsors of House Resolution 1831. HR 1831 is being co-sponsored by Representatives Steve Austria (7th Congressional District), Zack Space (18th) and Patrick Tiberi (12th). This important bill will make the current enhanced conservation easement tax incentives permanent. A companion bill, S. B. 812, has been introduced in the U.S. Senate. Unless Congress acts, these federal tax incentives will be dramatically scaled back at the end of 2009. For most conservation easement donors, a conservation easement is a major financial decision. Incentives allow modest-income landowners to receive significant tax savings, making it possible for them to permanently protect their land.

The enhanced incentive is a valuable tool that AOA has used to protect 1355 acres since the bill was first enacted in 2006. Incentives help increase landowner interest in conserving their land with our help. AOA has been working with our Congressional delegation and the Land Trust Alliance (LTA), to encourage passage of these bills.

If you are a constituent of the representatives who are sponsoring the bill, please call or write them to thank them for their action on behalf of AOA and similar land trust organizations. If passed, these bills will make it easier for others in our community to build on their love of the land and permanently protect the Hocking Hills and S.E. Ohio.

To learn more, visit:

www.appalachiaohioalliance.org
or www.landtrustalliance.org

by Steve Goodwin

The Waterloo Center

The Waterloo Research station is located on 2000+ managed acres used for public hunting, fishing, hiking and wildlife viewing. Since the 1950s deer, turkey, pheasant and grouse were raised here to be released in the recuperating habitats around the state. Wildlife biologists with the Ohio Division of Wildlife have used this facility until just two years ago for ongoing research in habitat management, whitetail deer, turkey and grouse research and as a check-in station during the spring and fall turkey hunts. In 2005 the building was shut down and the staff moved to a new facility in Athens.

As the building was no longer used by the state of Ohio, a small group of interested citizens decided that it could be used as a potential educational resource facility for our teachers, students and the surrounding community. After studying various uses through meetings and talks, it was decided to create an "Aquatic Education Center." The site was perfect for this use. It is next to maintained township roads just off State route 56 with available bus parking and the building is a ready-to-use low maintenance structure. In addition, it is on Hewitt Fork, a recovering stream tributary

in the Racoon Creek watershed area, has two ponds for fishing and aquatic studies and 35 miles of hiking trails.

The plan is to create a community initiated center. Funding has been forthcoming from the Ohio Division of Wildlife which has earmarked grant money for this project and from a private donor pledge to keep the doors open and the lights on for the first year. Planned activities include teacher training, school field days, community days, fishing derbies, public hikes and, most of all, instilling an appreciation of southeastern Ohio's natural resources and rich history.

The curriculum design will be owned by all who are willing to use it and will be in accordance with the goals of our schools and their needs as well as the community's. It is hoped that this will grow into a place everyone in the watershed can be proud of and all children and adults cannot wait to visit!

by Heike Perko

Editor's Note: AOA is in partnership with The Waterloo Center. The Country Keeper newsletter will feature other partnership articles in the future.



Appalachia Ohio Alliance 2009 Calendar of Events

•Sept. 19, Brunken Property- Bison Hollow Nature Hike, 10:00 A.M., Hocking County

This walk will traverse one of the most beautiful valleys in the Hocking Hills - a rambling stream, sandstone cliffs, waterfalls, nice woodland and fall wildflowers. Time permitting we will hike into a remote forested property newly owned by AOA. *Direction Note: Going east on SR 56 just before Ash Cave, turn right onto Amerine Rd. (just before bridge) which continues with left turn 1/2 mile from 56 over a small wooden bridge onto a gravel road (Don't continue on paved Liberty Hill Rd.)* For information contact Paul Knoop at: cpknoop@hocking.net.

•October 3, 2009, Crane Hollow Nature Hike, 10:00 - 12:00

You are invited to explore this privately owned dedicated nature preserve in the heart of the Hocking Hills. You will have your choice of two different hikes led by AOA Board Member, Natural Areas Consultant and Naturalist, Paul Knoop and Crane Hollow's Executive Director, Heather Stehle. Crane Hollow's founder and AOA Board Member, Jane Ann Ellis, will also accompany hikers into the hollow. Scenery includes ridgetops, massive rock outcrops and a cool stream valley shaded by majestic hemlocks. Some hiking will be difficult covering steep hillsides and uneven ground. Participation is limited. For information and to sign up call Heather Stehle at (740) 438-5777 or email at: heather@cranehollow.org.

•November 7, 2009, Blair-Jones Property Conservation Easement Nature Hike, Hocking County, 10:00

Join AOA President Brian Blair as we tour his scenic conservation easement protected property located in Good Hope and Laurel Townships. Watch for more details about this hike. For information contact Brian Blair at brianblair@ohiohills.com.

Request for Donations

If you are reviewing your charitable donations, please consider AOA for your gift list. AOA is an all volunteer organization of dedicated professionals with a strong conservation ethic. With your support, we can continue to accomplish great things together.

Appalachia Ohio Alliance
P.O. Box 1151
Logan, Ohio 43138-1255

