

# The Village Courier



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## PRAIRIE RESTORATION PLANNED FOR NAL MAIN RING

A proposal presented by the Illinois chapter of The Nature Conservancy, to re-establish a native prairie on the 650 acres of land inside the circle comprising the NAL Main Accelerator, has been approved by the Laboratory. The prairie landscape, first viewed by pioneers traveling westward before 1800 and characterized by tall grasses sprinkled with a variety of colorful flowering plants, has almost disappeared from the American scene. Cultivation, grazing, and construction have nearly obliterated prairie vegetation in the Midwest. The essentially-isolated nature of the inside of the NAL Main Ring makes it an ideal setting for a prairie restoration that may well become a world-famous botanical and ecological study ground.



*...650-acre prairie restoration coming to NAL Main Ring...*

According to Donald R. Getz, NAL Assistant Director, the project must get underway soon in order to be ready for the 1974 planting and growing season. The Laboratory has asked Dr. Robert Betz, professor in the Biology Department of Northeastern Illinois University and a world-famous prairie authority, to head the NAL Prairie Advisory Committee. Dr. Betz and his committee will come to the Laboratory to describe what a prairie is and explain the steps and procedures necessary to develop a prairie. A date for this talk will be announced soon. Employees of the Laboratory, members of their families, visiting experimenters and their families, and any other interested people will have an opportunity to hear these leading authorities on prairie culture describe what can be achieved with the project at NAL. Volunteers will be called for at this meeting to assist in this program, in several ways:

A nursery will be started immediately to plant and nurture seeds provided by the Morton Arboretum of some of the 200 varieties of prairie flowers and grasses. The seeds will be planted in ordinary flats in a greenhouse on the NAL site, then transplanted in two stages to a one-acre "nursery" site. Meanwhile, as early as possible this Spring, the Laboratory will have a controlled "burn" over the surface of the land as a major step in eliminating weeds and undesirable vegetation now growing on the site. About one-fourth of the land within the main ring circle will be burned early this year, the remainder when it is convenient and again at 2-3 year intervals. The burning is an important facet of prairie culture; fires, both natural and started, were vital factors in determining which plant species survived. The burning at NAL will be accomplished easily and safely because the entire acreage is surrounded by the waters of the cooling ponds of the accelerator.

Another aspect of the prairie plan at NAL is the gathering, from within a 75-mile radius of NAL, of more seeds of authentic prairie species which will in turn be planted in the nursery for further development and replanting in the prairie area. It is expected that ten years' time will be necessary to achieve stabilization of growth in this

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PRAIRIE RESTORATION PLANNED FOR NAL MAIN RING (continued)

project, one of the largest of its kind anywhere. A similar project at the University of Wisconsin, started in the 1930's, totals 100 acres. The Morton Arboretum, Lisle, began a 10-acre prairie in 1963.

The largest portion of the labor required for the prairie project at NAL is to be the work of volunteers. The work of volunteers will proceed according to the plans and schedules devised by the Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee will provide leadership to an NAL Prairie Committee, appointed by the NAL Director from a list of interested volunteers after the information meeting. This committee will supervise the volunteers.

"It is important," said Mr. Getz, "that everyone realize this is a working volunteer group. It will be interesting, rewarding work, but work nevertheless, involving hand cultivation and weeding and caring for the seedlings. No one should sign up who can't follow through with the project.

"But we need lots of volunteers, from inside and outside the Laboratory. It is a unique program; to the best of our knowledge, nothing like this has been done anywhere in the world, and we would welcome a lot of participation."

Rene Donaldson, of NAL's Technical Publications group, a student of prairie ecology, presents some background information on prairies on page 3 of this VILLAGE CRIER. Everyone interested in the NAL prairie project is welcome at the forthcoming meeting, Mr. Getz urges.

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*...The tall windswept prairie grasses, such as these at Goose Lake Prairie State Park, Morris, Illinois, often soared five feet (and high enough to hide a child), maintaining densely fibrous root structures. The dry foliage of the grasses provided the fuel for early spring and fall prairie fires that raced through the fields with frightening speed. (Photo by Tony Donaldson)*

# THE PRAIRIE -- A LINK WITH THE PAST AND A BOND WITH NATURE

by Rene Donaldson

Although Illinois is often called the "Prairie State," few realize the true meaning of the native prairie as it existed in the early 1800's. The word "prairie" comes from the French word for extensive meadow. Perennial grasses, such as big bluestem and Indian grass, give the prairie its special character, but the numerous prairie wildflowers (called forbs) are also conspicuous from April through October. These real prairie plants, because of their nonaggressive nature, are not adapted to survive the upheaval incurred by settlement.

The question which inevitably follows is: why preserve or reestablish the prairie? Once established, the prairie provides a self-maintaining ground cover while constantly improving the soil. The only measure necessary to insure survival of the long-lived grasses is supervised burning once every two years. Prairie plants, while often extremely delicate in appearance, have deep, well-developed root systems that can withstand the ravages of recurrent fires while the introduced Eurasian weeds, such as those presently inside the NAL Main Ring, could not.

Even if there were no practical application for restoring prairies, their aesthetic appeal--from the ashen tones seen after burning to the lush gold-brown fields silhouetted against an azure sky in autumn--would warrant preservation. Eventually with the restoration of a prairie and its associated plants, wildlife will be attracted to the tall grasses and seeds produced, providing a habitat for nesting birds as well as a resting place for migrating birds.

When one begins to comprehend its living inter-relationships, the prairie becomes more than a place of lonely beauty and haunting vistas. It becomes a place to go for peace and solitude, a link with the past amidst encroaching urbanization.

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A bibliography of general prairie information includes the following:

Durward L. Allen, *The Life of Prairies and Plains* (McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1967).

Robert F. Betz, *Prairie Plants of the Chicago Region* (The Morton Arboretum, Lisle, Illinois, 1965). Available in the NAL Library.

David F. Costello, *The Prairie World* (Thomas Y. Crowell Co., New York, 1969).

Torkel Korling, *The Prairie Swell and Swale* (Torkel Korling, Dundee, Illinois, 1972). Available in the NAL Library.

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...Prairie dock (*Silphium terebinthinaceum*) is an easily recognizable prairie plant bearing yellow flowers on a six-foot stalk in August... (Photo by Tony Donaldson)



...Flowers of the white wild indigo (*Baptisia leucantha*) give rise to inflated deep gray seedpods, always attractive among the bronze prairie grasses of late summer... (Photo by Rene Donaldson, at Norton Arboretum prairie)



...Prairie cinquefoil (*Potentilla arguta*), one of the loveliest prairie plants, has soft downy foliage and white flowers with yellow centers appearing in July. Although prairie cinquefoil is rather easy to cultivate, many other species of prairie plants are difficult to grow from seed... (Botanical drawing by Polley Cosgrove)

## NAL SOCIAL CALENDAR

- Sat., Feb. 16 - Family Skating Party tentatively re-scheduled, weather permitting. Call the NAL operator on the morning of the 16th if the weather is uncertain, for last minute news about the party. Hot dogs - marshmallows - hot chocolate - no charge. Everyone welcome!
- Wed., Feb. 20 - NALWO Bridge Group - 1 p.m. - White Farm.
- Sat., Feb. 23 - NALWO Gourmet Group - 7:30 p.m., Chinese dinner - McCrackens' residence, 1611 Mayo Ave., Wheaton.
- Sat., Mar. 16 - St. Pat's Dance - Village Barn - 8:30 p.m. No charge - Cash Bar. Band Music for all, sing-a-long.

### OTHER NAL HAPPENINGS...

...Entries are now open for the NALREC Ping Pong Tournament that will start March 4. Call John Satti, Ext. 3676, to register.

...The Solar Energy study group now meets every Thursday during the noon hour in the conference room adjoining the cafeteria in the Central Laboratory Building. Anyone interested is welcome to join the group. Call Hank Hinterberger or John O'Meara, Ext. 3391 for further information.

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### KIRK ROAD SIGNAL APPROVED

NAL will install a traffic signal on Kirk Road at the main entrance to the Laboratory, Donald R. Getz of the Directors Office advises. The Laboratory's request to the Kane County Highway Department for approval of such a signal has been approved, he says, and it is now being designed by NAL's Technical Services group. It will be of a pressure sensitive type that will leave it green on Kirk Road until a car approaches it on the Laboratory road, when it will begin to cycle. It will be several weeks before the installation can be completed.

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### VOLLEYBALL, ANYONE?

Carl Palaver, Ext. 3355, is interested in recruiting players for power volleyball teams among NAL employees and visitors. Carl proposes once a week evening games at a place to be arranged. Call him if you are interested.

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CONGRATULATIONS!! - to Teolia (Vehicle Maintenance) and Lorraine Jordan on the birth of Trini Lavett, 7 lbs. 5 oz., on January 29, at Copley Hospital, Aurora.

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### CLASSIFIED ADS

FOR SALE - German Shepherd Puppies, 5 weeks old. Vicki Caffey, Ext. 3404.

FOR SALE - 6'x9' Karastan Rug, Turquoise & Black Tapestry Print, 4" fringe all around. 1½ year old. Value \$80, will sell for \$20. Beth Shepherd, 653-5122.

FOR SALE - Marvel Metal Saw, 110V, \$25. New Marine hardware, brass chromed, \$35 for lot or separate. Harold Minster, Ext. 3233.

FOR SALE - Kitchen table, walnut formica, 60x41, two 12" leaves, 6 plastic chairs, excl. cond. \$65; 42" Gas Range, white, perf.cond., incl. center alum.grill, oven broiler, storage, immaculate,\$55. Frank Mehring, Ext. 3782.

FOR SALE - 3 bedroom Ranch in Batavia. Paneled recreation room, large lot, 2-car garage. Middle thirties. Phyllis Thompson, Ext. 3491.

FOR SALE - Refrigerator, Washer, Dryer - \$25 each. Mary Louise, Ext. 3211.

WANTED TO BUY - Mod.priced used upright piano in gd.cond. for NALREC. Helen Ecker, Ext. 3393.

WANTED TO RENT - 2 B.R. Apt., htd., close to NAL. Arnold Coleman, Ext. 3355.

FOR SALE - Baldwin Acrosonic Spinet Piano, \$600. Alfred or Rosamond Brenner, 858-5493.