

Introduction—23rd North American Prairie Conference

Building upon the tradition started in Illinois by Peter Schramm in 1970, with the first conference on prairies and prairie restoration, the North American Prairie Conference (NAPC) has developed a tradition of excellence in native prairie research, conservation, education and restoration of one of the worlds' most productive, yet most endangered, ecosystems. It has spawned great interest, enthusiasm and efforts to better understand, appreciate, manage and conserve this vital part of North America's natural and cultural history.

In early August 2012, the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg hosted the 23rd NAPC. The theme of the 2012 conference was **"Celebrating Our Prairie Heritage"**. It explored where we have been and where we should be heading. Over 230 people from 12 U.S. states and 5 Canadian provinces helped celebrate in outstanding style. This was only the second time this major international conference had been hosted in Canada. Manitoba is Canada's easternmost prairie province, and traditionally has been the gateway to the vast Canadian prairies further west. Historically, aboriginal peoples and European settlers alike marvelled at the open country revealed by lush shoulder-high grasses and wildflowers of the Red River Valley. The tall-grass prairie gradually gave way to the mixed grass and rough fescue prairies that stretched from western Manitoba right through to the Rockies.

We were fortunate to have the combined wisdom of some of the best-known individuals in native prairie conservation on the continent: Daryl Smith, Ken Higgins, Wes Jackson, Pauline Drobney, and Darcy Henderson. Their sage words provided a solid framework for all of us to build upon. Some of Canada's best-known prairie authors, Sharon Butala, Candace Savage and Trevor Herriot, reminded us of just how inspiring our prairies are, and how much is at stake. Keynote presentations by David Young and David Daniels presented unique views on prairie conservation. Numerous keen students of prairie ecology provided exciting new research findings about the prairie and how to better manage it. Career professionals, volunteers, gardeners, teachers and prairie enthusiasts each added their own personal viewpoints.

Field trips took us to some of Manitoba's grassland treasures: the rolling dunes of magnificent mixed grass prairies of the Spirit Sands at Spruce Woods Provincial Park; a Canadian showpiece, the Tall Grass Prairie Preserve in south-eastern Manitoba; gems of prairie hidden amongst nearly a million people in the City of Winnipeg; an original steam locomotive train ride through magnificent tall grass prairies not unlike what early settlers saw in the 1880's; and, finally, Manitoba's "other" grassland, the Arctic tundra at Churchill. A unique conference banquet of traditional Manitoba dishes was enjoyed with attendees 'grazing' through the Manitoba Museum of Nature galleries, alongside members of the Liv-

ing History Society in period costume - clearly a highlight that few will forget.

Two years of preparation culminated in a friendly, information-packed and stimulating week that easily could have continued far longer. Our special thanks to Lise Smith, Conference Coordinator, who pulled it off smoothly. Numerous volunteers gave freely of their time to ensure success, and we thank each heartily. Also special thanks to the University of Manitoba Conference and Catering staff whose hospitality and facilities showcased western Canada's oldest university at its very best. Our sponsors too, generously contributed their support to further the cause of prairie conservation and we owe them a huge thank you. We especially thank those of you who attended, presented, exhibited and helped with field trips. Without you, none of it would have happened, and we are truly appreciative of all of your efforts.

The 23rd volume of the NAPC Proceedings contains a variety of papers, with a range of subjects and research methods. They embody a mix of theory and practice, over a wide-range of space and time, and reflect the rich diversity of perspectives presented at the conference. Studies ranged from northern Texas (Jariel et al.) to the tall grass prairies of Ontario (Farrell et al.), Manitoba (Borkowsky, Borkowsky and Zahradka, Henderson and Koper, McGonigle and Timmer), and Saskatchewan (Davis et al., Henderson and Koper). The habitats studied were wide ranging, including several papers on urban prairies (Borsari et al., Mundahl). There are many papers discussing prairie restoration and ecology, both from a short-term (Borkowsky) and a long-term perspective (Farrell et al., Brock, Smith, Henderson and Koper), including how we can aid prairie seed establishment (Rosburg et al.) and good news stories of prairie reconstruction (Borsari et al.). There are papers that studied the interactions between native and invasive species (McGonigle and Timmer, Mundahl), the effects of fauna on prairie plant diversity (Davis et al., Miller et al., Mundahl), and the impacts of fire seasonality and frequency on prairie ecology (Jariel et al.). To examine this rich diversity of subjects the papers utilized a variety of methods: GIS to examine a spatial history (Brock), reproductive output to test for effects of herbivores (Mundahl), floristic and faunal surveys (Davis et al., Flynn and Rothenburger, McGonigle and Timmer), and many papers using field experiments (Jariel et al., Mundahl, Miller et al., Rosburg et al.).

This Proceedings is designed to share the information and enthusiasm from the 2012 North American Prairie Conference with others. It will add the 23rd volume to the best single source of prairie-related information available anywhere. We hope it continues to inspire us all and future generations to conserve our North American prairie heritage into the coming century and beyond.

23rd NAPC Organizing Committee:

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