



2023

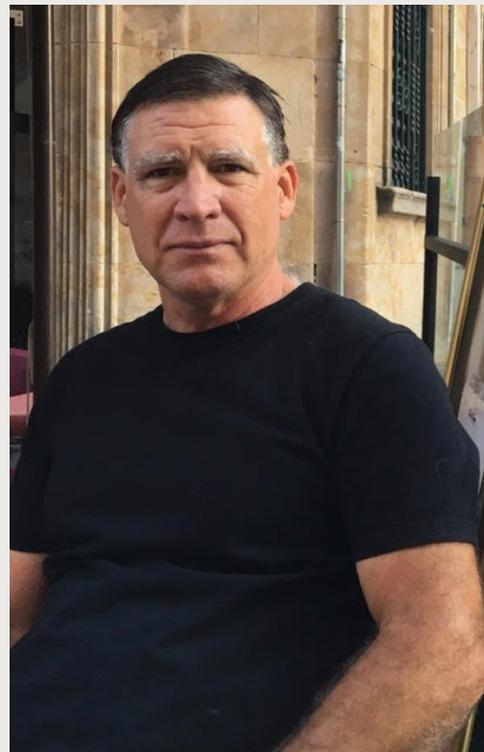
Summer Prairie Project Newsletter

Message From Leadership

I am delighted to have the opportunity to reflect a bit on the Prairie Project and all of the great things that are happening. It has been an exciting four years, and we look forward to another two years of productive work with funding support from the USDA—for which we are extremely grateful. As we endure another summer of record-breaking heat, I am reminded of the importance of what we are trying to accomplish.

Rangelands and ranching enterprises in the Great Plains are under increasing stress from a number of environmental changes, including expansion of woody plants, an increase in frequency and duration of extreme heat events, and a heightened vulnerability to severe wildfires. The overarching goal of the Prairie Project is to promote management practices that help ranching enterprises become not only more resilient but even more profitable in the face of these environmental challenges.

The premise is a simple one—that the synergistic application of pyric herbivory and mixed- species grazing as a management strategy can (1) reduce



Kudos!

Congratulations to **Letty Reichart** on getting elected as Second Vice President of the WOS! She will serve two years in this role before advancing to First Vice President and eventually President.

woody plant cover; (2) help “fire-proof” rangelands; and (3) mitigate the detrimental effects of extreme heat events on ranching. We are convinced that implementation of these management practices will lead to more resilient rangelands and more productive and profitable ranching enterprises.

As you will see from contents of this newsletter, there are many exciting things happening related to the Prairie Project. One that I will highlight here is that we are developing strong collaborative ties with colleagues in Spain, Portugal, and France who are very interested in using pyric herbivory and mixed-species grazing as a way of making Mediterranean landscapes more resilient to wildfire. Demonstration management trials are under way at many locations in the Iberian Peninsula, and early results are very promising. Some of us from the Prairie Project were able to interact with our European colleagues at a meeting in Granada, Spain, this summer. We are hoping that we can host a follow-up meeting in the USA in the summer of 2024.

It has been especially gratifying to partner with so many entities—both public and private—in applying these management practices. Let me just say thank you to all of you who share our vision of well-managed and healthy rangelands and who are working so hard at creating and maintaining open landscapes. I look forward to continuing these productive partnerships.

Brad Wilcox

Caddo National Grasslands



Congratulations to **Shannon Chatwin**! She won nationals for the AAPG Foundation Geology and received \$3,000 for herself and \$3,000 for her school to be used under her guidance!



Prairie Project Team Update!

THE 
PRAIRIE
PROJECT



The Prairie Project Extension team has been busy providing trainings on prescribed fire, patch burning, and multispecies grazing across Nebraska,



Photo taken August 11, 2023 of an area grazed by goats in the spring of 2022 showing showing great perennial forb response in the prairie.

The goats are back on the Caddo National Grassland. 1,500 head started grazing on April 11, 2023. The Forest Service is happy with the response to last year's grazing where some important pollinator forbs are showing up.

The NRCS is interested in learning more about using goats to manage vegetation and is planning a training on the Caddo in September. Austin Kelly a graduate student on the Prairie Project is studying the effect of the goat grazing on vegetation and hydrologic responses.

Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. Since last spring we have coordinated multiple state and national NRCS prescribed burn schools in Texas and Oklahoma with tours of our patch burn, multispecies pastures for Range Conservationists and Wildlife Biologists. We have shared information about these management strategies at tribal drought meetings, state cattlemen's conventions, Conservation Commission meetings, and a Women in Ag Conference. Our team co-authored 3 new factsheets and 1 pocket guide with new information on large-scale planning for grassland protection and woody plant encroachment prevention. These resources were shared with 300 natural resource professions from across the western US at a Working Lands for Wildlife meeting in Manhattan, KS in July. These are available **here!**

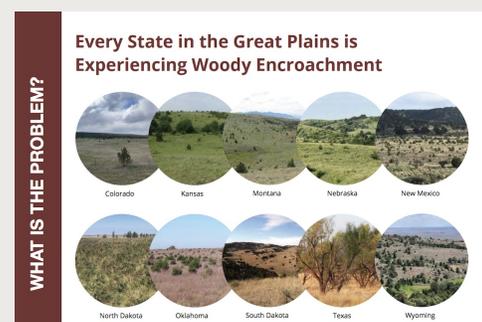
Great Plains Grasslands Extension Partnership!



Have you heard about the Great Plains Grasslands Extensions Partnership? It is a partnership with rangeland scientists and extension faculty collaborating across ten universities across the Great Plains.

Their mission is to provide science-based information and expertise that supports citizen efforts to confront the impending collapse of the Great Plains grassland biome due to woody encroachment.

Reducing Woody Encroachment in Grasslands: A Pocket Guide for Planning and Design



Rio Brazos Audubon Society



Sam Fuhlendorf is coming to town to give a talk at the Rio Brazos Audubon Society's monthly meeting on **Wednesday September 13, at 6:30 PM** at the Brazos Valley Museum of Natural History, 3232 Briarcrest, Bryan. The title of his talk is *"Birds, Bison and Fire: The Challenging Future of Conservation in the Great Plains."*

Have you seen the latest Pocket Guide from the Great Plains Grasslands Extension Partnership? This Pocket Guide integrates new guidelines for reducing woody encroachment with a planning process. It is also an important resource that further incorporates the latest, science-based approaches for reducing woody encroachment.

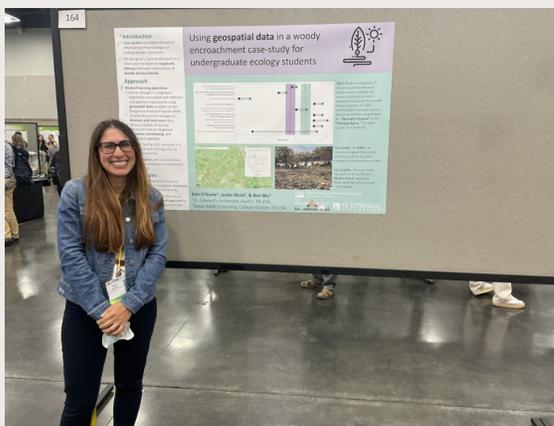
View the Pocket Guide [here!](#)

Ecological Society of America's Annual Meeting



The Prairie Project had great representation this past August at the Ecological Society of America's Annual Meeting in Portland, Oregon. Two members of the project faculty and staff, two members of our education cohorts, and one Ph.D. candidate were in attendance.

Weiqian Gao presented a poster on the effects of patch burn grazing on forage biomass and livestock diet quality. Weiqian is a Ph.D. candidate in Dr. Ben Wu's lab at Texas A&M.



Dr. Jason Martina and Sakina Dixon did a presentation on the Prairie Project Teaching Fellows program and the classroom project Dr. Martina developed and assessed through the program on woody encroachment and bird diversity. Dr. Martina is an assistant professor at Texas State University and is a member of



the second education cohort. Sakina is the education program manager for the Prairie Project.

Dr. Kim O'Keefe presented a poster on the development and student outcomes of her classroom project - using geospatial data in a woody encroachment case. Dr. O'Keefe is an assistant professor at St. Edward's University and is a member of the third education cohort.



Exploring Effective Detection and Spatial Pattern of Prickly Pear Cactus (*Opuntia* Genus) from Airborne Imagery before and after Prescribed Fires in the Edwards Plateau

Xavier Jaime recently published a paper in Remote Sensing. For the full article, click [here](#).

"Over the past century, prickly pear (PP) cactus (e.g., genus *Opuntia*; subgenus *Platyopuntia*) has increased on semi-arid rangelands. Effective detection of cacti abundance and spatial pattern is challenging due to the inherent heterogeneity of rangeland landscapes. In this study, high-resolution multispectral imageries (0.21 m) were used to test object-based (OB) feature

extraction, random forest (RF) machine learning, and spectral endmember (n-D) classification methods to map PP and evaluate its spatial pattern."



Climate-smart agriculture: Training the next generation of conservation professionals

What is climate-smart agriculture and how does it apply to conservation of grazing lands in the Great Plains? What are some of the best ways to communicate the value of climate-smart practices?

Texas A&M University, Oklahoma State University (OSU), the University of Nebraska (UNL) and the USDA Northern and Southern Plains Climate Hubs recently received a \$1.5 million grant from USDA NIFA's Education, Extension, and Climate Hubs Partnership program. Over the next four years this project will recruit students majoring in agriculture or natural resources to be part of a professional MS program led by Extension Specialists at OSU, Texas AgriLife, and UNL

The training program will include summer internships with the USDA Climate Hubs in the region and the USDA NRCS. The Climate hubs will partner with a team of highly successful Extension and Education professionals to build on the successes of the Prairie Project and help the next generation of conservation professionals become proficient in climate-smart agriculture practices involving fire and grazing management.

For more information on this, be sure to [click here](#).

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