

Eagle Scout Takes on Task of Hokanson Refurbishment



Barn, spring house to be renovated

Volunteer labor plus funding and tools equals the Hokanson homestead refurbishment. Add to that equation one 14-year-old Eagle Scout, **Wade Walker**, who's taken the lead to complete the project as assistant of **Valerie Wright** our Environmental Educator.

Walker and other members of Troop #74 are helping renovate the homestead for a chance at the William T. Hornaday Award for Distinguished Service to Natural Resource Conservation. The award was developed to encourage scouts to design, lead and complete conservation projects based on sound scientific principles and practices. An important part of the experience is working with a professional in a natural resource position.

The Konza Prairie was a natural choice for Walker.

"I've always really liked the environment and nature. Being a scout we do a lot of camping and all that outdoor stuff," he said.

It also doesn't hurt that his aunt **Nancy McClanathan** is a docent and his mom, **Connie Walker** is a participating teacher in the Schoolyard LTER program.

Walker's role includes obtaining bids from contractors, organizing volunteers and drawing up a construction schedule.

The project has been "slow-going but I expect to get busy here soon," Walker said. One of Walker's first tasks has been to drum up additional \$4,000 funding. Grants have been awarded to KEEP including \$750 Wade received from Youth as

Resources, \$2,000 from Outdoor WildLife Learning Sites (OWLS) and \$5,000 from the Bess Spiva Timmons grant.

But don't think Walker is going to be stuck behind a desk for the project.

"There's going to be a lot of physical labor



Shed to be refurbished. Photo by Tawnya Ernst

involved."

Trail work could begin soon for Walker and Troop #74 if weather, supplies and time permit.

In addition to the construction of a 3/4 mile wood-chipped trail around Hokanson, the barn will be refurbished; the wooden shed will be taken down and a self-contained toilet system will be installed.

Birds from wrens to barn owls will have a new place to roost and eat when more than 25 bird houses and a number of bird feeders are installed.

Most of the improvements will be done by volunteers, including the scout troop and the K-State Student Chapter of the Associate General Contractors (AGC) and KPRNA staff.

by Tawnya Ernst

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Editors' Notes

Chief Editors: Susan Bale and Tawnya Ernst

We encourage our readers to contribute articles, photos, snippets or ideas for future issues. You may contact us at: sbale@oz.oznet.ksu.edu or ternst@oz.oznet.ksu.edu

Prairie Patter

Dr. Valerie Wright
Education Coordinator



After a long and warm autumn we have been enjoying a mild winter. The benefits of this weather have been in working outside. **Tom Van Slyke** and **Jim Larkins** have improved the bridge over Kings Creek at the Hokanson Homestead this past week. The creek had gradually removed the gravel under the two small tubes. They replaced those with one four foot oval tube and fixed the sides so that water would overflow the crossing smoothly. This type of bridge design is called a "low-water crossing" because it allows a dry bridge during low water.

But during a high water event, the creek spills over the top of the bridge, often carrying large trees and other debris with it. The design works well on our intermittent dry and flooded creeks.

Doris Burnett has taken on the job of organizing publicity for docent recruitment. She has set up some new ways of getting the word out, including a radio interview on

AM Live (1350 on your dial), at 8:30 a.m. February 17th. **Charlie Given** and I will talk about the docent program and answer callers questions.

Verlyn Richards has agreed to help out **Jim Craig** with docent scheduling. Verlyn has already added some good ideas for organizing our computer files. He and Jim both have good computer skills, which helps me a lot.

Jean Craig has agreed to be chair of the Konza Activities Committee, which means we get to enjoy her home-made cookies again this year. She'll need volunteers for various events. Please give her a call if you can help.

We are reorganizing the Konza office to fit in a desk and new computer station for **Jan Evans**, who has been helping me part-time for the last six months. This will relieve the congestion from two people working from the same desk. Come in and see our new digs!

Docent Committee Important Part of Training Program

The Konza docent committee recently welcomed four new members to its table.

Doris Burnett, Verlyn Richards, Page Twiss, and Jan Evans are now on board. They join chair, **Charlie Given, Jocelyn Baker, Carol Hoogheem, John Tatarko, and Jan Olewnik. Jim Craig and Phoebe**

Samelson are ex-officio members.

The docent committee was established as a branch of the Friends of the Konza Educational Committee.

"The docent committee was started out to be a go between for the docents and administration," Given said. "It's developed into considerably more and has taken over quite a bit of responsibility from the Friends' education committee."

The committee typically consists of seven members solicited from the pool of new and experienced docents.

So what exactly does the committee do?

The committee, which meets on a monthly basis, is the source of representation for all docents. The committee along with the docent coordinator and education coordinator, **Valerie Wright**, helps keep the docent program on track.

The committee is responsible for production of the docent handbook and may recommend new material by collecting suggestions from docents and others.

Committee members recruit new docents and may recommend training subjects for the docent program.

Yearly evaluations of the docent program are also completed by a member(s) of the committee.

In September, the committee is in charge of recognizing docent accomplishments at graduation.

by Tawnya Ernst



On the Lookout for New Docents

New Docent Orientation
Tuesday, February 22
7:00 p.m., 221 Ackert Hall



(Tell your friends!)



The REU Experience

Ask **Molly Magill** what “REU” means to her and hands-on education, side-pool dynamics and friendships will likely be in her answer.

Magill, a K-State senior in microbiology was one of 10 students from across the country participating in the Research Experience for Undergraduates (REU) program on the Konza this summer. REU is a nationwide program sponsored by the National Science Foundation. The program provides opportunities for undergraduate students to participate in research in the fields of science, math or engineering. Each student works closely with faculty, post-docs and/or graduate students on a specific project. Magill paired up with **Walter Dodds**, a K-State biologist specializing in aquatic ecology.



King's Creek. by Tawnya Ernst

“Side-pool Dynamics of King’s Creek” project was the focus of Magill’s summer research. Magill sampled seven side-pool sites along King’s Creek, south of the Nature Trail bridge. A side-pool is created when water levels in the main channel rise and fall, leaving pools or channels isolated from the rest of the creek.

Magill compared the characteristic differences between the main channel and the side-pools. Her research examined how the water turnover rate affected oxygen levels and subsequent concentrations of compounds such as nitrate and phosphates. Three of the seven side-pools revealed significantly lower oxygen and nitrate levels than the main channel. Magill said she believes the lower nitrate levels could be due to a higher amount of microbes which consume

nitrate. Magill’s research efforts ended with the program in August, however the project could continue under a new researcher, she said.

Magill and the other students logged in about 40 hours a week, sometimes staying on the Konza from sunrise to sunset.

In addition to the research projects, the group attended two classes: scientific ethics and grassland dynamics to round out their REU experience. Weekly case studies in the ethics class were cause for much debate, Magill said.

“We were a lively bunch,” she said.

The students’ summer wasn’t all work and no play. The group took field trips to the Cheyenne Bottoms and the Salina Land Institute and went on a two-week road trip to Spokane, Washington, to attend an Ecological Society of America Convention.

“It was amazing how well we all got along, because its hard to find 10 people that mesh,” Magill said. “We still keep in touch.”

The friendships made the research and educational experience of the REU program that much more worthwhile.

“It was one of the best experiences for me,” said Magill who plans to pursue a graduate degree in microbiology. “It opened everybody’s eyes up to all the possibilities that are out there.”

by Tawnya Ernst

Not Quite Konza

A little bird told us that some of our docents are performing double duties.

Doris Burnett, Carol and Hoogy Hoogheem, Cindy and Gary Jeffrey, Gerry Snyder, Margy Stewart, and Van Withee participated in the 51st Manhattan Christmas Bird Census, an Audubon sponsored event. They were among the 75 participants that braved chilly weather on December 18th to count and identify the 68,000 birds spotted that day. Konza Prairie was part of the survey area, although there are no figures available specifically for Konza.



Docents who learn about nature, science, and local history outside of their Konza duties bring valuable knowledge and experience back to the rest of us.

by Susan Bale

Acknowledgments

A big thank you goes out to **Jean Craig** and her crew for organizing, decorating and of course, baking for the Christmas party.

Also, we extend a thank you to **Verlyn Richards** for the beautiful job on the holiday cards.

Konza LTER Review

In September, a program officer from the National Science Foundation (NSF) teamed up with seven research scientists to evaluate the Konza LTER program.

In their review, they note that Konza LTER is a “magnet for public interest in the natural world and knowledge of the scientific study of environmental process” in the tall-grass prairie. They also commend the success of the related program’s Schoolyard LTER and KEEP.

The team also acknowledged that LTER may be a victim of it’s own success. The increasing public demand may stretch the staff time to the point where they cannot explore new directions. They recommended that the University and the LTER program increase staffing so the program administrator can see additional resources.

Following are the team’s “Reflections on Site Visit”:

“Overall, the site-review team was quite impressed the Konza LTER program. The presentations by the Konza



Bison in pen. by Susan Bale

investigators had been conscientiously and carefully designed to illustrate the range and strength of their program, the capabilities of their investigators, and the advantageous features of their site. We felt that they were open with the review team in their discussions of their site,

emphasizing their strengths but willing to recognize where shortcomings existed. A great deal of attention had been paid to making an effective presentation on their research. This, we feel, reflects the substantial care that they devote to the overall program. We left the Konza prairie with very positive feelings about the research program there and the progress that ecological science is likely to make through their efforts.”¹

¹ Report to the National Science Foundation By the Site Review Team Evaluating the Konza Long-Term Ecological Research Site. Report Submitted 5 October 1999.



Konza Prairie Office
Division of Biology
Ackert Hall
Kansas State University
Manhattan, KS 66506-4901
310

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